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The “Invisible Wall” of Germany

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ABSTRACT

In February 2025, parliamentary elections were held in Germany, the results of which showed an extraordinary division of the electorate of East and West Germany, along the former state border between East and West Germany. These elections showed not only the geopolitical division of Germany but also the deep cultural, economic, and demographic division that this paper will prove. This work is significant in finding the source of divisions that still exist today, which have direct consequences for the population of Germany. Through this work, we will analyze the historical-geographical facts of the causes of these divisions, how they happened and why they continue today after the reunification of Germany. This work is significant, because it proves the divisions that exist on the cultural, geopolitical, religious, demographic and economic levels, and after reading the work you will understand how these divisions came about, why they still exist today and what the positive and negative consequences of these divisions are. This work is extremely important for countries that also yearn for reunification, which are culturally, economically and historically divided like Germany, to learn from Germany's example what the positives and negatives of this kind of reunification are. There are many such countries around the world, for example Korea, Cyprus or Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Germany; Division; Geopolitics; Economy; Reunification; Population; Culture

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1. Introduction

The main goal and task of this paper is to prove the theory, the division that exists today in Germany, along the margins of the former border of the “Iron Curtain”, that is, East and West Germany. The aim of the work is to find the reasons for this division through the historical-geographic research of this area and to illuminate them. This paper wants to discuss and state the reasons for this division despite the reunification of Germany 35 years ago. To state the reasons why these divisions, exist today and after quite a long time.

This work is significant because proving these divisions in German society is the first step towards a potential solution to this historically-geographically complex problem in the heart of Europe. This paper aims to prove the theory that these divisions are not only political in nature, but also economic, demographic, religious, ideological, cultural,

etc. In this paper, the focus will be on proving these divisions through the prisms of demography, history, economy, geography, religion and culture.

The inspiration for this work occurred at the end of February 2025, when the important federal elections took place in Germany, the results of which showed a deep political division in the country between East and West. The party in power, the center-left (SPD) party, experienced the worst result since the time of Bismarck (1887), while a clear division was seen among the voters, which we can see on the map of the won districts (**Figure 1**). East Germany is painted blue and is led by the relatively new Alternative for Germany (AFD) party, which was founded in 2013 and is often referred to as an ultra-right or “neo-fascist” party. The AFD’s victory in the east of the country contrasts with the victory of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) in the west of Germany.

