

*The fading of the membership party.
The organization of German Christian Democrats in East-West-perspective*

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Abstract

The Christian Democratic Party (CDU) is one of the two major political parties in overall Germany. The party governed the Federal Republic over years and integrated members in large numbers. Organizationally, it has been labeled as a muster of a people's party. In this paper I briefly describe distinct organizational characteristics of the CDU. Yet, the focus is the party's organizational development since the merger with the East German sister party on the eve of German unification. Due to steady changes in their environment (e.g. dissolution of formerly stable social recruitment milieus) the party in western Germany is losing constantly members. Despite these losses, in western Germany the party still represents a people's party whose organizational strength is constantly fading away, however. In contrast, the eastern sister party suffered even more membership losses and never reached a level of organizational strength anywhere near to that of its sister party. The differences in inner party organization are even that striking that the eastern party sections represent a completely different party type compared to the CDU in the West. In light of these findings I argue that the eastern party anticipates a highly likely scenario and serves already as a model of future development of party organizations.

Introduction

The German Christian Democratic Party (CDU) has been labeled in party literature as the archetype of the so-called ‘people’s party’ (e.g. Schönbohm 1985, Schmid 1990, Haungs 1992). Like all other real existing parties, a people’s party is a mixture of different party types. Empirically, it is characterized in two ways. At the *strategic* side, a people’s party offers moderate electoral programs that make it in principle eligible for everyone. Indeed, successful people’s parties like the German CDU, the Austrian ÖVP or the Dutch CDA got electoral support from all social strata and contributed to the stabilization of their electoral markets. At the *organizational* side, people’s parties resemble classical mass membership parties with all their characteristics (i.e. large absolute membership, high membership density, a dense net of permanent active local branches) but with one distinct difference. So, as it mobilizes voters from all strata, it integrates members from all social groups in society. As a consequence, a people’s party has a complex internal structure that reflects its integration and representation profile. More precisely, in terms of internal organization a people’s party is a special case of a mass membership party that is empirically defined by its relative high member/electorate ratio (membership density), a socially balanced membership and voter structure, permanent active and organizationally strong local branches, including specialized inner-party associations (like youth-, worker- and employee associations, women organizations and others), and finally by a relatively high influence of the extra parliamentary organization (e.g. members, party conventions, the program) in internal decision making (see below).

In recent years this party type came under pressure. Conditions, that led the people’s party thrive – as close ties between parties and their constituency or relative stable voter alignments – began to fade away. Parties lost organized supporters in large scales, and party researchers began to speak of the „end of the people’s party“ (see e.g. Lösche 1997). Whether or not to agree fully with these ultimate farewell lyrics to one of the most stabilizing party types in western democracies, it is obvious that people’s parties are loosing party people, i.e. members. At the same time, the parties are changing their internal procedures in order to adapt to these losses. Whereas members were welcomed earlier as important electoral resources¹ (and doubtless still are), party organizers compensated membership input in financing and campaigns by either state subsidies or mass media based campaigns and electoral-professionalized agencies inside and outside the parties. The loss in importance of enrolled members has been already stated by Otto Kirchheimer (1965), when he analyzed the emergence of the catch-all party. But what role do members and large extra-parliamentary party organizations, including all its elements (e.g. local branches, inner party associations, elaborated, value driven programs) play today? Does it matter, if parties suffer membership losses for their declared main objective to win elections and electoral offices?

In this paper I will approach to these questions. The focus, however, is the organizational development of the party since German unification in autumn 1990. The merger with the

¹ See for an overview about costs and benefits of party membership e.g. Daalder (1992) and Scarrow (1994).

suddenly rediscovered relative from East Germany leaves room for a whole bunch of research questions. From the perspective of transformation research, for example, one can study the effects of formally equal overall political conditions (e.g. parliamentarism, party competition) or the effects of the massive material and non-material resource inflow from the western party since German unification on party structures in the East. This is of great interest not only from an institutional point of view but also for the parties and more general party research.

The two relatives approached from two completely different social and political backgrounds. The western CDU came as an organizationally strong and established political party (see section 1) that shaped decisively the political landscape of the Federal Republic. In contrast, the eastern CDU served between 1949 and 1989 as a loyal partner of the ruling communist Socialist Unity Party (SED) without own electoral programs, ambitions or real opposition against the politics of the SED up to the end of 1989. When these different 'sisters' unified at the conditions of liberal democracy the question arose whether the former eastern 'bloc party' will be accepted by the electorate. Furthermore, it is of interest whether the party develops similar organizational patterns in terms of membership strength, inner party democracy, membership participation via intra-party association and finally in the strength of the whole extra-parliamentary organization or whether possibly something different is emerging in the East.

Before I access to these questions I will briefly summarize the organizational development of the western CDU from the stage of a cadre party in the post war years (1950-1969) to a „modern people's party“ (Schönbohm 1985) (1972-1982). The second section sketches the merger of the two – except the name – completely different parties, including a look at specific problems which emerged in the course of unification. The third section gives an overview about the organizational development of the unified party since 1990 in East-West-perspective. This main part is divided into three analytical sections, (i) membership development, (ii) distribution of power inside the party sections, and (iii) major campaigning resources. Knowledge about these variables does not only allow to draw conclusions about the party type that has emerged in eastern Germany, it helps also to address the question of the membership's role in internal decision making and policy formulation or – more generally – of intra-party democracy.

