

THE BRANDENBURGIAN WAY

Brandenburg's effort to reform the German system
in post-reunification Germany

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Abstract

This paper researches the Brandenburgian way, an effort in the government of Brandenburg to implement innovative policies in the pos-reunification context. Brandenburg tries to diverge from the federal republic in at least three dimensions: consensus politics, direct democracy, and labor market policies. Through this definition, this paper expands on previous literature that mainly defined the Brandenburgian way as consensus politics. Another contribution of this paper is that it considers the empirical validity of the Brandenburgian way through considering Brandenburg's policies and by comparing Brandenburg with other states. Through this test, this paper illuminates why, even though Brandenburg attempted to implement innovative policies, there is no real difference between the economic development of Brandenburg and the other new states.

1. Introduction

“We have a concrete vision, which is guiding us. A vision of an order of peace, unifying all of Europe and the Germans in freedom. We do not know when we can realize it but we will reduce our attempts to bring it about with all our might.”

- *Helmut Kohl, 18th of January 1989¹*

At the 1989 CDU congress Helmut Kohl, the chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), reflected on the past 40 years of West German statehood due to its upcoming 40th anniversary. Since the 23rd of May 1949, the federal republic had existed as a separate state from the East German territories. His speech clearly shows just how unaware he was of the speed at which the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was racing towards its demise. Even though he indicates that unification was still on the FRG's agenda, he, like most of his contemporaries, was completely blindsided by the rapid succession of events that led to the fall of the Berlin wall on the 9th of November of that year. With the advantage of hindsight, unification seems almost inevitable, mostly due to the GDR's desolate economic situation and the dwindling geopolitical power of the Soviet Union. As the conditions for reunification started to fall into place, the FRG was forced to act rather quickly to not miss its window of opportunity amidst the complex geopolitical circumstances of the cold war.² However, soon the euphoria of reunification was displaced by worry over the catastrophic economic circumstances emerging in the new east German states (*Länder*). Even today, the economic situation in the new states remains dire, with GDP per capita income only having reached 70% of the level of the western states.³

¹ Kohl, “18. Januar 1989 Rede Zur Eröffnung Des CDU-Kongresses „40 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland“ in Bonn.”, (my translation).

² Rödder, *Geschichte Der Deutschen Wiedervereinigung*.

³ Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, “Bruttoinlandsprodukt, Bruttowertschöpfung in den Ländern der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991 bis 2020 (Reihe 1 Band 1).”

The end of the SED regime was unexpected. A sophisticated plan for economic reunification, that would have accommodated the uneven standards of economic development, had not been developed. In addition to the suddenness at which reunification occurred, west German politicians were tempted to glance over looming economic difficulties, since they had experienced the benefits of the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). Believing that a similar trajectory of economic growth could be replicated in the East, the federal government acted to achieve the political union first and to then wait for an economic boom to occur in the east. Kohl famously promised ‘flowering landscapes’ that would blossom in the East just within a few years.⁴ These visions failed to become reality. In the years following reunification, the new states were entrusted with the task to align living standards. For the new states it was extremely difficult to moderate the consequences of reunification and consequently many tensions between new and old states, the new regional governments, and the federal government and within the new states arose. The new states often felt that important decisions had been and were being made over their head, thus severely limiting their ability to progress beyond the disarray left by SED leadership. Additionally, since the new states became integrated into the FRG and not the other way around, structures and institutions which had been created throughout the 40 years of the FRG’s existence were neatly applied to the new states. In most cases, this was not problematic. However, unsurprisingly, the fact that West Germans had experienced democracy and social capitalism for 40 years already and the East had not led to conflicts on both sides. West Germans would hold their experience against East Germans and East Germans would accuse West Germans of discrediting any accomplishments of the GDR.

In this context of conflict between East and West, Brandenburg decided to diverge from the system of the FRG through the Brandenburgian way (*Brandenburger Weg*). In previous literature, this term is defined rather loosely, as consensus politics.⁵ It is not possible to trace back the exact origin of the term. However, in parliament it was first used in April 1991, by the minister for agriculture, Edwin Zimmermann, who was speaking on an agricultural reform: “Brandenburg wants to realize a new kind of politics through the Brandenburgian way. The kind, which the old states often dreamed about but never practiced”.⁶ This paper will argue, that the Brandenburgian way, as suggested by the quote of Zimmermann, was defined as a contrast to the status quo in the west and moved mainly in the three fields of consensus politics, direct democracy, and labor market policy.

However, what is surprising is the fact that, despite all the efforts that Brandenburg underwent to demarcate itself from other state governments and the federal republic, its economy does not differ from that of the other new states substantially. Its unemployment figures were high when the unemployment figured of the other new states were also high. Its GDP per capita grew at the same rate as the GDP per capita of the other east German states. Today, Brandenburg still has lower GDP per capita than the old states, just as the other new German states. To investigate this curiosity this paper will seek to answer the question: was the Brandenburgian way more than an ideal?”

For this, this paper will first consider the West German context from which the Brandenburgian way sought to diverge and thereafter defining it. In the second section, the extent to which Brandenburg’s policies have

⁴ Kohl, “1. Juli 1990 Fernsehansprache von Bundeskanzler Kohl Anlässlich Des Inkrafttretens Der Währungs-, Wirtschafts- Und Sozialunion.”, (my translation).

⁵ Lorenz, “Aufstieg, Ausstieg, Umstieg. Elitenwechsel in Brandenburg,” 189–90. Brenke, Ludwig, and Ragnitz, “Analyse Der Schlüsselentscheidungen Im Bereich Der Wirtschaftspolitik Und Ihre Wirkung Auf Die Ökonomische Entwicklung Der Vergangenen Zwei Jahrzehnte Im Land Brandenburg,” 15.

⁶ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/14,” 1092, (my translation).

followed the path outlined through the Brandenburgian way will be considered. In the third section, this paper will briefly elaborate on the appropriate frame of comparison. Then the Brandenburgian will be compared to the other East German states. This paper finds that, even though Brandenburg was very ambitious to diverge from the reality of the FDR, it did not manage to embark on a completely different path. This becomes clear when comparing Brandenburg with other states but also by considering the limitations to their policies in the context of severe economic limitations.

1.1 Interdisciplinary justification

To answer this question an interdisciplinary approach is necessary. History is necessary to answer this question, given the need for reconstruction of the historic realities in the post-reunification period. However, the discipline of economics is also needed, especially for the evaluative and comparative aspects of this paper. The economic circumstances were the strongest challenge that the Brandenburgian way not only sought to overcome but also challenged its execution. Hence understanding the economic circumstances is necessary to analyze the Brandenburgian way. For this, concepts of economics must be applied to the historical analysis, effectively integrating the two disciplines. The execution of this integration is rather intuitive. Economics and history coincide in many aspects. The largest challenge poses the importance of context in the two disciplines. History places a emphasis on context, while economics prefers to consider problems independently of their context. Since this paper treats a very specific case, the context was emphasized. Unfortunately, this created some limitations to the applicability of the results of this study to other cases. However, since the case of Brandenburg is highly specific and comparison in the relevant context of the other new states was still possible, this does not seem to be a large limitation.

1.2 Methodology

To answer my research question, I will make use of a variety of different sources. Secondary literature, mainly on the regional history of Brandenburg but also on the context of reunification more generally, has been used to provide a broad understanding of the topic. This paper will also combine elements of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data is used to establish the “ideal” of the Brandenburgian way and quantitative as well as qualitative data to test its “reality”. For example, the main sources that have been used for the reconstruction of timelines were newspaper articles from *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, and *Die Tageszeitung*, three newspapers that offer broad coverage. However, it must be kept in mind that they are all share a similar interpretation of the sociopolitical debate. Additionally, this paper used plenary minutes from the different state parliaments, the Bundestag and the Bundesrat. Another important element of this paper are interviews which have been carried out by Lorenz and von Gersdorff with relevant actors in the Brandenburgian parliament and government.

While, due to its recent nature, this period is very well documented, there are still important limitations to this research. There are some sources which I would have liked to include but which were not available. Some examples are the minutes from the different committees (*Ausschüsse*) or regional newspapers. They would have necessitated the visit of an archive, which, unfortunately, momentarily was impossible due to safety regulations. Another important aspect, which is missing from this study, is research on the activities of the *Treuhandanstalt*, the federal institution tasked with executing the privatization process of state-owned East German enterprises. Only very recently have historians started to reappraise the massive amounts of documents that have been left behind by the *Treuhand* (around 35.000 files).⁷ These insights

⁷ Medienhaus, “Ausverkauf der DDR?”

have not been produced yet and, therefore, are not part of this analysis. Additionally, there were some inconsistencies between the different states and the availability of data. The parliamentary minutes of Mecklenburg West-Pomerania, for example, are not available before 1998. Moreover, different documentation systems made it more difficult to retrace law-making processes in different states, hence not allowing a systematic comparison of the proposals brought forwards by the opposition in all five new states. In such cases, this paper tried to make use of alternative measures. Lastly, through clearly defining the Brandenburgian way through the three dimensions elaborated on below, some meaning that contemporaries attached to it might get lost. However, to overcome the issue of the term's broad use, a clear demarcation of its characteristics is necessary for comparative analysis.