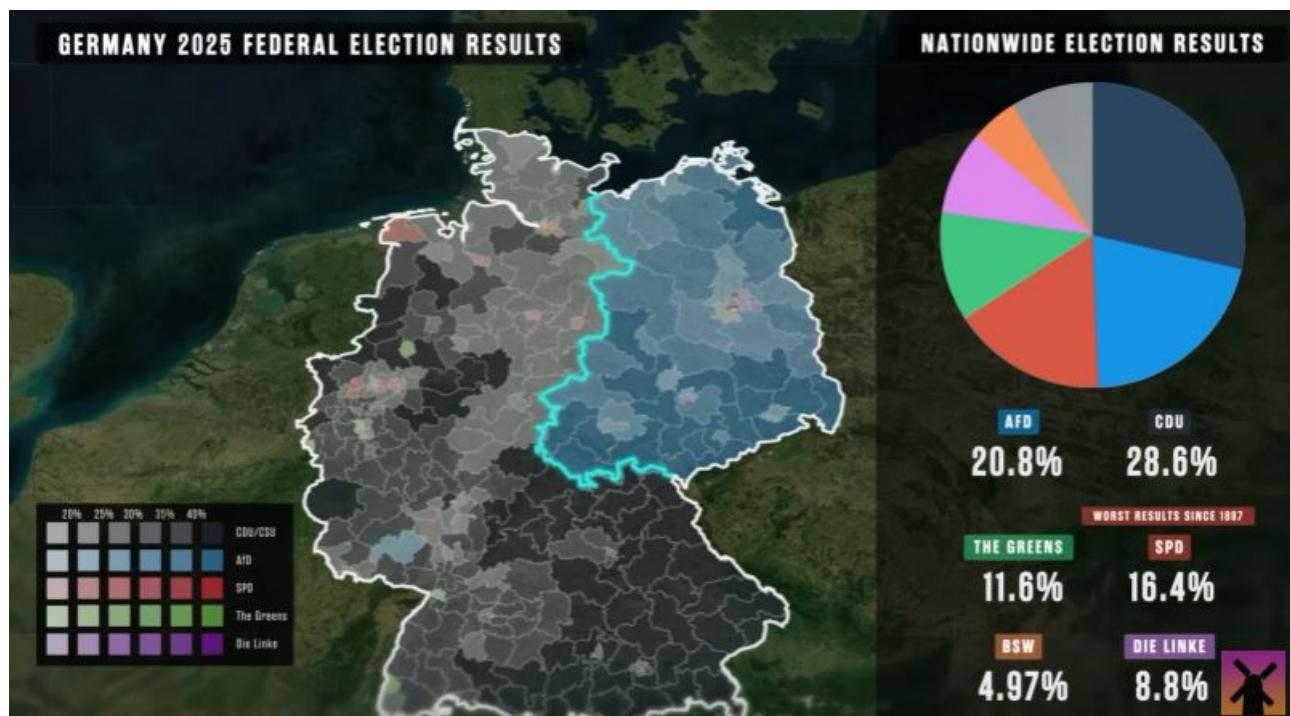


Figure 1. Map with the results of the elections in Germany by district in 2025.

(Source: Mirko Ivanović with data from Statistisches Bundesamt.)

2. Methodology

In this paper, the methods of comparison, analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, the method of statistical analysis, the method of generalization and specialization, the tabular method, the illustrative and demonstrative method,

and the demographic, historical and geographical method were used. The following statistical databases were used: German Statistics Agency (Statistisches Bundesamt), economic parameters from the Total economy database site, which works at the UN, all images depicting the divisions of Germany in this paper are the work of the author via the

geomotion application with data from the aforementioned statistical databases.

I understand that the geomotin method needs additional clarification. This is a relatively new methodology in science that contributes to a better illustrative presentation of data. All the demographic and statistical data collected in this work from the German Statistical Agency are uploaded to the Nebula platform, which uses these data to create maps, tables, age pyramids, diagrams, etc. This method greatly helps scientists to illustrate the data in the right way and not to waste time asking for confirmations or consent to publish images and maps from other sources and authors.

The methodological process was most influenced by the works of other authors and scientists mentioned in the references, who through their works proved some of the divisions mentioned in this paper. The originality of this work lies in the entire research of the author of this work on all divisions, not only individual ones (for example, the economic division of Germany) and by creating and proving the whole truth about the reasons for all divisions in Germany today. The contribution of this work lies in proving the existence of the entire “invisible wall” of Germany today (political, economic, religious, demographic, cultural, ideological, etc.) despite the reunification of the country more than 30 years ago. Within the methodological apparatus, the demographic method is the most significant because it's the source of all population divides in Germany, and it is the best method for analysis of the cultural differences in the populations in former West and East Germany.

The methods of comparison, analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction are used throughout the work, mostly in the conclusion where all results are analyzed. Demographic and statistical methods are used in the analysis of all types of data related to the population and the economy throughout the entire paper, mostly in the results section as a form of data analysis. This is mostly seen in the results of the elections in Germany, the age of the population, migrations due to a worse economy, cultural divides by religion etc.

It should also be noted that the data related to the employment of the population and more importantly for the topic of the paper on the historical-ideological division of Germany related to the employment of the female workforce were taken from the official website of the International Labor Organization.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Gepolitical and Cultural Divide of Germany

One cannot fail to notice in the map above (**Figure 1**) that Germany is politically deeply divided along the identical borders of the former “Iron Curtain”, during the Cold War, when they were two different states with different political-economic ideologies. The massive divisions during the political elections, however, do not stop there, the AFD not only won convincingly in the districts of the former East Germany, but they also had an average of 18% in the districts in the west of the country, which is cumulatively the most votes that an ultra-right party has had in Germany since the time of the Third Reich. We should also not forget the excellent result in the east of the country by the ultra-left party “Die Linke”, which is the successor of the communist party of East Germany^[1].

The election results show that in the districts of the former East Germany, more than two-thirds of the votes went to either the ultra-right or the ultra-left political option, ignoring the traditionally popular centrist options.

This is in stark contrast to the districts of the former West Germany, which overwhelmingly voted for centrist options (CDU and SPD) and voted poorly for extreme options from the political left and right. However, this is not the only time when we see the “sharp” political, cultural and economic “border” between the former East and West Germany. It can be seen on most statistical parameters, whether economic, cultural or demographic. Due to the size of the work, we will not show all these examples of division, but only some.

We can show a map of documented violent anti-refugee demonstrations and protests in Germany (**Figure 2**). As an example of cultural difference, we can show the map of gender equality in relation to earnings (**Figure 3**) or the religious map of Germany (**Figure 4**). There are too many examples of these divisions to list them all in this paper. The question is why are both extreme options attractive to East German voters?

Even today, if you look at Berlin at night from above, you will see by the light exactly where the border used to be, i.e. where the Berlin Wall passed (due to different street lighting). The bottom line is that there is still a clear political, economic and cultural border between West and East Germany even after several decades since the fall of the Berlin

Wall and the reunification of the country^[3]. With these examples, using the methodology mentioned, we proved the theory that there is still an “invisible” wall or political-economic-cultural border in Germany.