1. The western CDU

The federal association of the party was founded in 1950. In the years before, only Land associations existed, informally connected by basic values like anti-communism, liberalism, a commitment to a socially embedded capitalism, and political, economic and military integration into the western world. These values mobilized public support for more than fifteen years in which the CDU governed uninterrupted at the federal level. This unchallenged position and the legacy from the early years contributed to the self image of the party as an „electoral club“ (*Kanzlerwahlverein*) that has been (i) controlled by incumbents at the federal and the local level (the chancellor/s, ministers, MP's, majors) and could afford (ii) to waive large scale membership integration or to expand the extra-parliamentary party organization.

Things changed only slightly in 1966 when the German Social Democrats entered government positions for the first time in a Great Coalition with the CDU (for details see e.g. Jesse 1997: 139-40). Party leaders began to consider an expansion of the extra-parliamentary organization because the party apparatus of the meanwhile competitive Social Democrats was seen as an advantage. But neither the slow erosion of the formerly superior position nor the defeat in the elections of 1969² really convinced the leadership to rebuild the party corpus into an organizationally strong agency. A „membership party“ with all its elements (e.g. high membership numbers, efforts to enlarge the membership, a dense network of organizationally strong local branches) seemed to be a matter of the workers' movements not that of a bourgeois party that was accustomed to win by the incumbent's appeal and not by numbers of organized supporters. But when the party was defeated again in the federal election in 1972 the self image changed completely. The new leadership, Helmut Kohl as chairman and Kurt Biedenkopf as secretary general, followed strictly their ideal to reform the CDU to a membership party with all its characteristics. They endowed the local organizations with much more self responsible competence in terms of budget control, local campaigning, and candidate recruitment. This has been an incentive that really attracted new members. Favored by a sharp ideological competition with the Social Democrats that led sympathizers flow into the party, the membership doubled between 1965 and 1975 (see Table 1). At the end of the 1970s, the CDU has reached a level of organization that was red as a muster of a peoples party. According to party research it is characterized by the following attributes (see Schönbohm 1985: 18):

- high membership numbers and high membership density (members/voters ratio)
- high electoral shares; according to Schönbohm (ibid.) at least 30 per cent
- socially widespread membership and voters from all social strata
- permanent active local branches including inner party associations³ (youth organization, employees' and employers' interest groups, women organization etc.)
- acceptance of internal value pluralism and potential conflict, but:
- decision making in accordance with principles of inner party democracy (i.e. at party conferences, or more general: at least in principle a relative high influence of the party organization and its elements: the executive committee, members, their associations etc.).

² Although the CDU got together with its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, the relative majority of 46,1 per cent, the Union (CDU/CSU) was sent to the opposition benches because SPD (42,7%) and FDP (5,8%) formed a coalition.

³ These inner party associations reflect the socially broad integration concept of peoples' parties. Each social group, i.e. potential members, should be attracted by a tailor-made interest group within the realm of the party. As a consequence, party scholars referred to this party structure as socially „entrenched party organisation“ (see for example Kitschelt 1994: Ch. 5). These associations not only contribute to the complex internal structure of peoples' parties, in the parties' daily life they also compete for influence in policy formulation and internal decision making. Consequently, in an entrenched party organisation with active inner party associations the degree of inner party competition between potential power zones (e.g. membership and its associations, parliamentary group, incumbents) tends to be high (see below, and more detailed Grabow 2000: Ch. 6).

During the 1980s the CDU reached both, the return to power in 1982 and its membership ceiling (see Table 1). But the longer the party was in government, it suffered typical problems of governing parties. From the peak level of some 700,000 enrolled members in 1985, membership began to fall constantly, partially because of not realized electoral announcements (e.g. the non-fulfillment of the 'conservative turnaround', see Grafe 1986), overall de-alignment processes of the electorate (Dalton and Rohrschneider 1990, Wiesendahl 1990), and some internal apathy because the winning margins against the Social Democrats proved to be stable throughout the 1980s. Whether or not the party could have lost not only organizational strength but even its leading role as governing party if the collapse of the GDR had not happened, as some scholars speculated (e.g. Lange 1994: 466), is empirically seen a pointless consideration. When the East Germans overthrew their state, the western CDU stood after a short phase of hesitation consequently for a soon national unification. Chancellor Kohl offered the East German electorate „flourishing landscapes“ and his party enjoyed overwhelming public support by people who expected a repetition of the 'economic miracle' that experienced the Federal Republic in the 1950s under the CDU-led government (see e.g. Habermas 1990).

2. Unification with the eastern sister party

Formally, the merger with the eastern CDU was celebrated on a party conference on the eve of German unification in Hamburg. The year before, the eastern party had to be reformed completely from an integral part of the communist bloc into a party that is able to mobilize popular support under the conditions of liberal democracy. Definitely, the existing apparatus, thousands of members, and some of the old cadres gave the CDU an important organizational advantage compared to the newly founded SPD or the civic movements in eastern Germany which actually forced the old regime to make democratic concessions. Though obviously the majority of East German voters simply ignored the history of the eastern CDU or equated the party with its western relative, leaders and organizers from the western CDU were highly engaged in restructuring the eastern party organization. This happened at three levels. First, the number of eastern full time party staff was reduced significantly from 1,700 to only 175. The second level was the fusion of small local party branches into larger and more effective agencies, including the establishment of the inner party associations. The third focused on the advertisement of new members, paralleled with the exchange of old party cadres. Moreover, the western sister party supported their eastern relative with office equipment, experienced personnel, campaigning messages and candidates for the Land elections. Altogether, these efforts amounted to costs of about DM 12 million, provided by the federal party (CDU 1992).

