



# THE “WALL IN THE MIND” AND NOSTALGIA FOR SEPARATION IN REUNIFIED GERMANY\*

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Twenty years ago, the Berlin Wall, the iconic symbol of the Cold War, fell. Its disappearance marked the end of the repressive, communist regime of East Germany (hereafter GDR, German Democratic Republic) and offered prospects for a more hopeful future for its former citizens. *Ossis* (Easterners) could now take advantage of a variety of personal and civic freedoms. Integration into the larger, more dynamic West German economy and its substantial welfare state seemed likely to foster greater economic opportunity and raise living standards. Throughout the 1990s, the German government poured billions of marks into the new eastern *Länder* (regions) to help transform and modernize the economy and promote social development.

Two decades later, it is apparent that not all the hopes engendered by the fall of the Wall have been realized. The eastern *Länder* (or, in politically correct discourse, the “new” German states) remain poorer than those in the West. *Ossis* are twice as likely to be unemployed as *Wessis* (Westerners). West

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Germans did invest in the East, but *Ossis* did not always appreciate that their fatter wallets often came with a haughty attitude that either trivialized East German history or viewed the GDR exclusively as a *Stasi* (secret police)-state. *Ossis*, forced to conform to the West German system, complained that they felt like second-class citizens.<sup>1</sup> Some *Wessis* thought the *Ossis* were lazy and ungrateful, and most thought that their financial efforts were not sufficiently appreciated by *Ossis*.<sup>2</sup> One survey in 2004 found that 24% of *Wessis* believe it would be better if the Berlin Wall was still up.<sup>3</sup> Within a few years of reunification, observers began to speak of *die Mauer im Kopf* (the “wall in the mind”) that continued to divide German citizens.<sup>4</sup> One German politician suggested that, “We might be the first country which has, by unifying, created two peoples.”<sup>5</sup> Or, as one joke from 1990 had it: the East German says to West German, “*Wir sind ein Volk*” (“We are one people”) The West German replies, “*Wir auch*” (“We are too”)<sup>6</sup>

The problems—both real and perceived—faced by the *Ossis* have produced, at least in a certain segment of the population, nostalgia for some elements from the GDR: *Ostalgie*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>One survey in 1991, for example, found that 84 percent of respondents in the former East Germany felt like second-class citizens. See Michael Minkenburg, “The Wall After the Wall: On the Continuing Division of Germany and Remaking of Political Culture,” *Comparative Politics* 26(1), October 1993, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>A survey reported in *Spiegel Online International* found that 64% of 35–50 year old West Germans did not think their efforts to develop the former East Germany were sufficiently appreciated. *Spiegel OnLine International*, November 9, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>“Getting back together is so hard,” *The Economist*, September 18, 2004, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>For example, see Hans-Dieter Kilngemann and Richard I. Hofferbert, “Germany: A New ‘Wall in the Mind’?” *Journal of Democracy* 5(1), January 1994: 30–44. See also Minkenburg, 1993.

<sup>5</sup>Wolfgang Nowak, a former minister in the government of Saxony (region in formerly East Germany) in “Getting back together,” 2004.

<sup>6</sup>Taken from Dominic Boyer, “*Ostalgie* and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany,” *Public Culture* 18(2), 2006, p. 371.

<sup>7</sup>This term is a play on *Ost*, the German word for East, and *Nostalgie*, the German rendering of nostalgia.

This has been manifested in various ways. Some aspects, such as participation in on-line “*Ossi-Quizzes*” or quests to find or reproduce East German products such as the traffic-light *Ampelmännchen* or the rattling two-cylinder Trabant, border on kitsch.<sup>8</sup> Some, such as a proposed theme park dedicated to East Germany or a *Stasi*-themed restaurant in East Berlin, are of more questionable taste.<sup>9</sup> Others, such as voting for the Left (*Die Linke*) Party, the successor to the communist party of the GDR, have more political import.

This paper examines the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* in today’s Germany.<sup>10</sup> It is designed less to investigate well-trodden ground—e.g. depictions of *Ostalgie* in literature such as Jana Hensel’s memoir *Zonenkinder* (2002) or films such as *Sonnenallee* (1999) and *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003)<sup>11</sup>—and more to utilize survey data to cast a more discerning eye on this phenom-

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<sup>8</sup>For example, there is a Trabant car club in Berlin ([www.trabigoerenberlin.de](http://www.trabigoerenberlin.de)), and shops dedicated to the *Ampelmännchen* (<http://www.ampelmann.de/html/shops.html>). The on-line version of a store dedicated to a variety of East German products can be found at <http://www.mondosarts.de>. For more on the role of consumer goods in *Ostalgie*, see Daphne Berdahl, “‘(N)Ostalgie’ for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things,” *Ethnos* 2(64) 1999: 192–211, and Martin Blum, “Remaking the East German Past: *Ostalgie*, Identity, and Material Culture,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 3(34) 2000: 229–253.

<sup>9</sup>Plans for a theme park to be built in the East Berlin suburb of Köpenick included guard towers and bland, East German style restaurants and stores. See report from *BBC News*, February 28, 2003. For the *Stasi*-themed restaurant, zur Firma, see reports in *Spiegel Online*, August 4, 2008, and *Rheinischer Merkur*, June 18, 2009.

<sup>10</sup>Focus primarily will be on how this manifests itself among citizens of the former GDR, although one could imagine that *Wessis* might also wax nostalgic for a time when they were not burdened by having to pay the costs of reunification.

<sup>11</sup>For more on *Ostalgie* as expressed in film and literature, see Boyer, 2006; Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany Since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Anna Saunders, “‘Normalizing’ the Past: East German Culture and *Ostalgie*,” in Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, eds. *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2006), and Anthony Enns, “The politics of *Ostalgie*: post-socialist nostalgia in recent German film,” *Screen* 48(4) Winter 2007: 475–491.

enon. It is interested in several questions: how widespread is *Ostalgie*?; has it grown or declined over time?; what type of person is more likely to be “*ostalgie*”; and how politically or socially significant is *Ostalgie*?

### *Bases for Ostalgie*

Before jumping ahead, it would be useful to explore briefly some of the reasons that *Ostalgie* might manifest itself in contemporary Germany. One could put forward a number of different hypotheses.