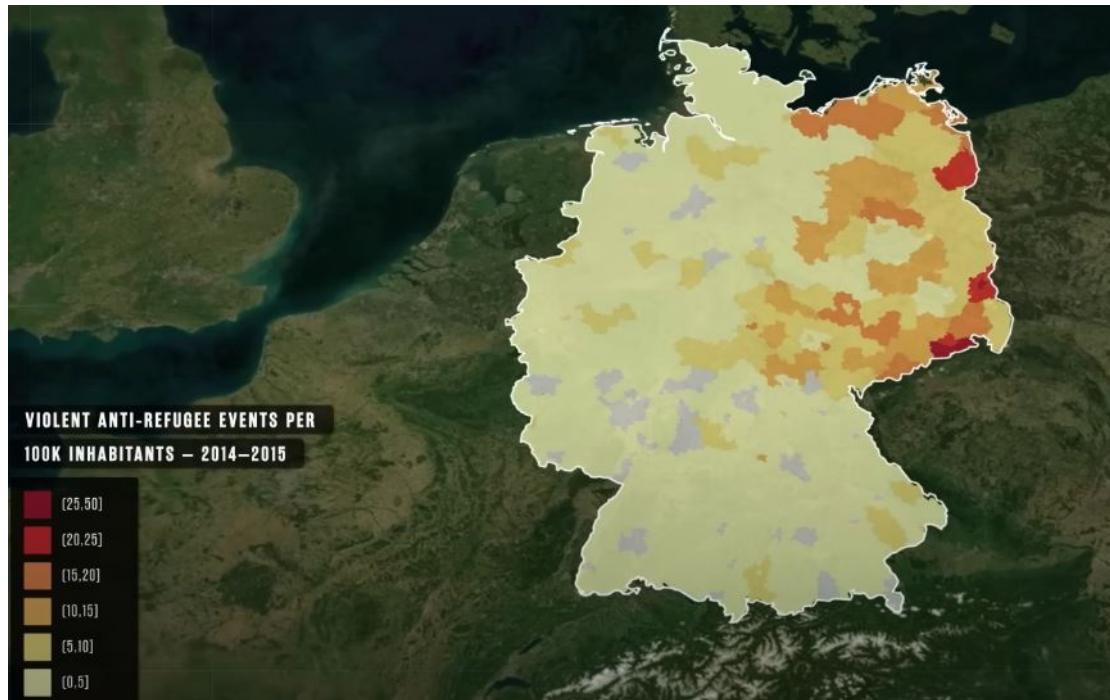


Figure 2. Map of documented anti-refugee protests in Germany in 2015.

(Source: Mirko Ivanović with data from Statistisches Bundesamt.)