2. What is the Brandenburgian way

The term “Brandenburgian way” has been used very differently since it was adopted in the 1990s. It was frequently utilized by Brandenburgian politicians during the early post-reunification period. Manfred Stolpe, the prime minister of Brandenburg, mainly used it to describe consensus politics, which is also how other scholars such as Astrid Lorenz, have defined it later.⁸ However, during the 1990s, the Brandenburgian way was not only used as a term to define consensus politics. Instead, politicians used it as a term to define a departure from the status quo. To “go a Brandenburgian way” in a certain matter, became a term frequently used in parliament, which becomes clear from example through an exchange of Dieter Helm, an MP for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and Christoph Schulze from the Social democratic party of Germany (SPD). In this matter, they were discussing the appropriate strategy during negotiations for the *Solidarpakt*, a federal financial package meant to help the new states finance different costs incurred through the separation.

Schulze, SPD: Would you not agree that in this case, our objective is not to call out the Brandenburgian CDU but to also go a Brandenburgian way in this question? [...]

Helm, CDU: I have indeed not understood your comment as such. However, I do not believe that in this matter we will be able to realize a Brandenburgian way.⁹

The Brandenburgian way was not exclusively used for consensus politics but more to define new, innovative solutions more generally. The fact that current definitions are rather limited and contemporary definitions are rather vague calls for a new definition. Since the principal users of the term used it to define politics that differed from the status quo in a context relevant to the citizens of Brandenburg it is useful to elaborate on the relevant aspects of the status quo from which they wished to depart.

2.1 The Status quo – the west German context

To understand Western German politics then it is necessary to take a brief recourse to the 40 years of the FRG's existence before 1989. The creation of the FRG as a state, not covering all the territory of the German nation was not a choice taken by the German population but rather a product of the increasingly complicated relationships between the allied powers. Rattled by the traumatic events of the two wars, the allied powers were determined to not let the horrors repeat themselves. By splitting up the German territory into four occupational zones, they aspired to irrevocably impede Germany from seizing power. Together, they tried to ensure that Germany paid reparations while the German population would have adequate supplies in the

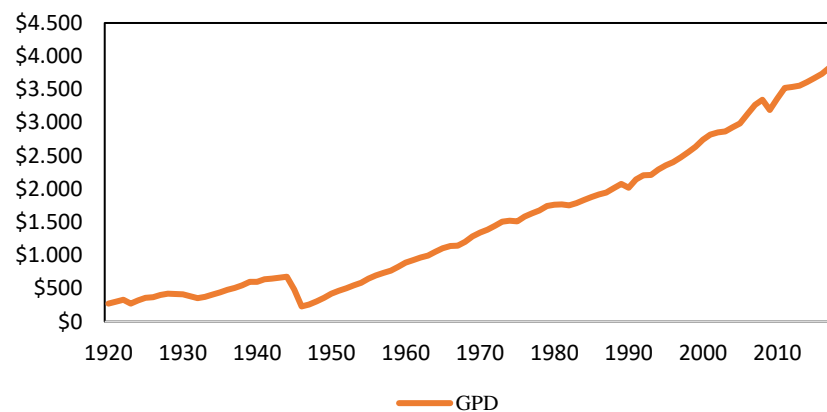
⁸ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/59,” 4404.

⁹ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/61,” 4707, (my translation).

post-war era. Soon, however, the differences between the western allies and the Soviet Union became unbearable. To “save” Europe from the dangers of communism, Western Europe, and Germany as a central part of it, became the Americans integrated them into an international system of global capitalism, aid programs, international diplomacy, and common defense strategies. Western Germany became a central stage in the fight of the cold war that ensued between the Soviets and the Americans. As a result, “not quite three years after the end of the war, therefore, [West] Germany had gone from being a defeated enemy which had to be punished from a potential partner”.¹⁰

The post-war years became known as the years of the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). The US had made the containment of communism its primary foreign policy objective and became convinced that “communism spreads where poverty and chaos prevail”. The focus had become to maintain peace through economic stability. Accordingly, West Germany underwent currency reform and received tremendous amounts of economic aid through the infamous “Marshall plan”. As a result of these factors, Germany experienced tremendous growth rates. It was able to recover much of the industry in which it possessed a comparative advantage such as chemicals and car manufacturing.¹¹ Between 1950 and 1973 there were ever-increasing levels of GDP and wages, with growth rates of a whopping 6.0%.¹² This economic growth also had profound effects on German society, which slowly transformed into a post-industrial, consumer society. That such levels of growth were indeed a miracle and as such unparalleled. They were a unique result of the “unique political situation at the time”, including the “spurt in population growth, the enormous backlog of demand both for consumption goods and investment goods, the liberalization of international trade and international payments systems, the confidence felt in the superior economic strength of the USA, [...], and finally the Korean war”.¹³ This experience of course differed starkly from the East German experience, where the economy was slowly run into the ground through the erosion of entrepreneurial activity.¹⁴

Figure 2.1: German GDP in millions of 2011 \$



Source: Worldbank Data

¹⁰ Herbert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Germany*, 480.

¹¹ Abelshauser, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte - Von 1945 Bis Zur Gegenwart*, 411–33.

¹² Herbert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Germany*, 501.

¹³ Herbert, 502.

¹⁴ Abelshauser, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte - Von 1945 Bis Zur Gegenwart*, 405–7.

The reason why knowledge of the economic boom is important for our story is twofold. Firstly, the experience of the *Wirtschaftswunder* largely shaped the West German expectations of the economic prospects of reunification. While even Kohl himself admitted that his vision of *blühende Landschaften* did not correspond with his actual assessment of the situation, the federal government did not expect chronic turmoil.¹⁵ Instead, they believed that economic hardships would last only for a few years, after which the East German economy would also experience a boom. The principles under which the federal government took its decisions for a currency union and the conversion rates were largely tainted by their prior experience of economics just “falling into place”.¹⁶ Secondly, the experience of the *Wirtschaftswunder* long allowed West Germany to not very seriously consider the problem of chronic unemployment. Before 1973, unemployment was virtually inexistent with an average unemployment rate of 0,88% in the period 1960-1973.¹⁷ After 1973, unemployment rose steadily and was considered more of a problem. However, even then unemployment rates reached no higher than 8,7% in 1985, after which it was already in decline again.¹⁸ In 1988, only 1,9 in 1.000 people were part of an *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme* (ABS), a strong contrast to the 27 in 1.000 that would take part in such a measure in the former territory of the GDR in 1992.¹⁹ Back then ABS were only used for individuals that were particularly “hard to place”.²⁰ However, one has to be cautious not to overstate the functionality of the labor market in west Germany since during this period the welfare state was experiencing increasing amounts of pressure. At that time, however, it was resolved as in other Western European states: when Kohl became chancellor in 1982 he declared to resolve the issue through “less state” and “more market”.²¹

Next to the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the creation of the *Grundgesetz* (meaning basic law, de facto the German constitution) was another important aspect of post-war West Germany that is relevant to understand the Brandenburgian way. The basic law sought to incorporate the lessons learned from the Weimar republic. Its constitution was fragile and unable to prevent NSDAP’s rise to power. Especially elements of direct democracy, such as the election of the *Reichspräsident* through the population or the possibility of a *Volksentscheid* in the case that 10 percent of eligible voters demanded it, were identified as particularly destabilizing.²² In combination with the general distrust German politicians held towards the democratic capacities of their population, this led to a complete abandonment of direct democracy in favor of representative democracy.²³

Lastly, it is worth elaborating on the political culture that had emerged during the 40 years of FRG democracy. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/ Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) were consistently the two largest parties. Until 1990, they had only governed

¹⁵ Wiegreffe, “Kohls Lüge von Den Blühenden Landschaften.”

¹⁶ Abelshauer, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte - Von 1945 Bis Zur Gegenwart*, 443.

¹⁷ Franz and König, “The Nature and Causes of Unemployment in the Federal Republic of Germany Since the 1970s.”

¹⁸ Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, “Sonderdruck - Arbeitsmarktanalyse 1988 Anhand Ausgewählter Bestands- Und Bewegungsdaten,” 333.

¹⁹ My own calculations based on: Bundesrat, “Bundesrat Plenarprotokoll 649,” 589; Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, “Sonderdruck - Arbeitsmarktanalyse 1988 Anhand Ausgewählter Bestands- Und Bewegungsdaten,” 333; Statistisches Bundesamt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1990*, 43.

²⁰ Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, “Sonderdruck - Arbeitsmarktanalyse 1988 Anhand Ausgewählter Bestands- Und Bewegungsdaten,” 623.

²¹ Bundestag Deutschland, “Bundestag Plenarprotokoll 9/121,” 7213–29.

²² Rux, “Direkte Demokratie in Der Weimarer Republik.”