One perspective would be that *Ossis* and *Wessis* were and are fundamentally different. In this view, the roughly forty-year division of Germany was long enough, thanks to differing educational systems, life experiences, government propaganda, etc. to create two distinct peoples with different values.<sup>12</sup> Both the West and East German states made efforts to define their identities in opposition to each other.<sup>13</sup> Upon reunification, both sets of Germans found little in common. As early as the early 1980s one prescient writer remarked, “It will take us longer to tear down the Wall in our heads than any wrecking company will need for the Wall we can see.”<sup>14</sup> After 1989, another observer noted that the “asymmetry between young East

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<sup>12</sup>Helga Welsh, “The Divided Past and the Difficulties of German Unification,” *German Politics and Society* 30 (Fall 1993): 75-86; M. Greiffenhagen and S. Greiffenhagen, “Eine Nation. Zwei politische Kulturen. Deutschland,” in W. Weidenfeld, ed. *Eine Nation doppelte Geschichte*, 1993 (29-45); and Ursula Feist, “Zur politischen Akkulturation der vereinten Deutschen, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Volume 11-12 (March 8 1991): 21-32.

<sup>13</sup>Boyer (2006) emphasizes this point, noting how for West Germans, East Germany was “more German” in the pejorative sense that it continued the authoritarian legacy of the past and did not “overcome” the German past by integrating into pan-European institutions. In this sense, the other Germany was a “prosthesis” of identification and origin. In Boyer’s terms, East/West difference—pre- and post-unification—fulfills a “perduring psychic necessity” (Boyer, 2006, p. 371).

<sup>14</sup>Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 119.

and West Germans in levels of knowledge, interest, and sense of community with each other was very striking.”<sup>15</sup>

Is there evidence to support these propositions that there were, prior to 1989, significant differences in values between *Ossis* and *Wessis*? The World Values Survey, conducted in the spring of 1990, provides us with some bases to answer this question. This survey asked a variety of questions ranging from political preferences to religion to personal values. Findings from the survey on several types of questions are presented in Table 1. What is interesting is that, with a few exceptions—on gender roles, value of equality, value of work, and the speed of reform, all covered more below—there are not marked differences. Many similarities, especially on core political and economic questions, stand out. Both sets of Germans were politically centrist, seemed to be pro-market and value competition, and wanted a future where more emphasis is placed on the individual. Surveys in 1991 and 1992 also found similarities between former East and West Germans on a wide battery of questions that probed attitudes toward democracy.<sup>16</sup> One scholar argued that the protests of 1989, together with the attitudes found in post-reunification surveys, showed that key segments of East German society had fundamentally rejected the tenets and values of the GDR’s socialist system.<sup>17</sup>

One should, of course, use such data with caution, as attitudes of *Ossis* may not have been well-established and were subject to change with different circumstances in the post-unification environment. Thus, rather than emphasizing alleged

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<sup>15</sup>Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity After the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>Russell Dalton, “Communists and Democrats: Democratic Attitudes in the Two Germanies,” *British Journal of Political Science* 24 (1994), and Frederick Weil, “The Development of Democratic Attitudes in Eastern and Western Germany in Comparative Perspective,” in Weil *et al.*, eds. *Democratization in Eastern and Western Europe* (Greenwich CT: JAI Press, 1993). See also Klingemann and Hofferbert, 1994.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Krisch, “German Unification and East German Political Culture: Interaction and Change,” in Gert-Joachim Glaeßner, ed. *Germany After Unification: Coming to Terms with the Recent Past* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1996).

**Table 1 Differences in Values Between Germans in 1990**

Question	West Germans	East Germans
Do you favor more private (1) or state (10) ownership? (Mean)	3.7	3.1
Should individuals (1) or government (10) assume responsibility for people's lives? (Mean)	4.2	4.1
Is competition generally good (1) or harmful (10)? (Mean)	3.3	3.0
Where are you on a Left (1) to Right(10) political scale? (Mean)	5.3	5.0
Which is more important: freedom or equality?	Freedom 59.3% Equality 22.4%	Freedom 46.6% Equality 40.7%
In the future should more emphasis be on the individual? (% agreeing)	84.4	87.7
In the future, should there be less emphasis on money and material possessions? (% agreeing)	50.4	46.9
Is political reform moving too rapidly? (% agreeing)	38.4	68.5
Husband and wife should both contribute to income (% agreeing)	55.0	83.0
A job is OK, but women really want a home and children (% agreeing)	42.3	47.7

Source: World Values Survey, on-line analysis at [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Questions are paraphrased from original.

intrinsic differences that pre-date the fall of the Wall, some analysts have suggested that it was the way in which reunification proceeded and its effects upon former East Germans that caused an attitude shift that led to both resentment toward the West and subsequent *Ostalgie*. Certainly, there were high expectations about how reunification would improve material conditions and that capitalism would mean investment and jobs. In 1990, Helmut Kohl himself promised East Germans “blossoming landscapes” within five years.<sup>18</sup> This vision was not realized, as economic restructuring and marketization in reunified Germany led to plant closings, extensive deindustrialization, and widespread unemployment.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the speed of reunification and the fact that it meant that the Western system was imposed on the East, leaving *Ossis* with little familiar in the new political, economic, educational, and cultural institutions, sparked resentment and, perhaps, a desire to revive such of the symbols or memories of their past.<sup>20</sup> As noted above, in the spring of 1990 most in the East thought political reform was proceeding too rapidly. Some spoke of the colonization of the East by the West; reunification, whose prospect was widely celebrated early on, was seen as an imperialist project. One writer noted, “No doubt this East German nostalgia is directly linked to the fact that the GDR has literally vanished from the political map. It was this speedy absorption—what East German detractors often call ‘Kohl-onization’—that made the GDR story so unique.”<sup>21</sup> Many East Germans were thrown into a situation where they no longer recognized the country in which they lived, and the rules governing the institutions of this country were created by others.

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Harvey Greisman, “The German Democratic Republic in Nostalgia and Memory,” *Humanity and Society* 25(1), February 2001, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup>For more on economic questions, see Mike Dennis, *Economic and Social Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1993).

<sup>20</sup>Boyer, 2006, pp. 372–373.

<sup>21</sup>Paul Betts, “The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture,” *The Journal of Modern History* 72(3), 2000, p. 734. See also Cooke, 2005.