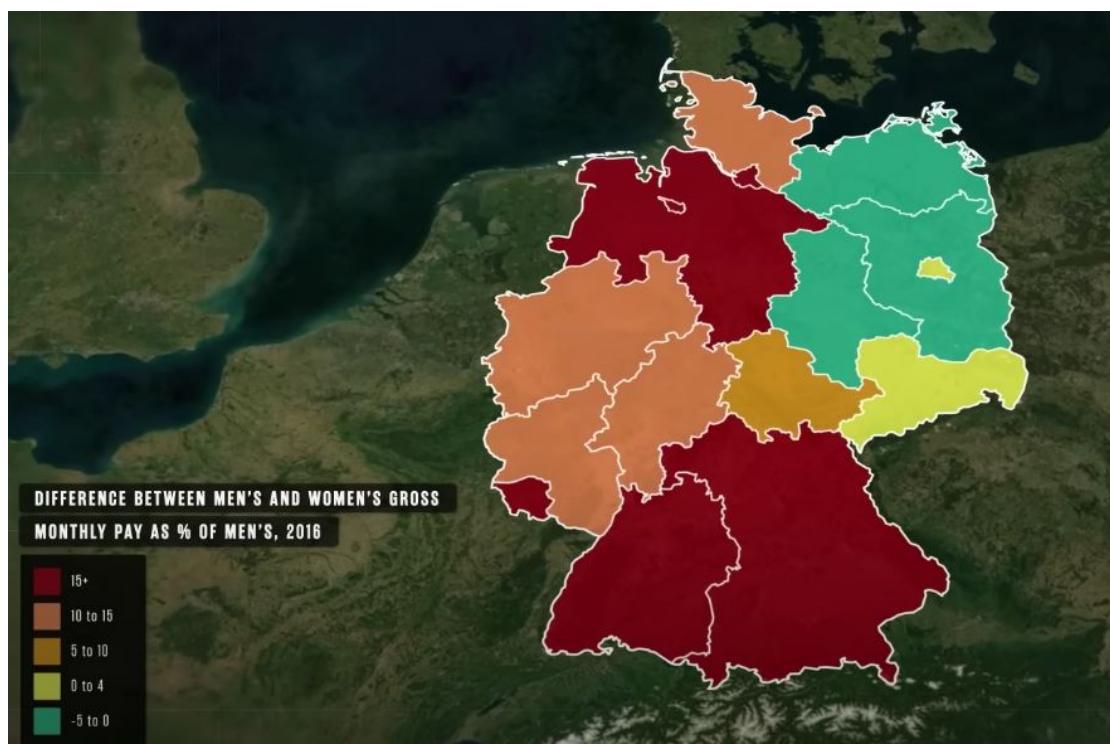


Figure 3. Map of gender equality in relation to earnings in Germany in 2016.

(Source: Mirko Ivanović with data from Statistisches Bundesamt.)

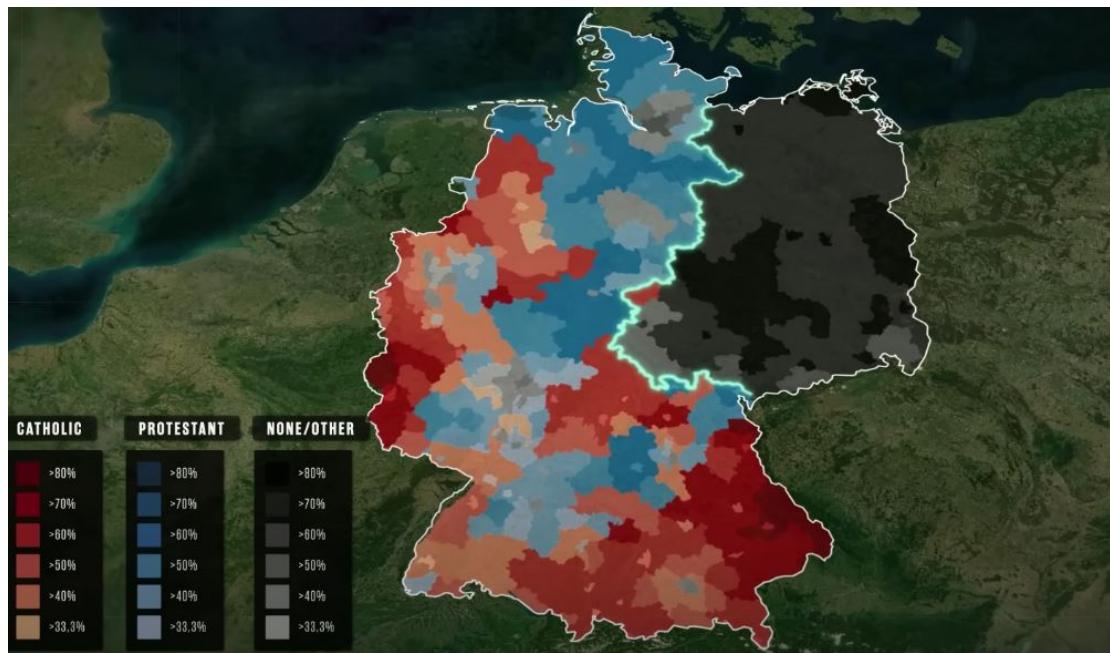


Figure 4. Religious map of Germany in 2022.

(Source: Mirko Ivanović with data from Statistisches Bundesamt^[2].)

3.2. Historical and Economic Divide in Germany

In order to understand this division that exists today and answer the question above, we must go back in time from the moment of the division of Germany after the Second World War, how the division came about and how that division was maintained even after the reunification of Germany. This division is mostly a cultural-ideological issue, but with a great impact on the economy and internal-local politics^[4].

At the end of World War II, German cities were devastated by constant bombing by the Allies, but the destruction was not geographically equal. The cities that will be part of the future West Germany suffered a much higher degree and intensity of bombing than the cities in the future East Germany, since they were geographically closer to the American and British bombers. There were exceptions in the cities of East Germany – Dresden, Magdeburg and Berlin suffered a mild devastation, but most other cities in East Germany fared much better than cities in the west of the country^[5].

This is significant, because after the division of the occupation zones at the end of the war into the Soviet (later East Germany) and the American-British-French part of Germany (later West Germany), in theory the eastern part of the country was in a much better economic starting position after the

war than the western part of Germany. That better economic starting advantage, in the end ironically condemned them to ruin. The explanation of this statement is very simple - due to the better economic situation in East Germany, it was more susceptible to looting by the new occupiers - the Soviets, who were also more eager to take revenge on the Germans for the traumas of the Eastern Front during the war^[6].