²³ Herbert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Germany*, 493.

together one time, while during the remaining 15 terms a combination of either CDU/CSU or the SPD governed in combination with the liberal party (FDP). This was also the case in 1989, when the CDU/CSU ruled together with the FDP under Helmut Kohl, the ‘unity chancellor’. The CDU had been the strongest advocate for German unity throughout this process. On the other hand, the SPD and especially the Green party were more conflicted on the issue. They agreed with the left-liberal position that unity was not strictly necessary anymore, as it would only threaten non-nationalist identity which had formed on the basis of democratic institutions and liberty.²⁴ As in most parliamentary democracies, there was always conflict between opposition and government, Kalke and Raschke even finding that the parliament in its entirety has started to fail to execute its function as a legislative control element and this position has instead been taken up by merely the opposition.²⁵ Sebaldt’s study on the federal parliament from 1949 to 1987 shows that even though the opposition has some possibility to influence decision-making processes, especially if it makes use of the correct instruments, its ability to exert influence is still marginal in comparison to the government and the governing parties.²⁶ Debates in parliament, also today, remain to be characterized by an opposition-government cleavage.

2.2 Defining the Brandenburgian way

Likely more through fate more than through deeply rooted favoritism, the SPD won the first local election on the 14th of October 1990.²⁷ In the four other new states, the CDU dominated the elections, even achieving an absolute majority in the case of Saxony. In the following months, conflicts of interest between east and west would become clearer and clearer, which made the fact that Brandenburg was headed by the SPD very relevant. Brandenburg was able to oppose the federal government more fiercely, and hence freer to “go a Brandenburgian way”. The aforementioned quote by Edwin Zimmermann shows that it was a primary objective of Brandenburg to practice an innovative kind of politics in whichever field it would be beneficial for its population. This was possible because of the historical context in which the Brandenburgian government operated, with a different coalition than the federal government at a time at which an east-west dichotomy emerged. Brandenburg then tried to depart from the system which West Germany was in the process of transferring onto the new states, in at least three ways which have been hinted at in the previous section and which will be outlined here more clearly.

The first aspect in which Brandenburg attempted to diverge from the status quo upheld by the West through the Brandenburgian way related to the *Wirtschaftswunder*. In the post-war period, the west of Germany experienced the accumulation of great wealth through cooperation between labor (also trade associations) and capital (also trade associations) within a system of ample social support, which in turn was reliant on high employment rates, coined as the Rhineland model.²⁸ Quite evidently, this model could not be adopted without alteration the new states, because of the absence of the required high employment rates to finance the social support system. As becomes clear from the quote from Steffen Reiche, an MP from the SPD, through the Brandenburgian way an attempt was made to extend Rhineland capitalism and to include more elements of active state involvement into the economy.

²⁴ Herbert, 903–11.

²⁵ Kalke and Raschke, “Regierungsmehrheit und Opposition in den bundesdeutschen Landtagen — eine quantitative Auswertung von Plenarprotokollen.”

²⁶ Sebaldt, “Innovation Durch Opposition.”

²⁷ Lorenz, “Aufstieg, Ausstieg, Umstieg. Elitenwechsel in Brandenburg,” 182.

²⁸ Menz, “Auf Wiedersehen, Rhineland Model: Embedding Neoliberalism in Germany.”

We have, on many occasions, through interpretation and application of [our] constitution walked down visibly and noticeably different paths than other states. The Brandenburgian way has become a synonym for new approaches to politics in many areas. I mention here the labor market with the initiative “work instead of unemployment”, through which it has been attempted to, in coordination with trade unions and trade associations, create 500.000 new jobs.²⁹

Through active labor market policies, both on the demand and the supply side, Brandenburg attempted to actively improve economic circumstances. The Brandenburgian way was hence executed both in the ministry of labor, headed by Regine Hildebrandt, where retraining programs and ABS and in the ministry of economics, headed by Walter Hirche, where it was executed mainly through active involvement in negotiations on the privatization process executed by the *Treuhandanstalt*.

The second characteristic of the Brandenburgian way relates to the aforementioned dominance of representative democracy in the West. At a federal level, direct democracy was never introduced and at the state level, it was only of marginal importance.³⁰ In contrast, in the Brandenburgian constitution elements of direct democracy were assigned an important role. The emphasis that was put on such elements of direct democracy was a result of the experiences with direct democracy which many of the members of the Brandenburgian parliament and government had gained during the process of the revolution. At the time at which the constitution was written, these elements of direct democracy led to in part, heavy criticism mainly by the western CDU members who declared that it was “the way into a different republic”.³¹ Throughout the process of writing the constitution, the direct inclusion of the public was essential as becomes clear from this statement by Alwin Ziel, the Minister of Internal Affairs:

“I also avow myself to the ‘Brandenburgian way’, as we called it back then. It was the right approach to include the people and to let them feel that they were involved in the process.”³²

This was done mainly by giving ample opportunity for the Brandenburgian population to give input on the drafts of the constitution, by holding an official vote to approve it and, later after the implementation of the constitution, through the possibilities to do so via the official procedures for direct democracy laid out in the constitution.

The final element of the Brandenburgian way, contrasting with the west German status quo, are consensus politics. Even though in West Germany the cleavage between the opposition and the governing coalition is completely not polarized, the influence of the opposition is still rather limited. In Brandenburg, it was consciously decided to create the largest possible consensus among parties, starting with the process of writing the constitution. The rationale behind this approach was that to represent the will of the people as accurately as possible, it was important to consider the input of all representatives sitting in parliament since each of them had been democratically elected. This created a political culture of tolerance and openness, in which discussions employed factual rather than personal argumentation. The mechanism through which the will of the people and the Brandenburgian political culture were allegedly linked becomes clear from the contribution by Schulze in the debate on the creation of an office for the protection of the constitution in December 1992:

²⁹ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/95,” 7772, (my own translation).

³⁰ Schiller and Mittendorf, “Neue Entwicklungen der direkten Demokratie,” 7.

³¹ Franzke and Büchner, “Entstehung der Verfassung des Landes Brandenburg,” 20.

³² Gersdorff and Lorenz, *Neuanfang in Brandenburg*, 37, (my own translation).

The best protection of our constitution is open and honest politics in parliament, government, and opposition. In constitution: this is the kind of politics we are already practicing here in form of the infamous Brandenburgian way. We speak openly with each other, we accept each other, and we try not to put each other down. [...] We from the SPD want an office for protection of the constitution that is broadly accepted among the population.³³

In the context of post-reunification Germany, consensus politics necessarily meant the collaboration with the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS or PDS-LL), the former SED. This in itself also presented a strong deviation from the approach taken by the federal and western governments, where the exclusion of the PDS-LL was demanded.³⁴

In conclusion, the Brandenburgian way, an umbrella term for “a new way of doing things” in post-reunification Brandenburg, can be said to have operated in three main aspects which are consensus politics, labor market politics, and direct democracy. All these aspects can be defined as part of the Brandenburgian way because they are direct reactions to the status quo in the Federal Republic of Germany at the time. Without the Brandenburgian way, these aspects would have been neatly applied to Brandenburg as well. In the following, his paper will test the extent to which this occurred in practice.

3. The Reality of the Brandenburgian way

In this section, the paper will discuss how the Brandenburgian way manifested itself. It will show the reality of the Brandenburgian way in the three dimensions that were previously identified. Already at this stage, this paper finds that the Brandenburgian way was severely limited by the economic reality of the time.

3.1 Consensus politics

As indicated above, consensus politics in post-unification Brandenburg necessarily was characterized by collaboration with the PDS-LL, the party that emerged from the SED before the *Volkskammer* elections in March 1990. Of course, most PDS members wanted to retain the GDR as a separate unit, however, many were willing to accept the decision of the population to join the FRG quite quickly.³⁵ The PDS by this point mainly consisted of lower-ranking functionaries of the SED and individuals that were party members but did not work for the SED full time, which were not as incriminated by their past in the party. It also meant collaboration with the CDU, which formed the opposition together with the PDS during the first legislative period. Concretely, consensus politics would have meant the consideration of policy proposals brought in through opposition, the inclusion of their suggestions and criticisms but also vice versa the support of the opposition for the policies of the government.

From the interviews by Lorenz and von Gersdorff, it becomes clear that Brandenburgian politicians believe that consensus politics was practiced during this period. Many contrast their experience with later years, as well as with other East German states, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. For example, Wolfgang Birthler, an SPD MP who was still in parliament in 2009 at the time of the interview while the SPD was governing together with the CDU, stated that

³³ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/59,” 4493, (my own translation).

³⁴ SPIEGEL, “»EINE NEUE LINKE«.”

³⁵ Lorenz, “Aufstieg, Ausstieg, Umstieg. Elitenwechsel in Brandenburg,” 176.

The atmosphere in the [parliamentary] sessions and within the committees was much better then than today. [...] Discussions were more focused on the matter at hand, and there were many decisions were taken in accordance with the opposition. [...] The term Brandenburgian way was coined because we also worked together with the opposition parties PDS and CDU, where the PDS presented itself as a very reliable partner. [...] Today, unfortunately, a government-opposition dichotomy has emerged. Our coalition partner [the CDU] categorically declines proposals from the PDS/Linken.³⁶

Similarly, Marco Schumann, the son of the deceased Michael Schuman, a prominent MP for the PDS, emphasizes that “only later, the form of political discourse morphed into a static vision in which the government juxtaposed the opposition”.³⁷ The case of Schuman, who had been a longstanding member of the SED before unification and who had worked as a professor for philosophy, is a perfect representation of the Brandenburgian way. As a former member of the SED, he was a remnant of the old regime. He was not an intense supporter of the GDR and its autocratic political system, however, as his profession suggests, he was a sharp critic of capitalism. Yet, he is remembered extremely fondly by his colleagues, since he made “many good suggestions that were taken into account”.³⁸

In practice, this consensus democracy involved lengthy discussions. Sessions often went on until midnight, while everyone’s suggestions were heard.³⁹ These discussions were even more intense because the government was composed of three parties. The hypothesis that the consensus politics inherent to the Brandenburgian way posed a contrast to the west can be strengthened through the figure of Klaus-Dieter Kühbacher, one of four west Germans that held a ministerial position in the cabinet. He not only stated that he found the cabinet meetings “tiring and excessively long” where he would get “annoyed when colleagues wanted to discuss minor points at length”, but also reportedly told the coalition MPs that “that is opposition, you are not allowed to vote yes”.⁴⁰ His remarks reflect the political etiquette which he had learned through his experience in West German politics.