*Ostalgie* thus emerged as a response to “personal anguish and political confusion” created by the disappearance of the GDR.<sup>22</sup>

Following this line of reasoning further, the nostalgia for the old system which then emerged was not simply an abstract notion. It was rooted in a belief that certain things were better in the GDR.<sup>23</sup> This went beyond the *Spreewaldgurken* pickles in *Good Bye Lenin!* Surveys as early as 1993, for instance, found that majorities of former East Germans believed that in many domains (e.g. job security, child care, crime prevention, gender equality, and social justice) the practices of the former GDR were superior to those in West Germany.<sup>24</sup> In the words of one writer, *Ostalgie* is not the product of massive denial but “a painful accurate realization that life for many is tougher under freedom than it was in a dictatorship.”<sup>25</sup>

Some singled out women as especially hard-hit, as many of the benefits they had under the old system, including generous maternity leave, funds for expectant mothers, and state-provided child care, were lost. The socialist order put great rhetorical emphasis on a woman’s role in the workforce and guaranteed women pay equality. Ninety-eight percent of East German women worked outside the home.<sup>26</sup> In reunified Germany, many women in the eastern *Länder* found themselves out of work and experienced great difficulties getting new jobs as employers viewed women with children as a liability. In the first two years after reunification, women’s unemployment in-

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<sup>22</sup>Konrad H. Jarausch, “Reshaping German Identities: Reflections on the Post-Unification Debate,” in Jarausch, ed. *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Whether or not they were better is not the point; the key is the how things were remembered as being.

<sup>24</sup>Reports from *Die Zeit*, October 1, 1993, cited in Klingemann and Hof-ferbert, 1994, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup>Greisman, 2001, p. 52.

<sup>26</sup>Grace Marvin, “Two Steps Back and One Step Forward: East German Women Since the Fall of the Wall,” *Humanity and Society* 19(2), May 1995, pp. 37–50.



creased to 23%.<sup>27</sup> In many other respects—gender-specific advertising for vacancies and discrimination in employment, exposure to sexual harassment, a gender gap in earnings, repeals of liberal divorce and abortion statutes—women fared poorly after 1990.<sup>28</sup>

Nostalgia for the old system also manifested itself politically in votes for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, later *Die Linke* Party), the successor to the GDR's Socialist Unity Party. This party, exploiting its status as the region's "home-grown" party and appealing to those with positive feelings for aspects of the GDR, regularly received over 20% of the vote in the eastern *Länder* and even won a near majority (47.6%) of the vote in regional elections in East Berlin in 2001.<sup>29</sup>

The above arguments assume that *Ostalgie*, being rooted in the experience of the GDR, has a clear political-social intention as a sort of identity of defiance against the West (*Trotzidentität*<sup>30</sup>) and is primarily manifested among older East Germans and those who were "losers" in the post-communist transition. This need not be the case. *Ostalgie* is often linked, particularly in television,<sup>31</sup> film and literature, to cultural artifacts and sensory experiences (e.g. food), particularly involving childhood and innocence.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, *Ostalgie* works to recall a simpler, more tranquil time. *Ostalgie* is thus more about time and place, not ideology or economic circum-

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<sup>27</sup>Marvin, 1995, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup>Helen Frink, *Women After Communism: The East German Experience* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2001), p. 48.

<sup>29</sup>Peter Barker, "The Party of Democratic Socialism as Political Voice of East Germany," in Mike Dennis and Eva Kolinsky, eds. *United and Divided: Germany Since 1990* (New York: Berghahn, 2004).

<sup>30</sup>Saunders, 2006, p. 90.

<sup>31</sup>An example would be Katarina Witt, former champion figure skater and host of *The GDR Show* on RTL, appearing in a uniform of the young pioneers, the communist youth organization.

<sup>32</sup>See Blum, 2000, and Joseph Jozwiak, "The Wall in Our Minds? Colonization, Integration, and Nostalgia," *Journal of Popular Culture* 39(5), 2006: 780–795.

<sup>33</sup>This is well-captured by Thomas Brussig, the screenwriter for *Sonnenallee*, who noted, "jeder Mensch erinnert sich gerne an die Kindheit oder Jugend," In Saunders, 2006, p. 101.

stances.<sup>33</sup> It could also be more of a generalized protest and/or a manifestation that none of the institutions in today's Germany adequately represent the interests of those in eastern Germany.<sup>34</sup> In some of its forms, such as the reappearance of communist symbols on T-shirts and efforts to find or re-create GDR products, it also borders on *kitsch*, a sort of retro-cool movement that is more about style or the desire to shock than something that is based upon experiential links to the GDR or something that even has political import. One would expect this sort of *Ostalgie* to be more prevalent among youth, not necessarily restricted to those in eastern Germany, and also have appeal to tourists who may desire some sort of souvenir of communist East Germany.

### *Measuring Ostalgie*

How extensive is post-unification *Ostalgie*? Has it grown over time? Are its manifestations in some respects stronger than in others? Examination of data from public opinion surveys may help answer these questions.

As noted earlier, soon after reunification many East Germans did feel that they were second-class citizens in the new Germany. Unification did not provide all of the benefits many expected. Disappointment with reunification did, over time, translate into greater nostalgia for the past, as more value was placed on certain aspects of GDR and less confidence was expressed in the practices and institutions of the Federal Republic. For example, according to surveys commissioned by *Der Spiegel* and conducted among citizens of the former GDR in 1990 and 1995, one can see marked growth in appreciation for certain aspects of life in the old system. In Table 2, one can see that whereas in 1990 the GDR was judged superior in three of the nine categories (predictably those of social security, gender equality, and maintenance of order), by 1995 the GDR was

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<sup>34</sup>These points are made by Barker with respect to voting for the PDS.

**Table 2. East German Assessment of Relative Merit of Aspects of East and West Germany, 1990 and 1995**

Criterion	1990		1995	
	% West superior	% East Superior	% West superior	% East Superior
Standard of living	91	2	85	8
Protection against crime	13	62	4	88
Equality for women	10	67	3	87
Science and technology	87	2	63	6
Social security	16	65	3	92
Schools	36	28	11	64
Vocational training	36	33	12	70
Health system	65	18	23	57
Housing	34	27	21	53

Source: "Stolz aufs eigene Leben," *Der Spiegel* 27 (1995), cited in Jacoby, 2000, p. 185.

judged superior in seven of the nine categories, including, perhaps surprisingly, health and housing. These findings support the notion that *Ostalgie* arose because of the experiences post-unification, not because of innate differences. Note that this survey includes nothing of political aspects, and, indeed, it is hard to find much evidence in support of the more political (e.g. repressive) aspects of the GDR. Lastly, it is interesting to note that whereas East Germans give high marks for the GDR in specific categories such as schooling and housing, the overwhelming consensus is that the standard of living in the Federal Republic is better. Perhaps the difference can be explained in that former East Germans recognize that there is a clear overall gap between the two systems but that in tangible ways they have been unable to take advantage of this. Nonetheless, despite aspects of *Ostalgie* found in the 1995 survey, only