The membership development, however, took a dramatically negative trajectory (see Table 1 and section 3.1). Already in the pre-unification year the eastern party suffered a net loss of approximately 20,000 members, partially due to disappointment of old cadres who were

either laid off or displaced by so called „transfer cadres“ from the western CDU⁴ (see Schmidt 1997: Ch. 10). Given this membership decline, the eastern CDU had serious problems to find enough eligible activists to establish the inner party associations and to enlarge the overall extra-parliamentary organization. Particularly, the party is plagued by shortages in junior members and candidates – only 5 per cent of the members are younger than 30 years. Although this problem is virulent in the western party organization as well (here 7.5 per cent of the members are younger than 30), these figures – the extremely negative membership development, much lower membership numbers and organizationally weaker local branches – already point to significant overall organizational differences between the dissimilar sisters. How far these differences really reach and moreover, whether they indicate not only some variance in internal organization but may be even typological differences should be answered in the following section.

3. The organization of the unified CDU in comparative view

Research about the organizational development of political parties in unified Germany made visible that neither the formal similarities of the overall institutional environment nor the resource inflow from the western parties proved to be a sufficient condition for an approximation of the party structures (e.g. Tiemann 1993, Linnemann 1994, Neugebauer 1994, Grabow 2000, 2001). Obviously, under the surface of formal resemblance operate forces which hinder the desired approximation of the party structures in the East to the model of their western relatives. Illustrated by the membership development (3.1), the locus of intra party power (3.2), and the main electoral resources of the parties (3.3), I will discuss in this section major organizational characteristics which portray the magnitude of possible differences between the sister parties on the one hand and could highlight the question of typological differences on the other. After the presentation of these characteristics I shall answer the question whether organizational or even typological differences have consequences for the electoral performance of the CDU in eastern and western Germany.

3.1. Membership development

As visible from Table 1, the CDU in eastern Germany lost since unification more than 50 per cent of its former membership. Compared to its western relative, the present eastern CDU is a low membership party. If we look at the density⁵ of organized supporters among voters or potential members, this becomes even more obvious. Here, the western party sections display a membership density of 1.37. In contrast, the eastern sections reach not even the half of that value, i.e. 0.51. In round numbers these data say that among 10,000 western voters we can find on average 137 CDU members and only 51 who are enrolled in the eastern CDU sections.

-- Table 1 –⁶

⁴ For other reasons, see below.

⁵ Membership density is measured in [members/potential voters]*100.

⁶ Les tableaux et figures sont regroupées en annexe en fin de document...

These data indicate that despite all attempts to enlarge the membership for the eastern party sections, the CDU in the New German Länder never reached the stage of a mass membership party⁷. The sister organization in western Germany, in contrast, still enjoys much higher membership numbers. However – except a slight increase between 1998 and 2000 that was due to the influx of sympathizers after the CDU lost the federal elections and the election of Angela Merkel as the party's chairperson – the party also lost steadily organized supporters. It suffered a relative reduction of its rank and file of about 13 per cent in the last decade. Insofar the mass membership stadium that the party once reached seems to dwindle.

The western CDU undergoes the same problems of many established parties in western democracies (see e.g. Katz and Mair 1994). According to party scholars, membership is declining, because of at least three reasons. First, the formerly rather tight social bonds between parties and their socially or economically defined recruitment fields have eroded steadily. For the CDU – and other parties that try to integrate potential members via Christian values – the problems are shrinking confessional milieus (see Falter and Schumann 1992) and the reduction of private farmers. Both, farmers and especially Catholics were the spine of organized supporters. Today, however, these core groups are shrinking socially and numerically – be it because of lasting secularization and value change in western democracies or because of economic restructuring. Second, since the end of the cold war and system confrontation, anti-communist hard liners have no reason to support a party like the CDU that stood consequently for West integration and socially embedded market economy. Third, organized participation within the organizational and ideological realm of an entrenched party organization seems to be an outdated model of political participation, especially for younger people (see Wiesendahl 1992). Beside these more general reasons, the CDU still has to fight the problems of a severe finance scandal since 1999 that costs the party not only sympathy but contributed to exits in larger scale.

Although these problems affect membership development in the East too, the dramatic decline of the party's organized support has still more reasons. First, the party suffers specific structural recruitment difficulties. In eastern Germany the party can not rely on stable supporter milieus, especially Catholics and farmers, who – although declining – still belong to the core groups of the western CDU, or civil servants and intellectuals, who show a stronger alignment either to the post-communist PDS or the Social Democrats. Second, the party has to handle with the absence of traditions in organized political participation within the realm of political parties. According to Claus Offe (1994) the problem in eastern Germany is an only weakly developed informal infrastructure for the growth of political organizations in general which depend on voluntary and sometimes even faithful input of believers. Finally, the party

⁷ Of course, we do not know a formal criteria that allows definitely to address a party a „mass membership party“ (i.e. beginning with 200,000 members, 350,000 and so forth). However, the comparison of membership numbers with other parties and even more important the internal structures and procedures in one certain party including a consideration of membership figures allow to draw conclusions about party types (see Duverger 1954: Ch. 1, Kitschelt 1989: Ch. 2, Katz and Mair 1995).

was weakened by personal tensions when the federal party executive exchanged old bloc cadres at the party's top and medium level by so-called „transfer cadres“ from western Germany⁸ (detailed see Schmidt 1997: Ch. 10). Even if this exchange seemed to be necessary either to fill inner party positions with professional candidates or to signalize the electorate an inner party democratization, it led to massive exits of old members whose earlier services as pacemakers, especially in the campaigns of 1990 and 1991, were no longer needed. Together, structural recruitment problems, the weakness of the informal preconditions of organized participation and the replacement of the old elite contributed to the dramatic decline of CDU-enrollment in the East where important conditions for membership growth are only weakly developed or not given at all.