Stalin – the leader of the Soviet Union, immediately passed a law on the payment of huge war reparations to the Soviet occupation zone in eastern Germany and implemented much stricter denazification measures than in the west. The Soviets confiscated all state-owned firms and industries in their occupation zone (East Germany), as well as all private firms run by the Nazis or their sympathizers. The direct result of that is the massive looting of those companies and industries in the name of war reparations^[7].

In a large number of cases, all capital and material (minerals, ores, weapons, etc.) ended up within the borders of the Soviet Union. This resulted in a 40% drop in East German industrial production and the nationalization of most other private businesses and industries^[8]. From 1947 until Stalin's death in 1953, East Germany paid \$14 billion in war reparations (or a whopping \$313 billion today when inflation is adjusted) to the Soviet Union. West Germany, however, had to pay a significantly smaller amount of money in reparations, and even received today's \$19 billion in di-

rect aid through the Marshall Plan immediately after the war for infrastructure rebuilding and economic stimulation, aid that East Germany never received. West Germany had a significantly better economic-geographical position than East Germany^[9].

This is primarily reflected in its geographical environment and borders in the west, where it could trade unhindered with France, the Benelux countries and the whole world because it did not have any restrictions on trade after the war. Although East Germany had navigable rivers such as the Elbe, Oder and Vistula, it cannot be compared to the navigable rivers of West Germany - the Rhine, Main and Danube, especially after the joining of those rivers by canals. It greatly contributed economically to the development of West Germany, because "overnight" the Rhine-Main-Danube canal became not only the "economic artery" of West Germany, but also of Western Europe^[10].

East Germany, unlike West Germany, could not trade with Western countries due to the ban on trade by the Soviets. This move dealt the already weakened economy of East Germany (after the looting by the Soviets) another devastating economic blow. At the end of the 80s (before reunification), East Germany conducted more than 80% of its trade with other members of the Warsaw Pact, while the other 20% of its trade was with African countries. The economic difference between East and West Germany is also reflected in natural wealth and resources^[11].

West Germany was much richer in reserves of ore, metals, minerals and above all coal than the East of the country. It used its vast coal reserves to restart its steel, aluminum and chemical industries, which were the backbone of the redevelopment of the war-torn economy and led to the "German economic miracle" that began in the 1960s. Although the use of coal was stopped at the end of the 70s in exchange for natural gas, the "German economic miracle" would not have happened if it were not for high-quality coal in the Rhine Valley^[12].

The formal establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the Democratic Republic of Germany (East Germany) came at the end of 1949, while the city of Berlin, which is located on the territory of East Germany, was also divided into West and East Berlin. This is how Germany was divided until reunification in 1990^[13].

East Germany was a communist country, where the

party and the bureaucracy ruled. The authorities promoted atheism, which can still be seen on the religious maps of Germany today (Figure 4). Those who were religious had a lower chance of finding a job, because all jobs were obtained through the party^[14]. The citizens were under constant surveillance by the communist government through their intelligence and police service "Stasi" and any voiced discontent was immediately bloodily suppressed by the highly paranoid communist government. At the height of the Service Path in the late 1970s, it is believed that one in six East Germans worked either directly or as an informer for them. Each resident had their own file and was under some kind of surveillance. After reunification, they found more than a billion surveillance documents in the so-called "Headquarters Trail", often private conversations between neighbors. Due to all of the above, the main problem that the East German authorities faced was migration due to the bad economy and the repressive communist regime. The local population wanted to escape for a better life^[15].

That is why the border between East and West Germany was one of the most militarized borders in the world, comparable only to the border between North and South Korea. Despite orders at the border to kill anyone who tried to cross the border illegally, hundreds of thousands of people would "defect" to the west each year. Not wanting to risk death at the border itself, the local population of East Germany used all the "political and legal loopholes" at their disposal. An example of such a "loophole" is that residents of East Berlin, who with the appropriate paperwork, could visit relatives in West Berlin and when they got there, they either stayed permanently in West Berlin or sought free passage to West Germany, which was guaranteed to all travelers from West Berlin, and thus "defected" to the West. Thus, there was a mass outflow of the population, primarily of highly qualified professionals, which had a direct impact on the even greater weakening of the economy of East Germany^[16].

That problem of migration was so big and harmful to the economy of East Germany, because according to their data, they "lost" more than 2.5 million people in the name of migration until 1961. Then the authorities of East Germany did something drastic in the name of stopping migration - they built the Berlin Wall. According to the data, the wall has fulfilled its primary objective and migration has been drastically reduced. In the 28 years of the Berlin Wall's

existence, thousands of people tried to cross the wall despite orders to shoot. A small number made it through, and 156 people were killed by East German soldiers guarding the wall^[17].