15% of those polled agreed that they “wished there had never been a reunification” of the two countries.<sup>35</sup>

One might have thought, however, that over time such feelings would become less pervasive. Many post-communist states experienced difficulties in the initial years of the transition to capitalism, and no doubt some Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians were nostalgic for some elements (e.g. social security) of the old system. However, as many of these states began to experience an economic turnaround and become integrated into Europe, the past held less and less attraction.<sup>36</sup> Surveys in the early 1990s among former East Germans, while unearthing evidence of *Ostalgie*, also found optimism about the future and that majorities believed that problems of misunderstanding between *Ossis* and *Wessis* would be overcome.<sup>37</sup>

Among former East Germans, however, nostalgia has remained relatively strong. For the eighteenth anniversary of the fall of the Wall, *Der Spiegel* commissioned a survey among older and younger Germans on both sides of the erstwhile divide about their attitudes toward reunification and the relative merits of East German and contemporary German systems. Table 3 presents some of the findings with respect to rating the systems.<sup>38</sup> One finds many similarities to data presented previously: East Germany tends to be rated higher in terms of social security, education, prevention of crime, and gender equality, whereas reunified Germany gets higher marks for personal freedom, its political system, and overall standard of living. Interestingly, for many of the elements of *Ostalgie* related to social protections and gender issues, one sees a significant gap

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<sup>35</sup>Reported in Wade Jacoby, *Imitation and Politics: Redesigning Modern Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 184.

<sup>36</sup>Can one find this with the New Europe Barometer survey?

<sup>37</sup>Klingemann and Hofferbert, 1994, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup>Data come from a sample 1004 respondents, divided between young (14–24 years) and older (25–50 years) respondents in both former Germanies (“East” Germans were those who resided in the East until 1989). Report is available at Spiegel Online International, November 9, 2007, at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,516472,00.html>.

between older (35–50 years) and younger (14–24 years) respondents, the latter of which would have very limited (at best) memories of the GDR. However, these younger respondents are more likely to rate the GDR as strong for personal freedoms and its political system, perhaps reflecting a naivety about realities of East Germany and/or their frustrations with their current situation. The survey also found that over 40 percent of those in the East believe communication problems between *Ossis* and *Wessis* are increasing (compared with 35% of *Wessis* who felt this way) and over 60% believe it is bad that nothing remained of the things one could be proud of in East Germany. A significant percentage (37 percent of older respondents, 35% of younger ones) also indicated that if the Wall was still up they would prefer to live in East Germany, which must rank as strong evidence of *Ostalgie* and/or great

**Table 3. Attitudes of Former East Germans\* in 2007**

East Germany Stronger:	14–24 Years Old	35–50 Years Old
Social Welfare	47	92
Social Equality	39	73
Gender Equality	37	73
Prevention of Crime	57	78
Education	57	79
Economy	26	19
Personal Freedom	14	4
Political System	22	11
Today's Germany Stronger:		
Political System	51	60
Personal Freedom	83	85
Economy	62	75
Social Justice	45	22
Social Welfare	51	26
Gender Equality	67	36
Education	40	19
Prevention of Crime	39	19

dissatisfaction with what they have encountered in reunified Germany.

### *Socio-Demographic Factors Behind Ostalgie*

What factors lie behind and may help account for feelings of *Ostalgie*? To this point, we have put forward several hypotheses (e.g. effects of age, gender, etc.) that might make an individual more susceptible to *Ostalgie*. These can be tested by analyzing existent survey data.

The best set of surveys for this purpose is the ALLBUS (German General Social Survey), which is conducted every other year. The survey does not ask questions directly connected to *Ostalgie* (e.g. what aspects of the GDR do you most miss?), but it asks some general questions about the GDR and how reunification has been conducted. One general question asks respondents living in the former East Germany to what extent, on a four point scale, they identify with the old GDR.<sup>39</sup> General results are displayed in Table 4, which reveals that respondents in 2008 were **more** likely than in 1991 to identify with the GDR, despite the fact that by 2008 the GDR had not existed for nearly two decades.

Assuming that this question can serve as a measure for *Ostalgie*<sup>40</sup>, one can then look beyond the aggregate results and

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<sup>39</sup>One confounding factor is that one could be living in East Germany now but grew up in West Germany and is thus more of a “West German.” According to the 2008 survey, however, only 2.8% of respondents in East Germany grew up in West Germany. An equal number grew up in former German territories (e.g. Silesia) and 3.7% were immigrants.

<sup>40</sup>Identity is a key concept, although it is important to keep in mind, as noted more below, that various identities may not be mutually exclusive. For more on notions of identity in the discussion of East German nostalgia, see Anselma Gallinat, “‘Being East German’ or ‘Being at Home in Germany’: Identity as Experience and Rhetoric, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 15(6), November 2008: 665–686; Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and M. Gerber and R. Woods, eds. *Changing Identities in Eastern Germany* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1996).

**Table 4. Levels of Identification with the Former East Germany**

Level of Identification	% of respondents		
	1991	2000	2008
Strong	12.3	21.2	20.8
Fairly Strong	30.9	47.9	44.3
A Little	30.1	23.0	21.9
Not At All	26.6	7.9	13.0
Sample Size	1494	730	626

Source: ALLBUS 2008, on-line data, available at <http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data/survey-data/allbus>. Responses of “do not know” or “cannot say” were dropped from the analysis

employ statistical analysis to assess what other variables are most related to this phenomenon. As suggested earlier, age should matter, as older respondents with actual memories of the GDR should identify more strongly with it. Socio-economics might also be important, as those who feel that they are in a poor economic situation might consider themselves “losers” from reunification and thus may have more positive feelings for the GDR. Following upon the argument that many women have lost status and benefits since reunification, gender might also play a role. Lastly, one could examine the effects of education (sometimes considered a proxy for social class or income), as this could color feelings about the GDR.<sup>41</sup>

An ordinal logistic regression analysis was conducted with the data from the 1991, 2000, and 2008 surveys, when the question on identification with the GDR was asked. With such an analysis, one can look at the specific effects of one variable

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<sup>41</sup>How education might matter could be disputed. Those who received a good education under the GDR might be “grateful” for that or feel that the GDR did a good job in the field of education. Conversely, the better educated might have better prospects in reunited Germany and/or be more aware of the problems in the GDR and thus have less “*Ostalgie*.” Other variables, such as income, could also be included, but these were not regularly included in all the surveys.