3.2. Distribution of power inside the party sections

To localize the center of internal decision making is important for at least two reasons. First, it helps to identify party types. Second, it makes visible how influential the membership is in programmatic discussions, policy formulation, decision making (e.g. coalition building, use of the budget) or candidate selection.

3.2.1 Locus of internal decision making

To begin with the question of typological classification we know, according to the pioneering study by Maurice Duverger (1954), that classical cadre parties are controlled by single candidates and office holders whereas mass parties are more controlled by the elements of the extra-parliamentary party organization, i.e. by members, their institutions (e.g. the party convention) and values (e.g. an ideologically driven program, linkages to society) or the party executive.

Research on power distribution of peoples' parties made visible that the locus of intra-party power is rather equally distributed among the elements of the membership organization, the parliamentary group and – insofar the party is in office – the government and single ministers. When the CDU experienced a strengthening of its organizational body, as sketched in section 1, exactly this almost equal distribution emerged. The growing membership claimed successfully more influence in decision making and policy formulation, as the employees' association, CDA, still does in the process of program discussions (e.g. recently in the discussion about the current electoral profile with a „New Social Market Economy“). These claims usually limit the degrees of freedom of the leadership, that tends to be in principle less obliged to „program- or ideology-true“ policy, and contributes to the complex power structure of peoples' parties with several potential power zones. For matters of analytical

⁸ The former CDU leadership was not exclusively exchanged by transfer cadres but also by East Germans who did not serve in top positions before. However, all bureaucracy top jobs at Land level were filled with experienced personnel from the West (see Damskis 1997), so that an important incentive for joining the party (career incentive) was not given anymore. In one case the leadership by a politician from western Germany was stylized as an „East-West-conflict“ (CDU in Brandenburg), but in fact it was primarily a personal conflict between the party chairman, Ulf Fink, and the parliamentary leader, Peter-Michael Diestel, not a substantial conflict between „East“ and „West“. All in all the former bloc party inserted quite calmly into the unified party, i.e. it did not try to get a specific profile as advocate of supposed East German interests.

simplification we can imagine three of these zones: (i) the membership organization with the inner-party associations (ii) the parliamentary group as an institution of the party, and (iii) single individuals (e.g. leaders of the parliamentary group, ministers, prime ministers; all expressively as *persons*). If we keep in mind Duverger's classification, then an almost equally balanced power distribution can be read as sign of a peoples' party (with a strong extra-parliamentary organization), whereas the dominance of either the parliamentary group or single persons refers to a cadre party type.

I illustrate the power distribution within the CDU in accordance with empirical findings that I already reported elsewhere (see Grabow 2001). The data stem from an investigation among seventy three local branches (thirty six eastern and thirty seven western) and twelve CDU-Land associations⁹. This data set is large enough to represent the organization of the CDU below the federal level. Moreover, it allows to draw conclusions about East-West differences in party structure at statistically acceptable levels.

-- Figure 1 --

As we can see from Figure 1, the margins between the three potential power zones are rather small for the western party sections. Although the parliamentary groups at the Land level got the highest score for „influence in internal decision making“, this picture refers pretty clearly to a quite balanced power distribution that was reported as typical for peoples parties with an organizationally strong party corpus beside the parliamentary group. For the party sections in eastern Germany, in contrast, much larger differences between the possible power zones are visible. Here, the extra-parliamentary organization with its elements plays a significantly lesser role in decision making, whereas at the same time single persons and especially the parliamentary groups score higher.

In combination with the low membership endowment of the East German CDU sections these figures already point to remarkable structural differences between the sister parties. The CDU in eastern Germany is a low membership party whose internal business is controlled in the Land parliaments or by single persons and not by the membership organization or the party executive. In other words: party life in eastern Germany is dominated by representatives and the party branches display another distinct sign of a cadre party.

3.2.2 Deficits in intra-party democracy?

So far this is primarily an analytical result that bases on the current organizational characteristics of the party sections. But do these differences in internal decision making point to deficits in intra-party democracy?

⁹ Though for western Germany only three Bundesländer were included in the study (Bremen, Lower Saxony, North Rhine Westphalia), the data represent six Land associations. First, because in Lower Saxony exist three independent Land associations (Oldenburg, Hannover, Braunschweig), second, because I collected data for the CDU in Berlin separately for eastern and western branches, so that these branches represent the party in eastern and western Berlin.

As long as modern party organizations are subject of social research, scholars were concerned with the problem of the membership's co-determination in party life. In his pioneering study about the organization of mass parties, Robert Michels (1911/1989) argued that members are chronically underrepresented in internal decision making for at least two reasons. The first is the need of labor-division within large political agencies. This necessary division into specialists of internal bureaucratization on the one hand and professional leadership and parliamentary representation on the other endows the experts with a set of resources that leads inevitable in a separation between relatively few office holders and the mass of plain members. The second reason is the tendency of 'the masses' to trust on strong leadership. Even for party organizations which tried expressly to overcome the imbalance between office holders and plain membership¹⁰ – the so-called left-libertarian parties which emerged in the early 1980s in some West European countries – scholars observed „perverse effects“ in membership representation (e.g. Kitschelt 1989, Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990). Here again, the critical variable was personal endowment with necessary resources for active participation, i.e. time, individual skills, access to power/decision zones by the status within the party (representatives, office holders vs. plain members). Insofar these observations confirm what Michels argued almost one century ago: political organizations have an obviously inevitable tendency to be divided into some who control the agency because they are endowed with the necessary resources and a majority of more or less active followers whose role is limited to due payers and loyal voters.