Despite numerous repressions in East Germany, there were some positives, especially in social issues where they were ahead of West Germany. For example, women were encouraged to enter employment. East Germany had the highest percentage of employed women in human history (91%)^[18]. Today's unified Germany has 56% of women employed. Women could actively serve in the army in East Germany, every woman was entitled to child allowance and paid daycare for her child, rights that women in West Germany did not have. That division is still felt today when we look at **Figure 3**, which illustrates that women in the East are still paid the same as men, while in the West there are more significant differences in wages between the sexes. Abortion was legal in the East and illegal in the West^[19].

East Germany had constitutionally guaranteed paid maternity leave, while in West Germany mothers had no such rights. The conclusion is that not everything was negative in East Germany, despite the repression of religion and freedom of thought and depending on individual cases. Some argue that the inhabitants of East Germany had more fulfilling and better-quality lives than in West Germany. Everything changed at the end of 1989, when after several confusing decisions of the East German authorities, first the Berlin Wall fell, and then in October 1990, the reunification of Germany officially took place. Actually, Germany is not united as many think of the new Germany, but East Germany ceased to exist and its territory was annexed by West Germany. That is why the name of the new state remained the old name of West Germany, i.e. The Federal Republic of Germany, therefore the same government that led West Germany at that time, became the government of a united Germany. That government had a difficult task ahead of it^[20].

To unite the country where the GDP per inhabitant in the east is more than twice as low as in the west (**Figure 5** and **6**), and to convert the economy of the east based on the communist economic ideology into capitalism. It was necessary to invest in infrastructure that had not been renovated at all since World War II, except for a couple of highways around Berlin. The fact that East Germany at the end of 1990 had only 4 million cars for a population of 17 million also speaks of poor infrastructure. In the first two years after unification,

the number of vehicles increased by 45%, but due to poor infrastructure, the number of road deaths jumped by 30% and this trend continued until the end of the 90s, until the roads were modernized. The lack of investment during the Cold War in railways also became a major problem during unification. In the east they still used steam locomotives, and the railway infrastructure was in decay or non-existent, also the few lines that were functioning were very slow and inefficient^[21].

A well-known example of railway inefficiency is the "fast" Berlin-Hamburg railway. Passengers during the Nazi era in 1933 took 138 minutes to travel this route. The travel time of the same line at the end of 1989 was 243 minutes. Road and railway infrastructure had to be completely renovated and modernized for the above reasons, which necessarily required large monetary investments^[22].

The two Germanys used different currencies for decades. After the reunification the government of the former West Germany, now united Germany, decided that their currency would be the only state currency on the territory of the new Germany. The government set the exchange rate to be one to one against the former East German currency. It was a difficult but politically understandable decision, because if they had not set such a course, it would have inevitably led to high inflation and a massive demographic exodus from the east to the west of Germany^[23].

However, setting such an exchange rate had its consequences, because overnight it tripled the debt that the residents and the economy of East Germany had before reunification. The government of the now unified Germany had to heavily subsidize the economy of the East just to keep itself from imminent collapse. Then, with the support of the West, there was mass privatization in the east of the country with the fall of communism. More than 8,500 state-owned industrial enterprises were privatized already in 1991 with more than 4 million employees. A large number of employees lost their jobs "overnight", all companies that were not self-sustainable were either closed or sold to large Western investors, often at prices far below the market. By 1995, the German government had shut down about 3,700 companies for which it was not possible to find a buyer. Of the other firms that were sold, only 5% had buyers from the former East Germany, while 95% were sold to Western buyers, often below market value, fueling an even greater economic rift between East and West Germany^[24].