**Table 5. Results of Regression Analysis on Identification with East Germany**

Explanatory Variable	1991	2000	2008
Age		x	x
Gender	x	x	
Education	x		
Assessment of German Economy			x
Assessment of One's Economic Situation			

x shows that the variable has statistical significance

while others are held constant.<sup>42</sup> We are interested in two items. First, what variables are most strongly related to identification with the GDR? Secondly, we are also interested if these variables perform similarly across time or if they change, suggesting that “*Ostalgie*” itself captures different things at different points in time.

The results show that all but one of these factors matter, albeit at different times.<sup>43</sup> Table 5 presents a very basic picture, indicating which variables achieved statistical significance (at least  $p < .05$ ) in the surveys. In the 1991 survey, the two variables with high statistical significance ( $p < .01$ ) are gender and education.<sup>44</sup> The effect of gender was such that women were more likely to identify with the GDR, perhaps as a result of the immediate effects of reunification on job and socio-economic

<sup>42</sup>Because the dependent variable—level of identification with the GDR—is categorical rather than linear, this technique is preferred over the more familiar ordinary least-squares linear regression analysis.

<sup>43</sup>For simplicity's sake, I present a narrative and simple graphs rather than more complex table with the statistical coefficients for each variable. When using the term “significant,” I mean that the variable appears to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) in the regression analysis. The graphs are deployed to capture some of the magnitude of these effects.

<sup>44</sup>The one scalar variable for education asked for the respondents end of school certificate (Arbitur, Mittlere Reife, Volksschulabschluss, etc.). Dichotomous dummy variables allowed one to identify graduates of university, technical schools, etc.



status. Educational effects were such that those with more education did identify more with the GDR, perhaps reflecting that these respondents were more likely to be part of the GDR elite and/or had a sense of tangible benefit of life in the GDR. Age did not appear as significant, which was not surprising: older respondents lived for forty years in the GDR and younger ones knew nothing else but the GDR. More surprisingly, perhaps, there did not appear to be a socio-economic effect. Responses to questions asking about the general economic situation in eastern Germany or about one's own personal economic condition did not significantly affect level of identification with the former GDR.

Results were different in 2000 and 2008. In 2000, there was still a gender effect, but a generational one also appeared: younger respondents were significantly less likely to identify with the GDR. The latter is not overly surprising, as by 2000 those under 30 had experienced a sizeable portion of their life in reunited Germany. Education, however, was no longer statistically significant, and socio-economic assessments also showed little effect. In 2008, as one might have predicted, age mattered ( $p < .001$ ) once again. Education and gender were not significant. As for socio-economic assessments, one's assessment of one's own economic condition did not seem to matter, but one's assessment of the overall economic situation in Germany did, with those thinking Germany was in a poor condition identifying more strongly with the GDR. This finding appears to be counter-intuitive: one would expect one's personal condition to shape attitudes more, but it appears that the more general (sociotropic) assessment is more important.<sup>45</sup>

To go beyond discussion of statistical significance and illustrate the importance of various factors, data are presented in Figures 1–4. Figure 1 shows how strongly respondents with different levels of education identified with the GDR. As noted

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<sup>45</sup>Not surprisingly there was a high correlation (.42,  $p < .001$ ) between these two variables.

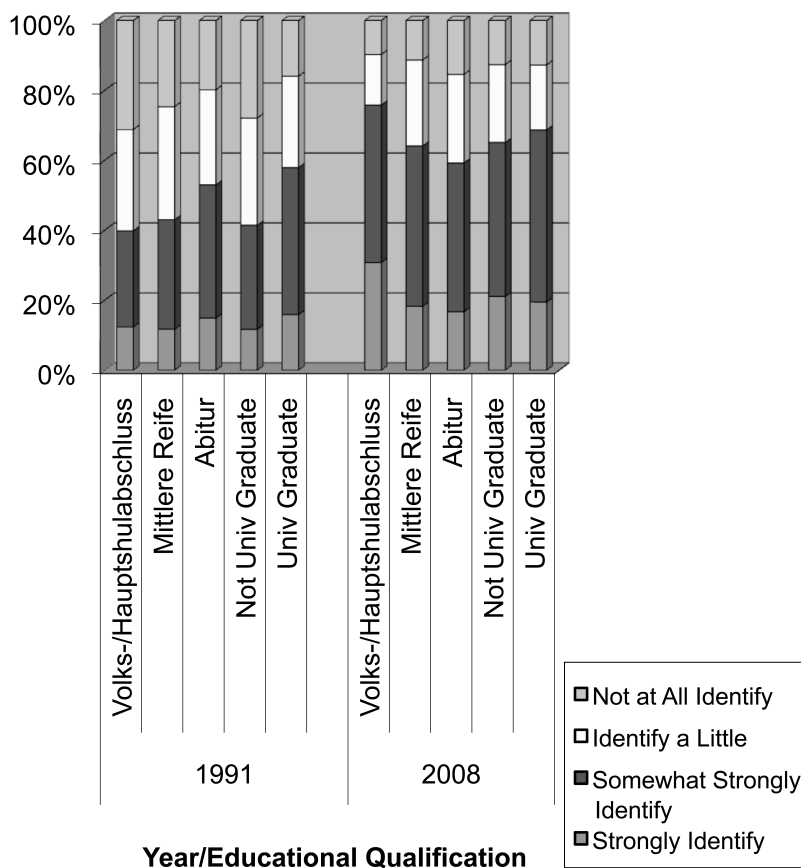


Figure 1. Effect of Education on Identification with Former East Germany.

above, this effect is discernible in 1991, but by 2008 is far harder to discern. If anything, one in fact sees those with higher credentials from school (e.g. *Arbitur* vs. *Hauptschule*) are less likely to identify with the GDR. Figure 2 shows the similar pattern with respect to gender, meaning that whereas there is a clear relationship in 1991, it virtually vanishes by 2008. Figure 3 shows a very clear contrast with age effects over time. Whereas one cannot see any pattern in 1991, it is very apparent by 2008. Lastly, Figure 4 shows data from 2008, comparing the two questions asking about economic conditions and identification with the GDR. In this figure, there is a modest effect