Even though consensus politics are very clearly documented through the memories of politicians of that time, there are limitations to the consensus politics aspect of the Brandenburgian way. The CDU MP, Karl-Heinz Kretschmer, expressed his concerns on the validity of Brandenburgian way’s claim to inclusive politics on at least two separate occasions in parliament. In September 1992, during a discussion on a proposal recommending the reorientation of the activities of the *Treuhandanstalt*, which had been brought in through the opposition, he remarked that it was striking that this proposal was being supported since in the past “proposals which were good in respect of content brought forward by the opposition had been laid to rest”.⁴¹ In December 1993, he lamented that “proposals by the opposition are mostly – this is nothing new – being rejected, despite the tolerant Brandenburgian way which is conjured up by the prime minister”.⁴²

³⁶ Gersdorff and Lorenz, *Neuanfang in Brandenburg*, 143, (my own translation).

³⁷ Gersdorff and Lorenz, 169, (my own translation).

³⁸ Gersdorff and Lorenz, 67, 143, (my own translation).

³⁹ Gersdorff and Lorenz, 67–68.

⁴⁰ Gersdorff and Lorenz, 15, 127, (my own translations).

⁴¹ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/53,” 3891, (my own translations).

⁴² Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/59,” 4404, (my own translations).

Table 3.1 shows that there is some truth to his statement. Only 29% of policy proposals brought forward by the opposition were eventually passed into law. However, in comparison to the federal parliament where only 7,8% of opposition proposals resulted in laws, 29% still attests a relatively large influence of the opposition.⁴³

Table 3.1: Draft laws brought into the Brandenburgian parliament in the first legislative period					
Draft brought in through	Total	Approved	Denied	Retracted	approved proposals in %
Government	130	128	2	0	98%
Parliament	59	35	19	5	59%
Combination of opposition and coalition parties	21	20	1	0	95%
Coalition parties	7	6	1	0	86%
Opposition	31	9	17	5	29%

Source: Parlamentsdokumentation Brandenburg

Another piece of evidence discrediting consensus politics is the fact that SPD and CDU explicitly decided to only employ one vice-president of the parliament. This is highly unusual given the high workload connected to this position. All other new states had two vice-presidents of the parliament. In Brandenburg, this decision was taken specifically to avoid giving this post to the PDS, which would have been the next biggest party in parliament and hence entitled to this position.⁴⁴ Hence, there were some limits to consensus politics, however, this aspect of the Brandenburgian can be confirmed after the first round of investigation.

3.2 Labor market policies

Labor market policies were another crucial aspect of the Brandenburgian way. The labor market with its ever-rising unemployment rates was one of the largest challenges faced by the Brandenburgian government during the 1990s. Since the planned economy of the GDR left behind uncompetitive enterprises, the integration into the West German market, led companies to either shut down completely or to at least let go of a substantial number of employees. The development of infrastructure had also been neglected though wages were high since they were paid in D-Mark, rendering the new states are rather unattractive investment opportunity. Hence the availability of jobs was steadily declining.

Regine Hildebrandt from the SPD, who became the Brandenburgian minister of Labor, had a major influence in defining the labor market aspect of the Brandenburgian way. In a *Spiegel* interview from May 1990 that she gave while she was still minister of labor of the GDR, she already indicates the policy position she would propose later.

SPIEGEL: The pressure is there. Thousands of workers are, like last Thursday, protesting on the streets. What would you like to do about this?

⁴³ Sebaldt, "Innovation Durch Opposition."

⁴⁴ Lorenz, "Aufstieg, Ausstieg, Umstieg. Elitenwechsel in Brandenburg," 187.

*HILDEBRANDT: Immediate measures need to be taken, like lowering the prices and stimulation of the retail sector. Additionally, we need to create perspectives. The question is, do I finance unemployment or do I finance re-training and education. We will quickly offer qualification programs and employment opportunities to prevent people from an obligatory move out of employment into unemployment. We need to create the framework to create employment opportunities in the firms that have collapsed.*⁴⁵

The interview already foreshadows the approach to “not finance unemployment but work, qualification and re-training”, which characterized the supply side labor market policy of Brandenburg.⁴⁶ It also showed the high willingness to involve the government in the transition process, here exemplified through the desire to install price controls to stimulate the retail sector. However, this state involvement later came in the form of heavy government involvement in the privatization process of companies undertaken by the *Treuhandanstalt*, a demand-side policy aimed to actively create new jobs.

In the Winter of 1991/1992 the jobs of roughly 19% of Brandenburgians had come under threat. However, only 7,5% of those became actually unemployed due to the extensive secondary labor market that was supplied through government measures.⁴⁷ Out of these 19%, a large share were workers that had been offered to retire prematurely. Initially, in 1991 there were still many that working short time, however, the use of this measure quickly declined as it became obvious that the jobs could not be held in the long run. Lastly, many participated in retraining programs or partook in *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABS)*, which are employment opportunities on the secondary labor market, financed by the government. As a result of these extensive measures only around 7,5% of Brandenburgians were formerly unemployed in 1991.⁴⁸ However, soon the number of people that were in overt unemployment far outnumbered the number of people that participated in alternative government employment programs.⁴⁹ Likely, a reason for this decline is that governmental employment programs still did not secure permanent employment since the number of overall job vacancies was simply too low. Therefore, the government involved itself in the privatization process of the *Treuhandanstalt* to create more demand for labor. Unfortunately, the systematic review of the files of the *Treuhand* has not been completed yet, making it impossible to provide a quantitative overview of the governmental involvement in this process. For this reason, this paper will resort to shedding light on this process through the case of the Märkische Faser AG Premnitz, which was one of the first cases in which the government became involved and which strongly influenced the policy of Brandenburg towards the *Treuhand*.

3.2.1 Case Study

Initially, there was not much conflict between the government and the *Treuhand*. While Brandenburgian officials were aware of the importance of *Treuhand*'s tasks, there was no reason to believe that they would not carry out their tasks satisfactorily. However, after the most promising firms had been sold it became harder and harder to find buyers for the remaining firms, which as of June 1992 still employed around 18% of Brandenburgian workers.⁵⁰ It was then, that the CDU submitted a proposal for the fixture of new priorities

⁴⁵ Kampe and Volz, “»Unsere Lage ist verzweifelt.«”, (my own translation).

⁴⁶ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/5,” 93.

⁴⁷ Brenke, Ludwig, and Ragnitz, “Analyse Der Schlüsselentscheidungen Im Bereich Der Wirtschaftspolitik Und Ihre Wirkung Auf Die Ökonomische Entwicklung Der Vergangenen Zwei Jahrzehnte Im Land Brandenburg,” 69.

⁴⁸ Brenke, Ludwig, and Ragnitz, 69.

⁴⁹ Brenke, Ludwig, and Ragnitz, 69.

⁵⁰ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/49,” 3563.

for the *Treuhandanstalt*. Even though the *Treuhand* had been tasked to privatize, liquidize and restructure were necessary, it had not engaged in restructuring until then. In their proposal, the CDU demanded that the tasks of the *Treuhand* would be refocused to accommodate the fact that the remaining companies were less attractive investments and needed restructuring before their sale.⁵¹ The developments at the Märkische Faser AG Premnitz (MFAG) were, at least partially, the reason for the government to become aware that such a refocus was necessary.