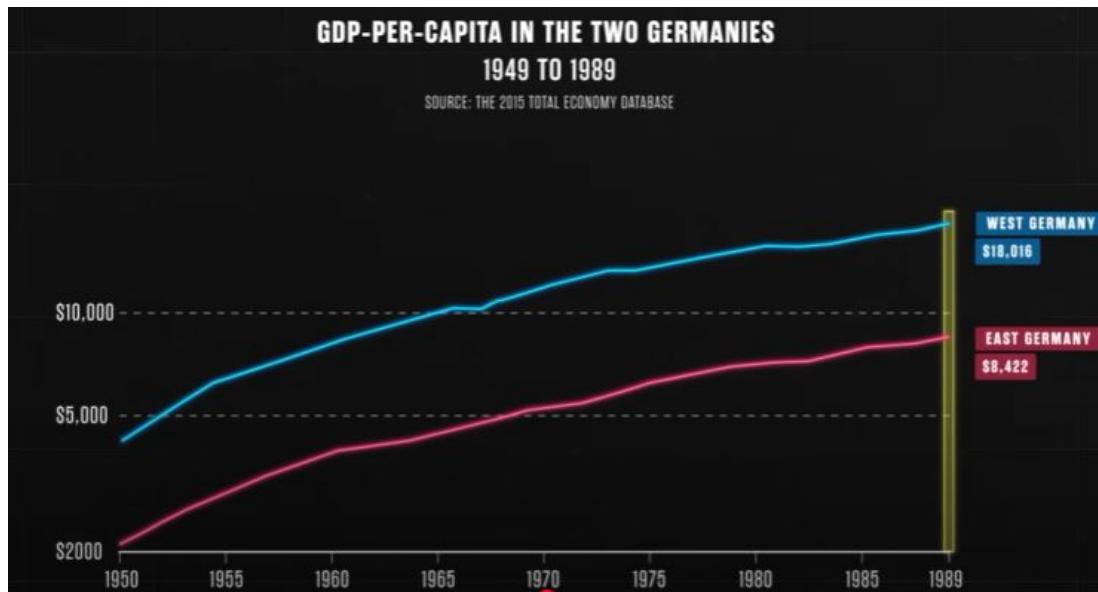


Figure 5. GDP- per- capita of the two Germanies from 1949–1989.

(Source: UN Total Economy database.)



Figure 6. GDP per inhabitant of the two Germanys in 1991 and 2018.

(Source: Federal Commission for new states in 2020.)

This directly resulted in high unemployment and demographic drain in the districts of the former East Germany. In just five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, about 80% of employees in the former East Germany lost their jobs either temporarily or permanently, which led to great dissatisfaction and mistrust of the population in the East. For years after reunification, unemployment in the east of the country was

consistently above 15% and consistently twice as high as the German national average until 2010. For many residents of eastern Germany, the shock of transition and privatization led them to a “swim or sink” scenario in which many did not adapt to the sudden economic-cultural changes^[25].

East Germany had the highest percentage of working women of working age on the planet (Table 1) precisely

because of the communist ideology plus the state budget for kindergartens for all working mothers. Over 2,000 women who served in the East German armed forces also lost their jobs. By 2007, more than 70% of kindergartens and crèches for children under the age of five were shut down in the east of the country due to the lack of monetary assistance from

the state, which resulted in a higher percentage of unemployment among women in the east of Germany. This is a direct consequence of the fall of communism in eastern Germany and differences in ideology. This is one of the main reasons why many women still vote for the successor of the Communist Party.

Table 1. Top 5 countries in the percentage of employment of women of working age in 1990.

East Germany	91%
Madagascar	83%
Solomon Islands	82%
Nigeria	81%
Tanzania	80%
Burundi	80%

Source: International labor organization- ILO^[26].

At the time of unification, West Germany had more than 4 million foreign workers (guest workers), while East Germany had only 190,000 foreign workers and was not open to foreign migrants like the West. East Germany was more demographically homogeneous than the West. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was a mass demographic exodus of the inhabitants of the former East Germany to the West in search of better and higher paying jobs. These mass migrations left not only economic problems in the east due to the lack of a better-quality workforce, but also created a big demographic problem, the current population of the east of the country is rapidly aging (on average 47 years old). It is not only migration that is to blame for these demographic statistics, but also the decline in fertility among women in the east of the country

after the fall of the Berlin Wall, due to the loss of rights and social programs they enjoyed during communism^[27].

The western part of the country has invested more than 2 trillion euros in the east of the country since reunification, the largest part of the funds went to rebuilding the infrastructure, then in the process of transitioning from an economy with an industrial accent to an economy with a service accent, in an attempt to make a “soft” transition from a state communist economic system to a private capitalist economic system^[28].

This led to results over time, today unemployment in the districts of the former East Germany is around 7%, far from 15% just ten years ago. GDP jumped by 30% compared to 30 years ago (Figure 6), but inequality still exists as can be clearly seen (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