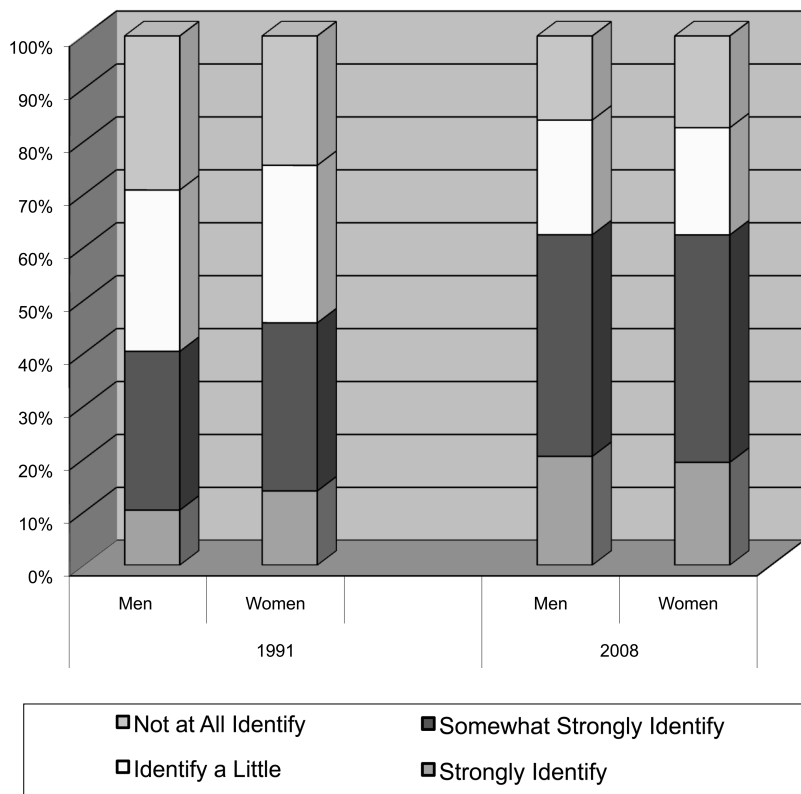


Figure 2. Effect of Gender on Identification with Former East Germany.

related to assessment of the overall economic condition in Germany. Overall, what comes across clearest is demographic and socioeconomic conditions related to *Ostalgie* have changed. In 1991, there is some evidence that those that may have been relatively privileged in the GDR—the better educated and women—were more likely to identify with the GDR. By 2008, the generational effect becomes the clearest to see, which is not surprising as one would not expect those under 30—with little real memory of the GDR—to identify with it, especially nearly twenty years after its demise. At the same time, however, evaluation of the general economic condition of Germany now appears as a more important factor, but only this diffuse feeling, not an assessment of one’s own particular eco-

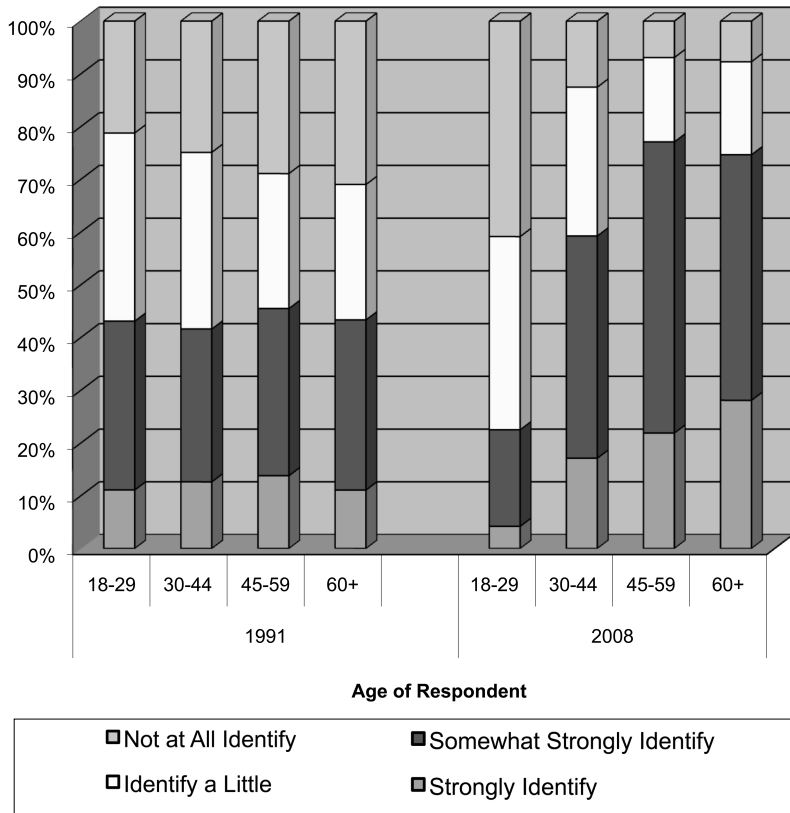


Figure 3. Effects of Age on Identification with Former East Germany.

conomic condition, which we might expect would drive attitudes more.<sup>46</sup>

One could employ other means to examine *Ostalgie* in these surveys. In several years, the ALLBUS asks respondents in general terms about the effects of reunification and whether people in western or eastern Germany should, respectively, make more sacrifices or exhibit more patience. These variables capture, more directly than anything else yet presented, atti-

<sup>46</sup>This phenomenon, however, has been uncovered in other studies of “sociotropic voting,” in which general assessments about the economy weighed more heavily in one’s voting than assessments of one’s own condition. For more on this, see .

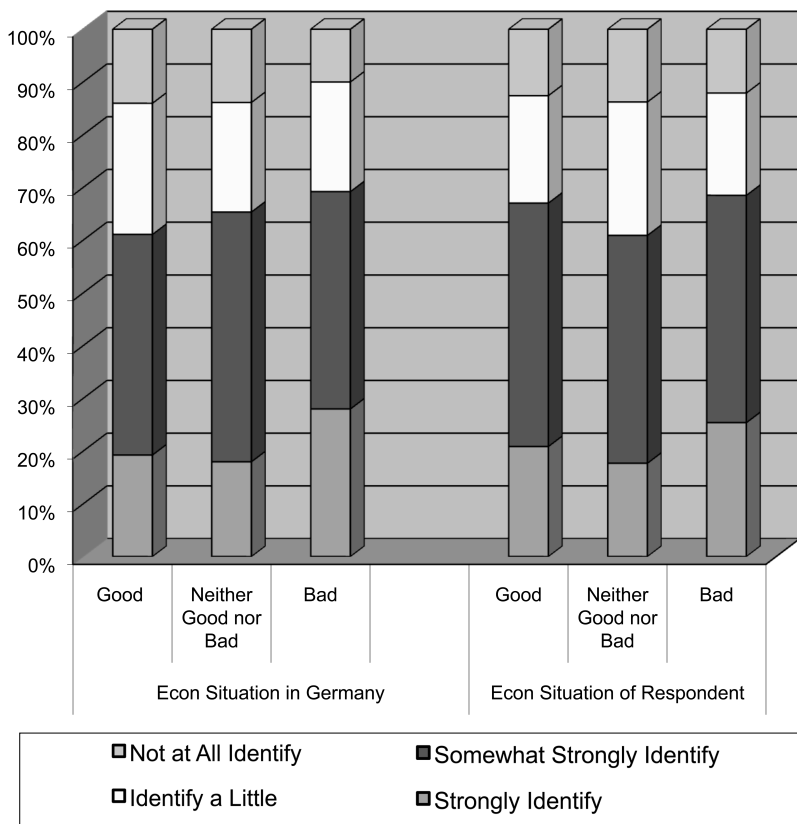


Figure 4. Effects of Economic Evaluations on Identity with Former East Germany, 2008.