Despite these structural differences in individual resource endowment and a tendency to personalized party representation at the federal level¹¹ we could see for the western CDU sections a rather strong influence of the membership in internal decision making (see Figure 1, left column). Members, represented by the extra-parliamentary organization in general or more specifically by the inner-party associations and party conventions, still claim a comparatively high influence in inner-party affairs. This can be traced back to the party's history. In the 1970s the CDU experienced a so-called „modernization“ by which the local organizations enjoyed an allocation of much more autonomy and competence (see above). The local units were not only strengthened in their role as integration channels, they really were endowed with much higher decision autonomy in local policy formulation, campaigning, candidate selection, and budget control, whereas the Land organizations were strengthened in their role as strategic or ideological „think tanks“ (see Schönbohm 1985, Schmid 1990). Because the majority of the current CDU membership in western Germany entered the party exactly in this period and experienced the allocation of more decision competence to the local party

¹⁰ The most important mechanisms by which these parties tried to break with these imbalances were (i) the formal separation between party offices and mandates (ii) office rotation after two years in responsibility, and (iii) a formal representation quota for women of 50 percent.

¹¹ The longer the former chancellor and party chairman, Helmut Kohl, was in office, the more the party, at least at the federal level, left its representation completely to him and his reputation as the „chancellor of German unification“ or European statesman. This development peaked in the campaign of 1994 when the party offered only his outsized portrait without any other message to the electorate.

organizations and the Land level, the rank and file still claims co-determination in internal decision making.

In contrast, in eastern Germany this kind of organizational and strategic re-structuring of the party grounds never happened since unification. As mentioned above, party organizers were rather concerned with a reduction of the large party apparatus that was inherited from the former bloc party (see section 2). However, the current distribution of internal power in the eastern CDU sections does not necessarily speak of a priori deficits in internal democracy. The dominance of representatives or incumbents rather reflects the only weak organizational ground of the party – i.e. low membership numbers, less strongly organized inner party associations, and weaker ideological mobilization of the rank and file – and not a colonization of the party by some office holders. Even the contrary, party organizers and leaders are indeed interested in the enlargement of the membership organization, even at the expense that their privileges as almost unconstrained decision makers may be challenged by a larger membership (Grabow 2000: Ch. 7). But the attempts to expand the membership were not successful, as seen in the section above. Consequently, the influence of the membership in internal decision making, policy formulation, and candidate selection is rather low. Yet, this result does not refer to an underdevelopment of inner party democracy inside the eastern party sections. Instead, it mirrors the fact that the membership organization with the inner-party associations is simply too weak to challenge the position that representatives and incumbents enjoy today in the eastern party branches.

3.3. Major electoral resources

The power of electronic and other mass media gave party strategists incentives to conduct expensive media based campaigns rather than to lean on numerous and faithful campaigning troops (Epstein 1967, Panebianco 1988). Consequently, as Kirchheimer (1965) argued, individual members as *electoral asset* lost in importance and were replaced by either own experts or professionalized non-party campaign agencies. This development has been observed also for West German parties (e.g. Radunski 1980, Lösche 1997). The question is whether or not the eastern CDU sections can also be attributed as such electoral-professional parties. Moreover, I am interested, whether between the sister parties differences become visible in the evaluation as well as the use of different electoral resources. Here again, I distinguish between the membership organization and its elements on the one side and individual candidates and their media based presentation on the other.

-- Figure 2 --

Figure 2 reflects that in eastern as well as in western CDU branches the organizers still favor the organization as major electoral resource. This result could be biased somewhat because the local and Land party organizers are employees of the party *organization*. As such they value by profession a strengthening of the membership organization higher than, for example, candidates do. Yet, the data indicate that the trend goes toward more candidate-centered campaigns. That the eastern sections are at least as electoral-professionalized as their

western relatives becomes visible with a look at the campaigning agencies. Of five western CDU Land associations, four employed their own specialized campaigning divisions whereas only two got support from non-party experts. In contrast, of the five eastern CDU associations all employed their own and external agencies for electoral campaigns. Insofar, the overall CDU offers distinct signs of electoral professionalization with a somewhat higher candidate orientation for eastern party sections (see Figure 2 and section 3.4). In this setting, members in general play a significantly lesser role as an electoral resource, although party organizers still welcome them as transmission belt to the local community, as potential candidates for offices, and, of course, as due payers (see Scarrow 1994). This seems to be doubtless an important but the remaining part of organized party supporters. As visible from the following section, they are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for electoral success.

3.4. Organizational differences and consequences for electoral support

As seen in the section above, the two relatives do not clearly differ in their use and evaluation of major electoral resources. But they differ significantly in their internal organization. The much lower membership density, consequently organizationally weaker local branches including the inner party associations, and the dominance of the parliamentary groups and individual candidates in internal decision making do not only speak of organizational differences in East-West-perspective. In view of the empirical findings we can even state the outcome of an other party organization type in eastern Germany compared to their western sister organization. Although the CDU in western Germany is constantly losing organized supporters, it represents due to its actual organizational characteristics (still relatively high membership numbers, membership density, relative active inner party associations, a balanced relationship between different potential power zones in internal decision making) still a people's party that is losing organizational strength, however. At the contrary, the eastern CDU sections never developed to a similarly strong membership organization. Given the current organizational characteristics, as sketched in this paper, the party resembles much more the cadre party type¹².