Experts had advised the *Treuhand* to either privatize the MF AG quickly or to liquidize it. It was a company producing artificial fibers located in Premnitz, a small town with around 12.000 inhabitants in the periphery of Brandenburg. Only in 1988, Erich Honecker, the then-secretary general of the GDR, had inaugurated the “most modern acrylic fiber assembly line in Europe”.⁵² It had employed 6.700 workers, a substantial number for a town as small as Premnitz, especially given the fact that in the surrounding areas no other large companies resided. In 1990 the MFAG submitted a proposal to the *Treuhand* in which it estimated that it would require 300 million D-mark to restructure the company and continue operations and around two-thirds of the workforce were to be cut until 1993.⁵³ In January 1992 the MFAG was bought by the Alcor Chemie AG (ACAG), a small Swiss chemical producer with only 20 employees, which agreed to retain at least 1.990 jobs.⁵⁴ The financial proposal presented by the ACAG to the *Treuhand* upon sale to guarantee continued operation of the facility rested on the wrongful assumption that sales to the Soviet Union would be continued.⁵⁵ The European market did not present a viable alternative since the European demand for artificial fibers was low, and was already met by more competitive firms. Unable to make the necessary investments the ACAG announced that the closure of the MFAG on the 24th of September 1992.⁵⁶ This provoked the workers to occupy the MFAG and engage in a variety of other forms of protests for 73 days until an agreement was reached.⁵⁷

The parliament became involved by passing an *Entschließungsantrag* (motion for a resolution), handed in through all 5 parties, on the 30th of September. The government was tasked to either push the *Treuhand* and the MFAG to uphold the agreement which had been made and to conserve the site in Premnitz or to force the *Treuhand* to buy back the company. Additionally, they also explicitly called upon the federal government and the *Treuhand* (the *Treuhand* being a federal institution), to cover the costs of the necessary investments to retain the site.⁵⁸ Already on the 25th of September, one day after the announcement of the closure of the MFAG, *Treuhand*, government, and MFAG management engaged in negotiations in which prime minister Stolpe promised 25 million D-Mark to keep the company afloat for the following weeks.⁵⁹ Eventually, after long negotiations, the government managed to gain the West-LB as an investor in 1993.⁶⁰

After the MFAG incident, the cooperation between the government and *Treuhand* became closer, with additional meetings held every 4 to 6 weeks. In addition to that there were working sessions with the

⁵¹ Landtag Brandenburg, “Drucksache 1/1095.”

⁵² Schnibben, “Der Neue Kalte Krieg.”, (my own translation).

⁵³ Schmidt, “Requirements for Successful Privatization,” ANNEX.

⁵⁴ Knoll, “Mehr Als Ohnmächtig? Zur Zusammenarbeit Zwischen *Treuhandanstalt* Und Brandenburg.”

⁵⁵ Albrecht, “Eine Gnadenfrist von vier Wochen.”

⁵⁶ Albrecht.

⁵⁷ Hohmann, “Mit jeder Faser.”

⁵⁸ Landtag Brandenburg, “Drucksache 1/1255.”

⁵⁹ Albrecht, “Eine Gnadenfrist von vier Wochen.”

⁶⁰ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 2/29,” 2697.

Treuhand in which certain branches or companies were discussed.⁶¹ Moreover, through the passage of the proposal by the CDU the parliament required the Treuhand to refocus on restructuring.

In the first legislative period, the Brandenburgian government adopted the principle of *Standortsicherung*, meaning the conservation of existing industrial production sites, to retain employment opportunities in peripheral regions such as Premnitz.⁶² The case of the MFAG illustrates not only the high level of governmental involvement but also shows the problems that came with this approach. Even after substantial effort to continue operations at the MFAG, only between 1.000 to 2.000 workers were employed the MFAG, meaning that at least two-thirds of the original employees lost their jobs. Eventually, MFAG struggled to become competitive and finally declared bankruptcy in 2001.⁶³ This shows that the Brandenburgian government and parliament were involved in the privatization process undertaken by the *Treuhand*, however, their success was limited. Neither ABS and retraining programs nor governmental involvement in the privatization process could make up for the fact that the Brandenburgian economy had been run completely into the ground under GDR rule. However, one can only imagine how devastating the circumstances might have been in their absence.

3.3 Direct Democracy

As previously mentioned, at the time at which the basic law was written in 1949, the recent memory of direct democracy was rather negative. In contrast, the Eastern German states, through the experience of the peaceful revolution, were favoring the introducing democratic elements. Many of the politicians themselves had also been involved in revolutionary movements. Because of this experience, Brandenburg chose to allow its population to submit their ideas, put the constitution to a popular vote, and introduced elements of direct democracy as central parts of the constitution. The process of writing the constitution, which would ultimately implementation of direct democracy, was already notably democratic, especially in comparison to the origin of the basic law. Its authors consciously decided to not ratify the basic law through the population due to the mistrust they felt towards their population.⁶⁴ In contrast, the authors of the Brandenburgian constitution asked the population to bring forward suggestions, eventually receiving more than 500, and ratified the constitution through a *Volksentscheid* on the 14th of June 1992.⁶⁵ More than 94% of voters approved of the constitution, however, the participation was at 47,9%.

Table 3.2: Volksinitiative, Volksbegehren, Volksentscheid in Brandenburg

Name	Number of signatures needed (percentage of 1990 population)	Consequence
§ 76 Volksinitiative	20.000 (0.998%)	Parliament must vote on the subject of the <i>Volksinitiative</i>
	150.000 (7.482%)	Parliament must vote on the dissolution of parliament
§ 77 Volksbegehren	80.000 (3.991%)	In the case that the <i>Volksinitiative</i> does not get passed within four month a <i>Volksbegehren</i> can be requested, the parliament needs to pass a vote within two months
	200.000 (9.976%)	Parliament must vote on the dissolution of parliament
§ 78 Volksentscheid	Majority votes, at least 25% of eligible voters	If the <i>Volksbegehren</i> is not passed within 2 months a referendum takes place

⁶¹ Landtag Brandenburg, "Plenarprotokoll 1/49," 3667.

⁶² Brenke, Ludwig, and Ragnitz, "Analyse Der Schlüsselentscheidungen Im Bereich Der Wirtschaftspolitik Und Ihre Wirkung Auf Die Ökonomische Entwicklung Der Vergangenen Zwei Jahrzehnte Im Land Brandenburg," 20.

⁶³ Landtag Brandenburg, "Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 3/47," 3044.

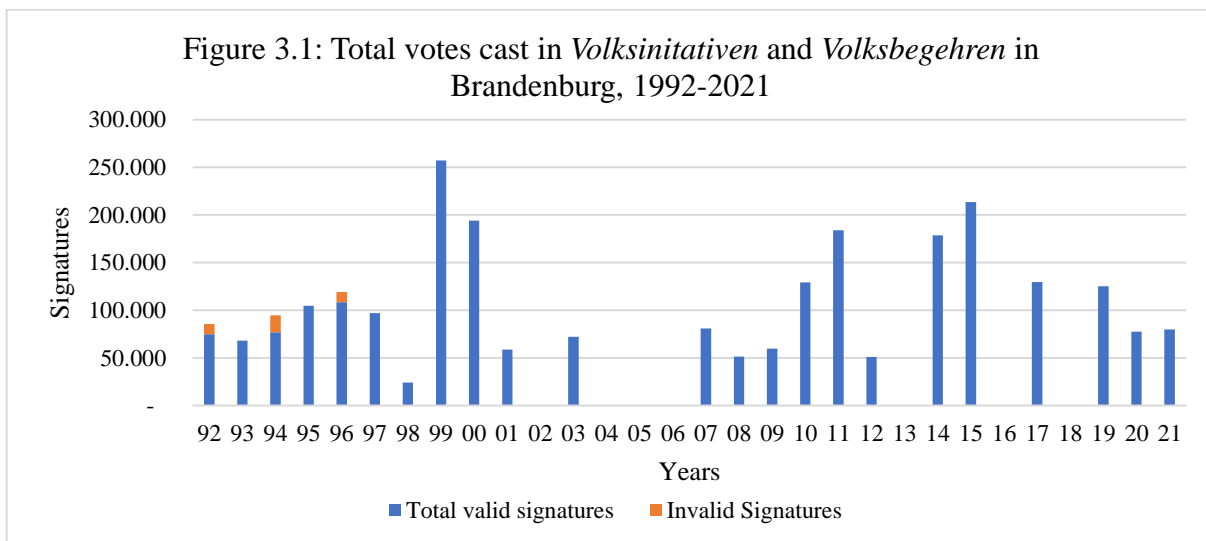
⁶⁴ Herbert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Germany*, 493.

⁶⁵ Franzke and Büchner, "Entstehung der Verfassung des Landes Brandenburg," 20.

Source: Website Landtag, Bevölkerungszahlen von Daten über Volkskammerwahl

An overview of the elements of direct democracy which were introduced into the Brandenburgian constitution can be seen in table 3.2. What is notable is that the number of participants needed to initiate each of these measures is not particularly high. To enforce a dissolution of the parliament through a *Volksbegehren* only around 10% of the population would be needed. The high accessibility of these measures bears witness to the commitment of the Brandenburgian government to ensure that power could not be centralized again like in the GDR.

The population had the opportunity to get involved through direct democracy, yet it also made use of this instrument. Figure 3.1 shows that even though the use of direct democratic elements declined after 2001, it remained popular throughout. In 2021 alone, 3 initiatives have been submitted.⁶⁶ The initiatives submitted over the past 29 years differed strongly in their scope and subject. Some were highly specific such as the initiative from the 26th of June 1995, which demanded that a highway in Finowtal should not be built. Others were broad in their scope and certainly acted more like agenda-setting elements rather than direct lawmaking processes. Examples of this include the initiative from the 9th of June 1999 which spoke out against the “increasing discrimination against east German citizens in respect to the availability of health care services”, which was signed by a whopping 201.850 people.