tudes about the process and results of reunification, arguably factors that could foster *Ostalgie* if one is disappointed in reunification or the actions of the West Germans. The only year in which these questions were asked in conjunction with the question about identification with the GDR was 2000. As one might expect, there is a correlation between identification with the GDR and most of the questions relating to reunification, as seen in Table 6. Moreover, responses to questions about the results of reunification and the need for *Wessis* to make more sacrifices correlate most strongly, among the variables we have considered previously, with assessments about economic con-

**Table 6. Correlations Among Socio-Demographic and Evaluative Variables on Reunification and Identity**

Variables	ID with East Germany	German Econ Situation —Bad	One's Econ Situation —Bad	Changes in One's Econ Situation —Bad	Age	Education
Reunification Bad for E. Germans	.08*	.13**	.26**	.17**	-.04	-.09*
People in Former GDR Should Show More Patience	-.12**	-.06	-.13**	-.14**	.06	.02
People in W. Germany Should Sacrifice More	-.02	.10**	.11**	.11**	.14**	-.23**

Data from 2000 ALLBUS Survey. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

ditions. The strongest correlations were with responses to questions about one's own economic condition, including whether one's own economic condition had changed in the past few years. In this case, as one might have expected, those who thought things had gotten worse for them—the “losers,” so to speak—were more likely to think poorly of reunification itself, but they were *not* significantly more likely to identify with the former GDR: correlation with a poor assessment of one's condition is .022 and correlation with negative assessment of changes in one's own condition is .059, neither of which even obtains  $p < .10$  statistical significance.<sup>47</sup> This point is surprising

<sup>47</sup>This latter question was not, unfortunately, asked in the 1991 or 2008 surveys.

and potentially important: being disappointed with personal economic results of reunification by itself does not seem to foster identification with the GDR, what might be taken to be a better operationalization of *Ostalgie*. Neither does a negative assessment of changes in own's condition correlate strongly (coefficient .011) with the ideological sentiment that socialism was a good idea but was just implemented badly.

More sophisticated analysis from the 2006 survey—an ordinal regression on the most general question of whether reunification brought advantages to people in the former GDR—does show, however, that assessment about the general and one's own economic condition are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), as well as age and education ( $p < .01$ ). This does not directly contradict the discussion above, as this type of question—has reunification brought benefits—may appeal more directly to material interests and show significance in groups (e.g. the older or the less educated) who may have fewer economic opportunities.

### *How Might This Matter?*

There is still strong evidence to suggest that *Ostalgie* is a prevalent feeling among people living in the former GDR. By some measures, this *Ostalgie* has even grown over time, and even though it is more strongly associated with the older generations, sizeable numbers of younger people also identify with the former GDR or think that at least in some areas, the former GDR is superior to contemporary Germany.

While some aspects of *Ostalgie*, e.g. campaigns to bring back the *Ampelmännchen*, are of more interest for those examining popular culture, one might also ask what, if any, is the broader political importance of *Ostalgie*? This question can be answered in a variety of ways. Let us look at three: voting, support and trust in democratic institutions, and identification with the contemporary German republic.

Is there an “*Ostalgic*” vote? As noted earlier, the *Linke*

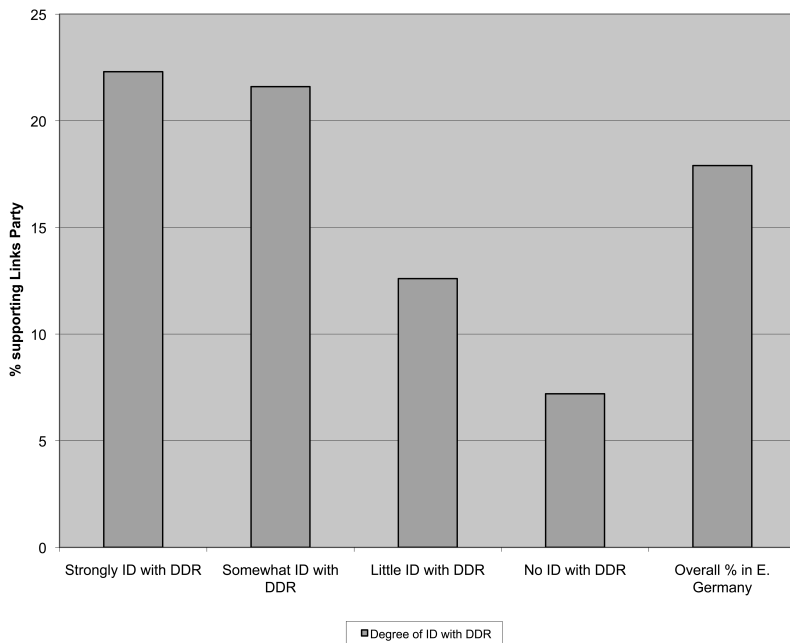


Figure 5. Voting Intention for Links Party

Party, rooted in the former ruling party of the GDR, has established itself as a sort of protest party that caters mainly to those who feel ill-served by the existing socio-economic system. Throughout much of the 1990s and 2000s, the *Linke* Party and its predecessors found most of their voters in the former East Germany, although, in 2009 thanks to the addition of Oskar LaFontaine a long-time leader in the Social-Democratic Party, it seemed poised to do better in some regions of western Germany. While it is obvious that this is more of an “East German” party, is it true that this party finds more support among those who are more “*ostalgic*”? The 2008 ALLBUS survey asked respondents about party identification and vote intention. One can examine whether those who identify more with the former GDR express different views and intentions than those who identify less with the GDR. A comparison is seen in Figure 5. There is a clear relationship, although it would be an exagger-