The relative organizational weakness, yet, does not necessarily lead to negative consequences for electoral results. Figure 3 reflects the rather weak overall relationship between membership strength and the electoral results at Land level for the last electoral year¹³. Although some eastern CDU associations reached only poor results (e.g. Berlin/East,

¹² Unfortunately, in a short contribution like this it is impossible to present a comprehensive „check list“ of more characteristics that define party types more accurate. However, broader research with more structural variables (e.g. efforts in membership recruitment, costs for building or maintenance of the extra-parliamentary organization, the membership-representative-ratio or the social structure of the rank and file) made even more structural differences visible and allowed to conclude the emergence of a different organizational type in eastern Germany (see Grabow 2000: Ch. 9, 2001: 35-8).

¹³ Mecklenburg Western Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt, and Lower Saxony 1998, Berlin, Bremen, Brandenburg, Saxony, Thuringia all 1999, North Rhine Westphalia 2000.

Saxony-Anhalt), the most successful Land associations also are eastern sections. The CDU in Saxony and Thuringia got even absolute majorities with only relative small membership organizations. But especially these two land associations were represented by very popular peak candidates. Research made visible that the peak candidates' popular appeal counts much more for voter mobilization than organizational strength or just membership numbers (e.g. Grabow 2000: Ch. 8). This has been true also for the CDU in Brandenburg, where the party offered a popular peak candidate and improved its market shares significantly in the last election without gaining new members. Insofar scholars referred to elections in the East as 'personal plebiscites' and not party votes (see Schmitt 1995).

-- Figure 3 --

Moreover, the scatterplot shows that the deviation of electoral results is much larger in the East than in the West. This strong deviation mirrors the high volatility of East German voters, or their low party bonds, respectively. Under these conditions, the supply of popular candidates is the most promising strategy, at least in a short term perspective (see Radunski 1996, Perkins 1996). The potential problem of this strategy, however, is that the orientation on the popularity of single candidates *without* a stronger organizational background makes a party depending on this person. Not only at the federal level after the era of the former chancellor Helmut Kohl has passed, but also at the Land level – e.g. in Saxony, where the heyday of prime minister Kurt Biedenkopf seems to be over as well – this problem is striking the party today.

Conclusion

This sketchy overview made discernible that the reality falls back the expectations of the actors and their efforts to build up a similarly strong extra-parliamentary party organization in eastern Germany. The CDU in the East experienced extremely large membership losses since unification. Today it is a low membership party that is dominated by parliamentary leaders and incumbents, i.e. it represents a different party type compared to its western sister organizations. In western Germany, however, the conditions which once led to membership growth for the western CDU are fading away (e.g. formerly stable social recruitment milieus for political mass organizations, trust in overall management capacities of political parties and others, see above). In eastern Germany these conditions never have really developed. Given these external constraints it seems highly plausible to expect that in overall Germany (and in other democracies as well) the model of a membership party is either going or never will evolve. Even the contrary, the eastern CDU possibly anticipates a likely stage of the overall party organizations' development. Surprisingly yet, that despite all attempts to build up an organizationally strong party in the East, the way of a possible adjustment goes obviously the other way around. Not the western kind of party organization but that of the eastern branches seems to serve as model for future evolution.

The current major difficulty of the overall CDU, however, is not only the loss of organized supporters but to find a convincing strategy that could bring the party back to government.

Although the records of the federal government made of the Social Democrats and the Greens is conflicting in their success (e.g. in reducing structural unemployment), the CDU has been passed by the red-green coalition in terms of budget policies, tax reform, deployment of troops to the Balkan, and migration policies. Moreover, after the exchange of the leadership from Wolfgang Schäuble to Angela Merkel and an intermediate gain in popularity, the party is presently paralyzed by leadership weakness, still the effects of the party's finance scandal, personal as well as factional disputes in the question of the next peak candidate between the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, and controversies over electoral programs. So it seems that the CDU's largest chance to come back to power is not their own programmatic and strategic creativity or their organizational strength but the eventually bad performance of the current government. Yet, whether or not the voters honor this only weak bases of electoral mobilization will be answered definitely still in September 2002, when the German voters are called to the ballot boxes. The most recent electoral results for the CDU at the Land level (Hamburg: 26.3 per cent, Berlin: 23.7 per cent) in combination with the constantly negative membership development of the overall party rather speak of the deepest crisis that the party ever experienced in its history. Given the list of characteristics that define a party as a „people's party“ (see above in accordance with Schönbohm 1985: 18), we see that not only the eastern branches are far away from this type but also that the overall CDU is running into the serious danger to lose its role as a people's party.