Source: Brandenburger Landtag

A point of conflict arose whenever these popular initiatives targeted policies that were part of the government strategy to induce growth. One important aspect of the economic recovery program was the construction of adequate infrastructure which would make Brandenburg more attractive for investment. Seven initiatives in total were submitted that specifically targeted infrastructural projects. Two related to project 17, a waterway built to improve the access to internal harbors in Brandenburg and an additional three related to the airport Berlin Schönefeld. Another two were about a highway in Finowtal and a trans rapid high-speed magnetic-levitation train connecting Hamburg and Berlin. Of these seven initiatives only two got approved: the initiative against the construction of a highway in Finowtal and an initiative against

⁶⁶ Brandenburg, “Übersicht über beim Landtag Brandenburg eingegangene Volksinitiativen seit 1992.”

night-flights at the airport Berlin Schönefeld. However, even though the population was very adamant about project 17 and the extension of the Berlin airport, the government could not respect the voice of the population on this matter.⁶⁷ A Further case of the limitation of direct democracy due to economic considerations is the example of the town of Horno, which had to give way to a brown coalfield. It vehemently protested against the relocation of the town and at first, its protests were very successful as prime minister Stolpe promised to try everything possible to protect the town.⁶⁸ However, many jobs were connected to the site, and eventually the government was forced to forgo the will of the people due to the pressures of the post-reunification economy.

This shows that there was ample opportunity for the Brandenburgian population to get directly involved in democratic decision-making processes. However, likely the ability of the Brandenburgian population to have their will met through direct democracy was limited by the government's mandate to stimulate economic growth. Proposals conflicting with growth-inducing policies, or proposals that would require large financial means were unlikely to succeed in this context.

4. Comparison with other Länder and East German states

4.1 Comparison with other Eastern European States

To further qualify the extent to which the Brandenburgian way was more than an ideal, a comparison is necessary. In Chapter 3, the Brandenburgian way has been contrasted with the FRG. Further possibilities would be to compare Brandenburg with other East European states that were also transitioning from communism to capitalism at that time. However, this comparison would likely be less fruitful than a comparison with other East German states.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, East Germans themselves, also during times of the GDR, hardly compared themselves with other East German states. The benchmark was always the federal republic. During the cold war, the GDR was one of the most prosperous regions of the Eastern Block, which was often stressed by the SED leadership.⁶⁹ However, this fact hardly deterred East Germans from desiring to also benefit from the prosperity of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. Secondly, the other countries of the former Eastern Bloc did not become integrated into a new system right away. The eastward extension of the EU only occurred in 2004 and 2007 respectively. This had two important implications. Firstly, the currency union and the resulting troubles in the labor market combined with the possibility to relocate to the West of Germany with relative ease put very different pressures on the new east German states than on other post-communist states. Secondly, the problem of state capacity, which has emerged as a key component of analysis when comparing post-communist economies in previous literature, is hardly applicable to the new East German states.⁷⁰ State capacity here denotes the administrative strength of a country, determining the country's ability to enforce rules in the context of economic transition.⁷¹ There, state capacity was created

⁶⁷ Brandenburg.

⁶⁸ SPIEGEL, "Begrüßung einer Firma."

⁶⁹ Abelshäuser, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte - Von 1945 Bis Zur Gegenwart*, 450.

⁷⁰ Hamm and King, "Post-Manichean Economics: Foreign Investment, State Capacity and Economic Development in Transition Economies"; Popov, "Lesson from Transition Economies: Putting the Success Stories of the Post-Communist World into a Broader Perspective."

⁷¹ Hamm and King, "Post-Manichean Economics: Foreign Investment, State Capacity and Economic Development in Transition Economies," 13.

rapidly by copying the administrative system from the federal republic, through retaining many former SED employees and manning key positions in administration with unencumbered East Germans but mostly West Germans (so-called *Aufbauhelfer*).⁷² Through close cooperation with a partner state, which was North Rhine-Westphalia in the case of Brandenburg, the new states were able to build state capacity relatively quickly. All this created a very different set of problems for the new East German states than for other post-communist states.

4.2 Comparison with other East German states

Hence it is more sensible to compare Brandenburg with other East German states. This will be done in the following section, again making use of the three aspects of the Brandenburgian way identified above. Surprisingly, Brandenburg, even though it stressed that it was going the Brandenburgian way, does not differ from the other states in terms of unemployment rates or GDP growth. This is notable since labor market policies formed such a central pillar of the Brandenburgian way. There are two possible explanations for this: either the Brandenburgian way was not exclusive to Brandenburg but instead also silently adopted in other states or the Brandenburgian way was not effective in producing measurable results.

4.2.1 Consensus politics

Quantifying consensus politics is rather challenging. In the assessment of consensus politics for Brandenburg, it was possible to include qualitative evidence from interviews, for which no equivalent exists for the other states. Additionally, data on the law-making process in the new states is not as readily available as in the case of Brandenburg which complicates a comparative quantitative assessment. Hence, this section will use two alternative methods to inquire about the differences in consensus politics. Firstly, this paper will consider the process of passing the constitution. Secondly, it will consider a qualitative analysis of the last parliamentary session in Brandenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony and analyze whether their desire to practice consensus politics translated into the factual discussions necessary for such an approach. For this, this paper chose the last parliamentary session because in each of the three cases the parliaments decided to have a moment in which they reflected on the legislative period. As in Chapter 3, this section will begin with the consideration of the constitution.

It is possible to discern whether the concerns of a particular party or individual were included in the constitution by considering the voting behavior during the ratification of the constitution through parliament. For Mecklenburg West-Pomerania, unfortunately, plenary minutes are only accessible starting 1998, which is why in this case party affiliation cannot be linked to voting behavior. In the case of Thuringia, the vote on the constitution was not a vote by roll-call, leading to the same issue. However, the reaction of the MPs to the vote has been recorded in the parliamentary minutes, giving at least some insights on the stance of different parties on the constitution. Table 4.1 shows that if one judges only by the approval rating of the constitution, Brandenburg does not seem to be characterized by a higher consensus. Saxony and Mecklenburg West-Pomerania have higher approval rates. It also shows that the dissenting votes were different in Brandenburg and the other new states. While in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia the PDS appeared to strongly disapprove of the constitution, the only dissenting votes and abstentions in Brandenburg came from the CDU. In Saxony-Anhalt also all Bündnis 90 MPs voted against the constitution.

⁷² Kotsch, “Kapitel 17 - Die Rückkehr Zur Länderordnung.”

Table 4.1: Voting behavior and origin of disapproving votes during the vote on the constitution in the parliaments of the new states					
<i>State</i>	<i>Brandenburg</i>	<i>Mecklenburg West-Pomerania</i>	<i>Saxony</i>	<i>Saxony-Anhalt</i>	<i>Thuringia</i>
Government parties	SPD, FDP, BÜ90	CDU, FDP	CDU	CDU, FDP	CDU, FDP
Number of MPs present	87	62	151	101	89
Percentage approval	82.8%	85.5%	87.4%	79.2%	(more than 66.7%)
Origin of disapproval	CDU (40.7%)	-	PDS (82.3%) CDU (1.1%)	Independent (33.3%) SPD (7.4%) PDS (75%) BÜ90 (100%)	(Applause CDU, FDP, SPD)
Origin of abstention	CDU (14.8%)	-	PDS (5.9%) CDU (1.1%) BÜ90 (20%)	Independent (11.1%) PDS (8.3%)	(PDS MPs leaving the room)

Source: Parlamentsdokumentation Brandenburg; Hesse, "Der Beitrag Der Verfassungen in Den Neuen Bundesländern Zur Verfassungsentwicklung in Deutschland."; Parlamentsdokumentation Sachsen; Parlamentsdokumentation Sachsen-Anhalt; Parlamentsdokumentation Thüringen.

Generally, table 4.1 does not suggest that there was necessarily a higher consensus in the case of Brandenburg, simply that the Brandenburgian government was willing to cooperate with the PDS, which appeared to have been at the expense of collaboration with the CDU. This hypothesis aligns with the remarks by Karl-Heinz Kretschmer, presented in section 3.1. However, it is also clear that the percentage of CDU members that were dissatisfied with the constitution was lower than the percentage of PDS members that were dissatisfied in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. This could suggest that there was still more collaboration with the CDU in the Brandenburgian case than with the PDS in the other new states.

Further evidence of how consensus politics differed between the different states can be found when looking at the transcripts of the review moment in the final parliamentary meetings of the first legislative session. By then interparty dynamics had already been firmly established. Out of the five states only Saxony, Thuringia, and Brandenburgian decided to have a review moment, the former two being much more extensive than the latter. The review moment in Saxony, where the CDU had governed with an absolute majority, hostility suggests that there was hostility towards the PDS and a sharp distinction between opposition and government. Hostility was visible. Gunther Hatzsch from the SPD and Herbert Goliasch, chairman of the CDU, quarreling about who would win in the next elections.⁷³ Goliasch also characterized the whole FDP as "quarrelsome, argumentative and bullheaded" and stated that he distrusts the PDS wholeheartedly.⁷⁴ After the speech of the PDS, Kornelia Müller, a Bü90 MP, stated that "her stomach was turning".⁷⁵ In Thuringia, this review moment was similarly laden with conflict. There, prime minister

⁷³ Landtag Sachsen, "Sachsen Plenarprotokoll 1/100," 7038.

⁷⁴ Sächsischer Landtag Plenarprotokoll 1/100, Goliasch, page 7067-7069, (my own translation).