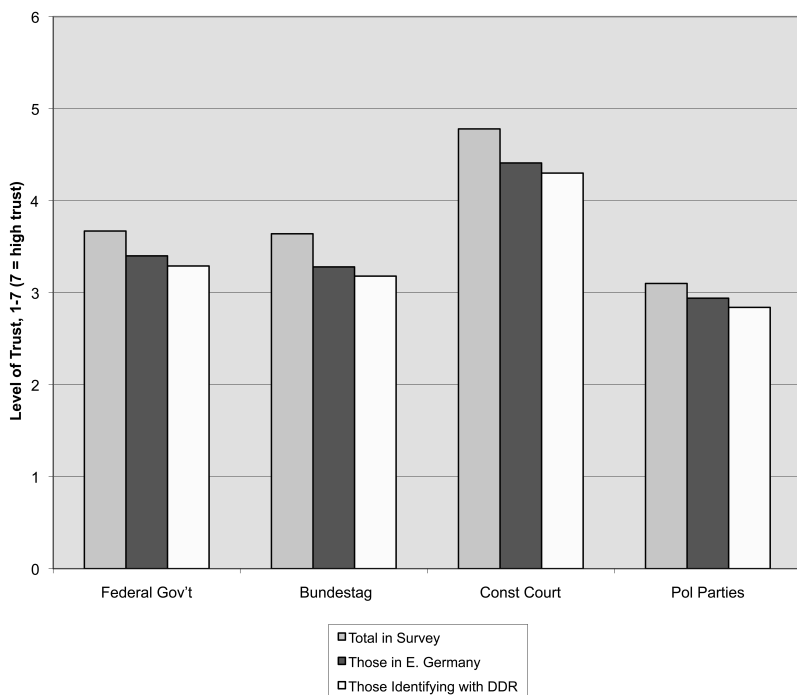
ation to assert that all or even most of those who strongly identify with the GDR will back the *Linke* Party.<sup>48</sup> What lies behind the *Linke* vote is harder to say. Whereas some would assert that this is a “protest vote,” there is no correlation between support of *Linke* and general distrust in political parties. There is, however, a strong correlation between an intended vote for the *Linke* and general distrust of the federal government.<sup>49</sup> Surprisingly, perhaps, there is also no significant correlation between support for the *Linke* and assessments about one’s economic situation or the general German economic situation. A binary logistic regression analysis on vote intention for the *Linke* shows that identification with the GDR, distrust of the federal government, and, not surprisingly, age, are all statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). How significant in terms of consequences this is, however, is harder to say. Whereas the *Linke* and its predecessors were anathema and almost assumed to be undemocratic parties a decade ago, today the *Linke* has more respectability and has shown a willingness to cooperate with other political parties. To say that the modest support for the *Linke* among those living in the former East Germany is a threat to German democracy seems like a bit of an exaggeration.

What about broader, more diffuse support for governmental and democratic institutions? Is there a relationship between *Ostalgie*—as measured by identification with the GDR—and lack of trust in various institutions? Figure 6 presents some data from the 2008 ALLBUS on this issue. For these questions, respondents were asked to indicate their level of trust in various institutions on a seven-point scale, with seven being high degree of trust. Figure 6 compares responses among all Germans, Germans living in the former GDR, and those in the former GDR that strongly or somewhat identify with the GDR. One can see a modest relationship. However, when an ordinal regression analysis is performed on data from respondents in

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<sup>48</sup>Correlation between the two variables is .135,  $p < .001$ .

<sup>49</sup>Correlation is .111,  $p < .001$ .



*Figure 6. Trust in Political Institutions*

eastern Germany, economic assessments are generally far more important factors across all institutions queried than is identification with the GDR, which obtain statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) only in the case of trust in the federal government. As to a wider question of political alienation from democratic institutions, there is a correlation between identification with the GDR and agreement with the idea that politicians don't care what people like me think. This relationship remains significant ( $p = .02$ ) in a regression analysis once age, education, gender, and economic assessments are taken into account.

How far does this alienation extend? Specifically, how much less likely are those that identify with the GDR to identify with contemporary German and fellow Germans? Data are presented in Figure 7. The results may be surprising, in that

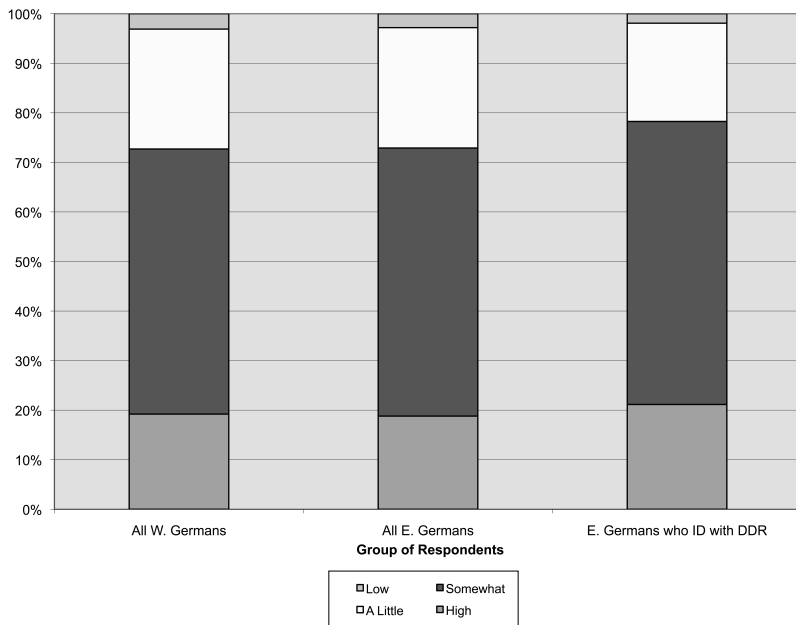


Figure 7. *Level of Identification with Germany as Whole*

Germans who strongly or somewhat identify with the GDR are just as likely—if not slightly more so—to identify with the whole of Germany and all German citizens. Thus, it does not appear that *Ostalgie*, as measured in this analysis, is related to an existential crisis about German identity or, for that matter, poses a crisis of legitimacy for the state.

This is not to say that *Ostalgie* is wholly irrelevant, but one should be careful about exaggerating its political importance. Most East Germans identify with today’s Federal Republic, and trust in political institutions, while not overwhelmingly high, is also not abysmally low. Its strong presence among older Germans should mean that it will recede as a political force, and its saliency seems likely to decline as well as memories of the GDR fade. This need not mean that former East Germans will be as content with institutions or their situation as those in the older German *Länder*, but it does seem likely that it will be harder for the GDR to be a touchstone as a point of reference or a place to imagine a better alternative.