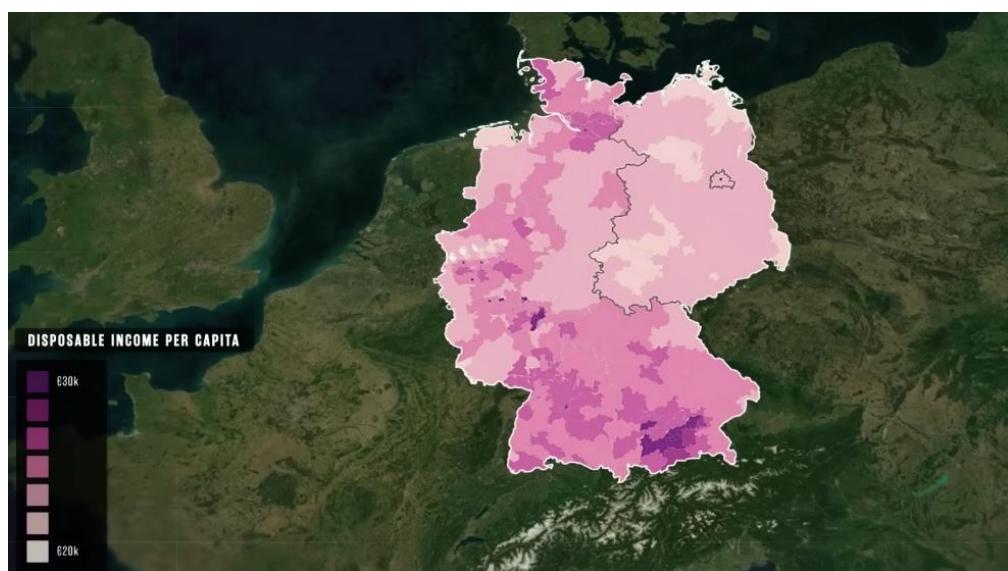


Figure 7. Disposable income per capita in Germany in 2022.

(Source: Mirko Ivanović with data from Statistisches Bundesamt.)

4. Conclusions

The entire process of transition and privatization left a bitter taste for the residents of the former East Germany, like most of the countries of the former Warsaw Pact and Eastern Europe, which went through similar processes in the 90s (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, former Yugoslavia, etc.). Because of all the facts mentioned in the paper, the sentiment of the people of the former East Germany towards dissatisfaction and distrust of the federal government is understandable. The main goal of this work was to prove the economic, cultural, political, demographic division of Germany despite the passage of 30 years after reunification. The facts mentioned during the work undoubtedly prove this theory. Economic inequality is due to many historical-geographical factors, demographic transition towards population aging due to population migrations from east to west.

Cultural differences in the form of political elections for more extreme parties, due to mistrust of the authorities due for the reasons mentioned in the paper, the worst economy and cultural opposition to the migration of foreigners (guest workers) in the districts of the former East Germany. Religious differences that remain even today after 30 years, the long-propagated state atheism is still more than current today in the east of the country, while the west is predominantly nominally Christian-oriented. Due to all these reasons of division, which have been proven in this paper, there is still an “invisible wall” of division in Germany.

One of the goals of this paper is to inform the reader about the “invisible wall” that still politically, culturally, demographically, geographically and economically divides Germany into two parts. To point out the complexity of the reunification of the territory that was divided for decades not only physically but also ideologically, and to point out to the countries that dream of reunification, its difficulties and challenges. An example of such reunification would be a unified Korea. There are many countries that have some kind of division, be it cultural divisions like in Canada^[29] (north and south) or in economic nature like Italy^[30] (also north and south), but rarely can you find this level of complex division of a country like Germany.

The next goal of the work is to understand how the divisions came about and why they are active today. And

what lessons from this example can be taken by countries that may be thinking about potential reunification in the near future, such as North and South Korea or the island of Cyprus, which are also politically, economically, and culturally different environments^[31].

It is also very important to highlight the fact that the process of demographic aging of the population is not only and exclusively a problem of the people of the districts of East Germany but is present on the level of the federal republic. That only means that this problem of division in Germany (cultural, economic, political, etc.) will most likely create a more radical division in the near future, when the older generation faces even more cultural backlash from the younger mostly immigrant population because of its extreme political choices. And the final conclusion of this paper is the answer to the question of why both extreme political parties are so attractive to voters in the east of Germany?

The answer is precisely this entire work. The people in the east of Germany still remember communism in that part of the country because the population in the east is very old, speaking demographically, the average age is over 45. They remember the positive and negative sides, they grew up in one ideology and then with the fall of communism experienced the worst that capitalism and privatization can do to a people, an experience that shook the whole of Eastern Europe. The result is distrust in the Western system and nostalgia for communism and “better days” for some, especially the female population who still vote for ultra-left options.

As for the AFD and the ultra-right option, the answer to that can also be found in this paper. The people of the east of the country have always been very demographically homogeneous and they do not like migrations that “steal” jobs from Germans. They have a historical distrust of foreigners and a strong dislike of the current German government which has an open border policy. The rhetoric that the AFD preaches is therefore very attractive to people in the east. This can be seen in **Figure 2**, which shows the anti-immigrant sentiment in the East. And because of the economic differences between the east and the west of Germany, this rhetoric in the ears of the voters in the east against the migration policy and globalization that the AFD preaches is very tempting. These are the main reasons for today’s geopolitical division of Germany, which has its roots in the historical, geographical, cultural and economic division after the Second World War.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Belgrade (protocol code 61212-3525/1-24 on the date 22nd of January 2024) for studies involving humans.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the data protection law of the Republic of Serbia.

Conflicts of Interest

Author declares there is no conflict of interest in this study.

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