⁷⁵ Sächsischer Landtag Plenarprotokoll 1/100, page 7057, Müller, (my own translation).

Bernhard Vogel reflected positively on the achievements of the legislative session and was heavily criticized for this by Gerd Schuchardt from the SPD:

„Ladies and gentlemen, likely no one was really anxious to hear today’s government declaration. It was clear what would be said despite four years under Duchac-, later Vogel-, leadership with all of its deficits, delays, neglects, scandals, small and great. Despite deindustrialization, rising unemployment, social decay, and submission to the federal government in many cases. Despite the month and some case years of ignorance of the necessary steps to be taken and the consequences. This government managed to do all that and wants to be celebrated for it, it is unbelievable. (...) It is unbelievable that, in the face of all the unresolved problems of this region, such an uncritical review can be made. Who do you want to fool by that?”⁷⁶

Moreover, Schuchardt made clear that the atmosphere between opposition and government was not cooperative.

Unfortunately, the ill practice to reject proposals from the SPD in principal and to, in part, not even allow them to pass to the respective committee has emerged. Instead, things are handled in the spirit of the French chemist Antoine Francois de Fourcroy, who in case of conflict divided the opponents of French chemistry into those that in his opinion did not understand the matter at hand and those that are deluded by factionalism, which is exactly how things were handled by the governing coalition. (applause from SPD, LL-PDS and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen)⁷⁷

These elaborations are in clear contrast with the fact that at the end of the last session in Brandenburg, Heinz Vietze, and MP for the PDS-LL, gave flowers to the president, vice-president, and the director of parliament to thank them for “the fair treatment [of the PDS-LL MPs] through the president, the vice president, and the director of parliament as well as through all other parties present in parliament”.⁷⁸

This section shows that in Brandenburg there was overall a more cooperative atmosphere in parliament. This was likely because for the SPD it was possible to collaborate with the PDS while for the CDU it was not. The federal CDU had a strong position against the PDS, which was also adopted by the CDU in the respective new states.⁷⁹ However, also in Brandenburg, while the overall atmosphere in parliament might have been cooperative and tolerant, there was limited consensus with the opposition parties, especially with the CDU. Exclusion of the CDU meant a rejection of the federal government while the exclusion of the PDS meant the exclusion of former SED officials and the recent past of the East. This difference coincides with the decision taken by Brandenburg to pursue more liberal processes of reappraisal of the past than other states.⁸⁰

4.2.2 Labor Market Policies

Supply-side labor market policies in Brandenburg and the other new states were rather similar simply because many of the measures were not financed through the states themselves but through the federal government. However, to obtain these finances the states had to first lobby the federal government to

⁷⁶ Thüringer Landtag, “Thüringen Plenarprotokoll 1/122,” 9442, (my own translation).

⁷⁷ Thüringer Landtag, 9452, (my own translation).

⁷⁸ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/100,” 8208, (my own translation).

⁷⁹ Christliche Demokratische Union Deutschlands, “Protokoll - 10. Parteitag Der CDU Deutschlands - 18.-19. Mai 1998 - Stadthalle Bremen,” 55.

⁸⁰ Gersdorff and Lorenz, *Neuanfang in Brandenburg*, 44.

convince them of the importance of these measures. In the first two years after reunification, the financing of these measures had been generous. Unemployment rates skyrocketed but the federal government was still under impression that a boom was soon to occur in the East and hence willing to finance temporary measures.⁸¹ However, in 1992 the federal government decided to reduce expenditures on such measures for 1993 in the face of the explosion of costs reunification had produced. The proposal was then discussed three times in the *Bundesrat*, the second chamber in German politics, which is meant to represent the interests of the states vis-a-vis the federal government. During these three discussions in the *Bundesrat*, all new states except for Saxony were able to speak and hence state their position on the use of ABS.

At these meetings, all representatives of the new states stressed the importance of ABS for the masses of unemployed individuals in the east who could not hold out hope to regain employment any time soon.⁸² As a reaction to the proposal, the new states also drafted a new proposal called the declaration of Schwerin, where they asked for an even stronger commitment to active labor market policies, for example through the inclusion of women.⁸³ Hence the new states were united on the importance of ABS. West German states were surprisingly also in opposition to the law since they believed that cutting ABS would only increase expenditures unemployment measures, leading to even higher costs. The *Bundesrat* decided to reject the proposal.⁸⁴ However, in the following meeting, after a compromise between the federal government and *Bundesrat* had been reached, Brandenburg stood out as the only state that was still in vehement opposition of the proposal due to concerns that it would result in a decrease in ABS spaces, seemingly going a Brandenburgian way.⁸⁵ The other new states that spoke on the occasion, Thuringia and Mecklenburg West-Pomerania, showed some resignation at the decision of the government. Klaus Gollert, the minister of labor from Thuringia, a member of the FDP, stated:

“Mrs. Hildebrandt, I can understand you very well. I, as a pragmatic, find myself in a similar situation as you. But may I also ask you to try to accept what Mr. Blüm (Minister of Labor of the federal government) has told us, which is that currently, not everything that we hoped for is realizable. We did not have a change of heart, even though it might have seemed like that. Instead, we merely reached the insight that at the moment we have to make compromises.”⁸⁶

It could be that, since Brandenburg was the only state that was governed by the SPD, they were able to assume a stronger position against the federal government on this matter. This case also illuminates a difficulty in the process of empirically measuring the Brandenburgian way in the case in which its policies depended on federal funds. In such a case, “going a Brandenburgian way” would mean taking a strong position in negotiations with the federal government, however, the results of these efforts would be felt by all east German states, hence differences would not be measurable. Possibly, in this sense, the Brandenburgian way had a distinct effect on labor market policies, however, attesting this would go beyond the scope of this paper.

⁸¹ Abelshäuser, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte - Von 1945 Bis Zur Gegenwart*, 443–50.

⁸² Bundesrat, “Bundesrat Plenarprotokoll 646”; Bundesrat, “Bundesrat Plenarprotokoll 648”; Bundesrat, “Bundesrat Plenarprotokoll 649.”

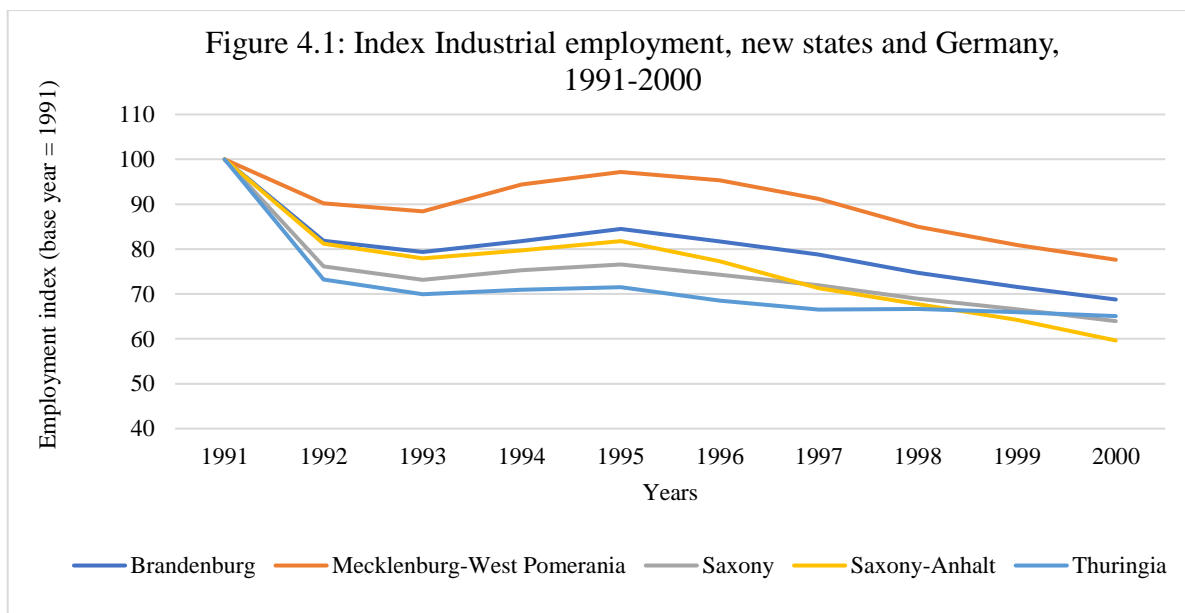
⁸³ Winden, “„Die Streichung bei ABM-Stellen verhindern“.”

⁸⁴ Bundesrat, “Bundesrat Plenarprotokoll 648.”

⁸⁵ Bundesrat, “Bundesrat Plenarprotokoll 649.”