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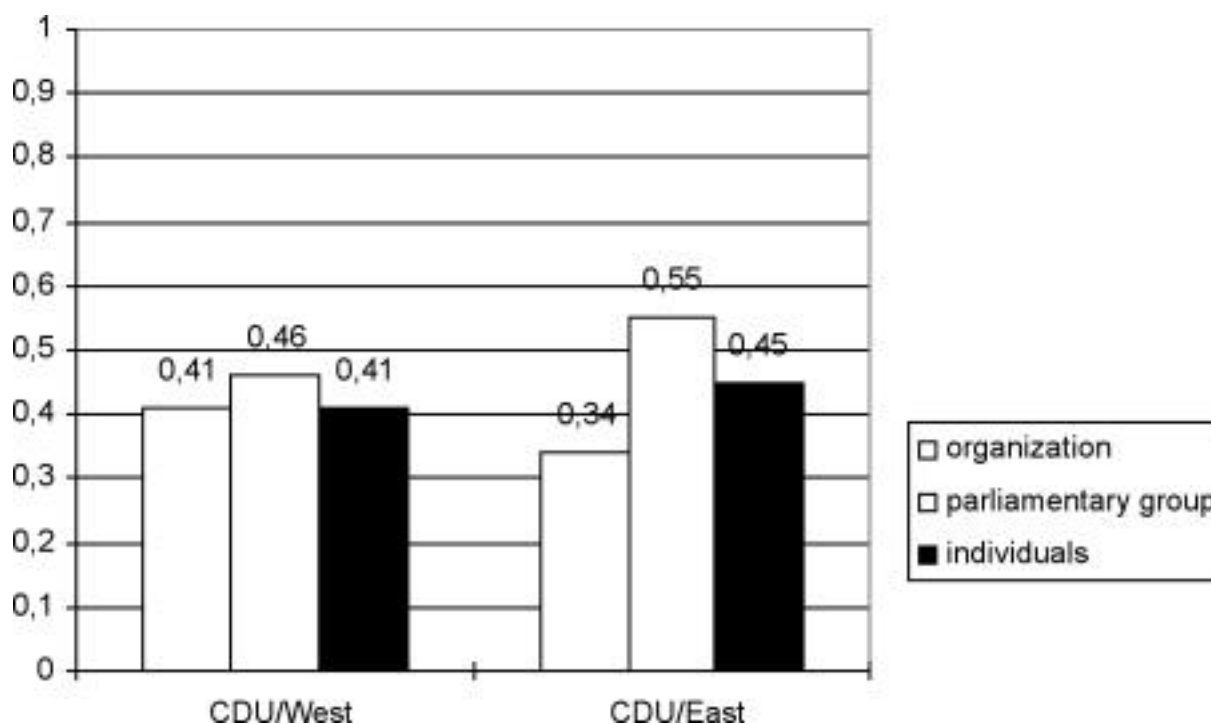
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Annexes

Table 1. Membership development of the CDU

Year	CDU/West	CDU/East	total since unification
1960	230,000	70,000	
1965	288,000	90,000	
1970	330,000	100,000	
1975	590,000	100,000	
1980	693,000	125,000	
1985	719,000	130,000	
1990	655,100	129,556	784,656
1992	619,579	94,267	712,846
1994	596,477	78,193	671,890
1996	583,505	65,923	645,786
1998	565,418	60,839	626,257
2000	569,980	60,094	630,074
per cent change 1990-2000	-12.9	-53.6	-19.7

Sources: Scarrow (1996: 57), Reichart-Dreyer (2000: 299), Grabow (2001: 26)

Figure 1. Distribution of intra-party power

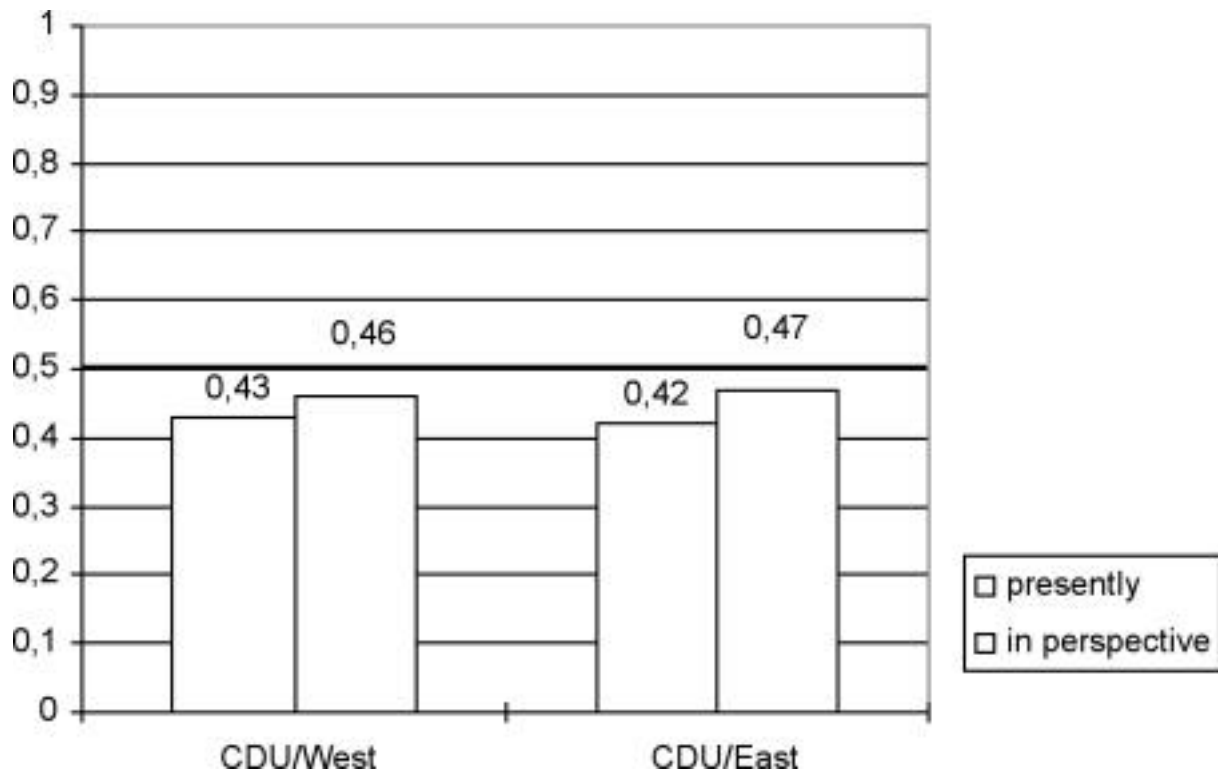
scoring: 0 = no importance; 1 = high importance

N = 85 (sum of all answers for the local branches and Land associations as given by the participants).

The question was: „What do you think is the main locus of intra-party decision making in your branch/Land association if you consider general policy formulation, campaign messages, coalition building, personnel recruitment, and use of the budget ?“ The three levels, organization, parliamentary group, and individual candidates/office holders had several sub-items which were neither in the questionnaires nor in the interviews mutually exclusive, i.e. multiple answers were possible. The *organization* was represented by the (i) membership, represented by the party convention, (ii) the inner party associations, (iii) the party executives as an institution, and (iv) the program. The *parliamentary group* was counted if the participants named the group as

such or single representatives as dominating forces. *Individual candidates/office holders* were counted if they were named expressly as individuals, i.e. (i) the party chairman, (ii) the leader of the parliamentary group as person, (iii) the prime minister, (iv) other ministers. After the investigation I divided first the given answers per item by the maximum value of each (organization 4, parliamentary group 2, individual candidates/office holders 4), and got the picture for a single party unit, then I calculated the average for each answer in East-West-perspective. All reported East-West-differences are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Figure 2. Major electoral resources within the CDU



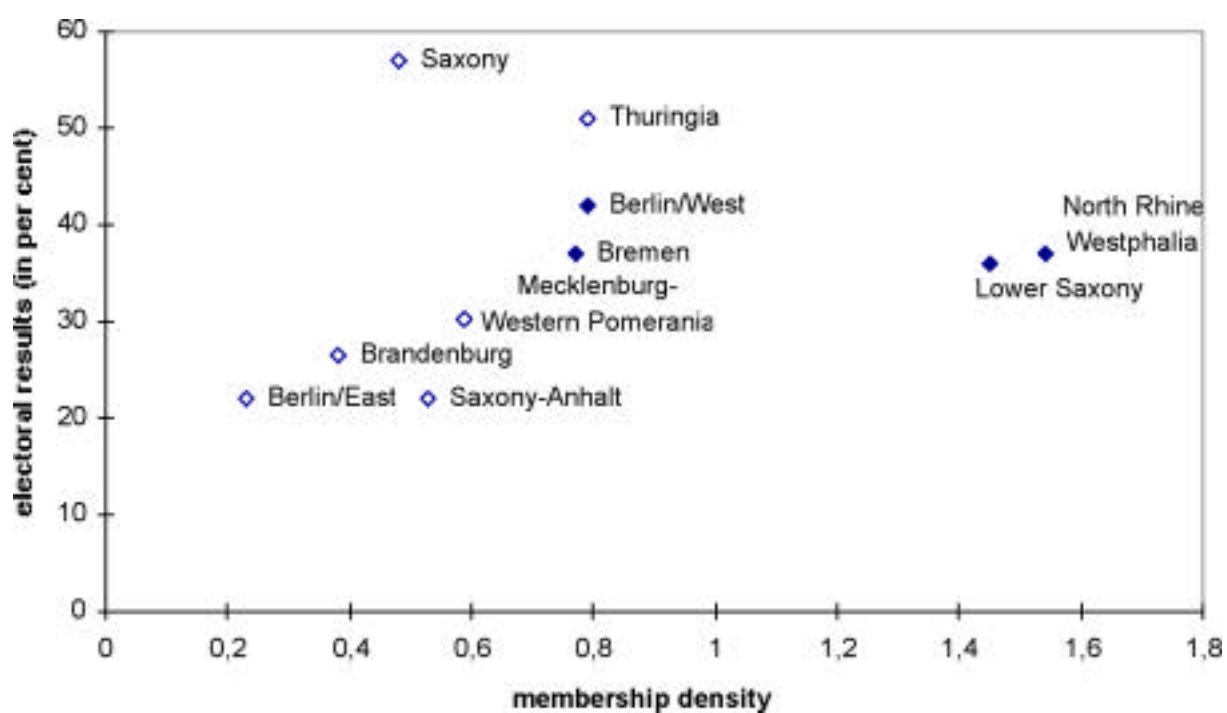
scoring:

0 = „the organization and its elements are the major electoral resources“

1 = „individual candidates and their media based presentation are the major electoral resources“

N = 85 (see Figure 1)

The questions were: 1. „What do you think are the major electoral resources of your party district?“ 2. Which would you like to enhance in future?“. Possible answers were: (i) active membership, (ii) strong/advanced party structures (including inner party associations), (iii) the party program, (iv) single candidates, and (v) the media based presentation of iv. Items i - iii were scored with „0“, iv and v with „1“. For example, a party unit, which secretary marked i, ii, and iv for question 1 was scored 1/3 ($[0+0+1]/3$). If the same secretary marked for future resources (question 2) instead of i now iv and v, then the unit got the value 2/3 ($[0+1+1]/3$). I have applied this procedure for all participating units, then I calculated the average values in East-West-perspective, which are portrayed in Figure 2.

Figure 3. The relationship between membership density and electoral results at Land level $r = .23$