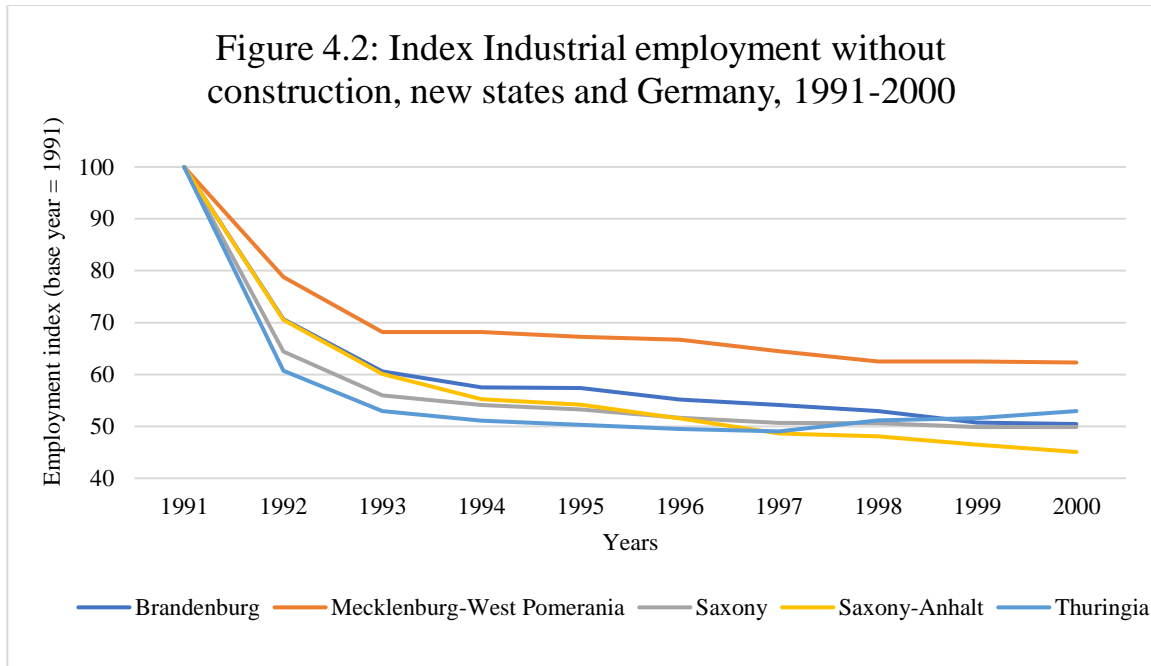
⁸⁶ Bundesrat, 592, (my own translation).

Labor market policies did not only concern active labor market policies like ABS but also the efforts of the government to engage with the *Treuhandanstalt*, to retain employment. In the public discourse of the time, Hildebrandt and Stolpe emerged as two very vehement critics of the *Treuhand* yet it remains to be seen whether their assertiveness had any measurable impact on the employment in the sectors targeted by their involvement. Figures 4.1 through 4.3 show the development of the employment of the industrial sector, with and without construction, and the agricultural sector. In all three figures, it can be observed that during the 1990s employment in industry and agriculture first dropped rapidly and later declined steadily. Due to the construction boom in this period, an upwards trend around 1993 can be observed in figure 4.1. However, the boom was temporary, and after 1995 industrial employment was in decline once more. All three figures barely show any distinction between Brandenburg and the other states. Mecklenburg West-Pomerania stands out since its industrial employment numbers decline significantly less than in the states. In Mecklenburg West-Pomerania the government was also very actively involved in the privatization process which could explain the slow decline.⁸⁷ The only noticeable development relating to Brandenburg is industrial employment in comparison to Saxony-Anhalt. At first industrial employment in Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg declined at almost the same speed, however, later Brandenburg's curve becomes much flatter. This could show a marginal effect of the Brandenburgian way of retaining industrial employment.

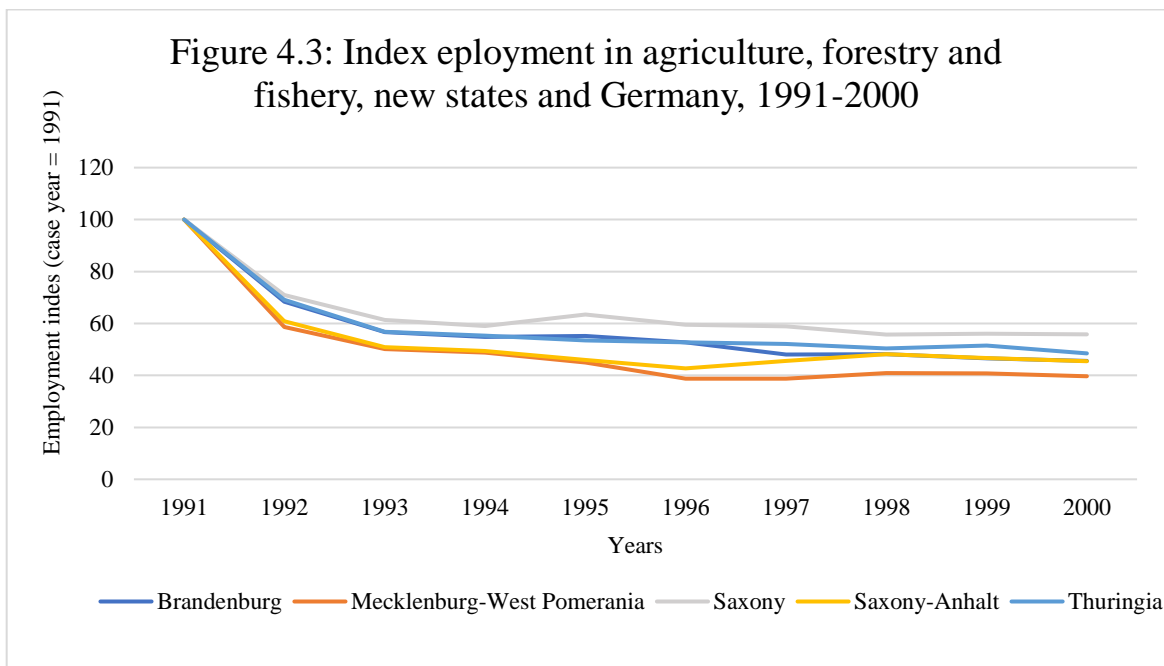


Source: Erwerbstätige in den Ländern der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991 bis 2020

⁸⁷ Hassink, "How to Unlock Regional Economies from Path Dependency?"



Source: Erwerbstätige in den Ländern der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991 bis 2020



Source: Erwerbstätige in den Ländern der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1991 bis 2020

4.2.3 Direct Democracy

As with Brandenburg, direct democracy began with the process of writing the constitution. In Brandenburg, the process of writing the constitution was seen as an opportunity to strengthen regional identity which is why it was decided to ratify it through a popular vote. Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Thuringia also

decided to hold a popular vote on the constitution, while in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, the constitution was merely voted on by parliament. Out of the three states that held a popular vote, Brandenburg's constitution received the highest approval rating. 94,04% of voters confirmed the constitution. In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Thuringia, it was only 60,1% and 70,1% respectively. The high approval of Brandenburg's population shows that Brandenburg was successful in creating a constitution with which Brandenburgian could identify. However, while the Brandenburgian constitution contains particularities such as, for example, foreigner's right to vote or the possibility for the population to dissolve the parliament, many of the elements which were considered innovative were also contained the constitutions of the other new states.⁸⁸ Overall, the constitutions of the new states were rather similar, even though they were not received as such in popular discourse at the time.⁸⁹

Brandenburg of course is not the only new state whose leadership and population had experienced the power of direct democracy during the revolution. Accordingly, Brandenburg was also not the only state to implement elements of direct democracy in remembrance of the experience of the revolution.⁹⁰ In fact, after reunification, many states in the west of Germany started to introduce *Volksinitiative*, *Volksbegehren*, and *Volksentscheid*, or similar processes going by different names, into their constitution. These concepts were not inventions of the new states, however, before 1990, they were not instruments that were widely used by the population.⁹¹ Additionally, in the constitutions of the new states, they played more central roles and came with lower quotas which would encourage its use.⁹² The popularization of these measures can therefore be seen as a product of the revolution and the reunification process more generally, not a Brandenburgian invention.

Land	Volksinitiative/Bürgerantrag/ Volksantrag			Volksbegehren			Volksentscheid
Brandenburg	20.000	1.02% ^A	49	80.000	4.09% ^A	14	0
Mecklenburg- Vorpommern	15.000	1.06% ^A	29	100.000	7.05% ^A	4	1
Sachsen	40.000	1.08% ^A	14	450.000	12.13% ^A	4	1
Sachsen-Anhalt	30.000	1.34% ^A	3		7% ^B	3	1
Thüringen	50.000	2.49% ^A	10		10% ^{BS} / 8% ^{BO}	5	0

Source: Rehmet, "Volksbegehrensbericht 2019."; A=my own calculations based on population numbers from 1990, B = officially mandated, S = collection of signatures on the street, O =collection of signatures in official government building

As one can see from table 4.2, there is a large difference in the extent to which the citizens of the new states made use of direct democracy measures. While in Sachsen-Anhalt only 3 initiatives took place, in Brandenburg there were 49. Brandenburg leads the list both in the number of *Volksinitiativen* and *Volksbegehren*. What is notable, is that even though the number of signatures needed as the percentage of total eligible voters is rather similar for Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt, the number of *Volksinitiativen* differs substantially. It is in the threshold for *Volksbegehren* that is

⁸⁸ Lorenz, Anter, and Reutter, "Entstehung und Inhalt der brandenburgischen Verfassung," 49–55.

⁸⁹ Hesse, "Der Beitrag Der Verfassungen in Den Neuen Bundesländern Zur Verfassungsentwicklung in Deutschland," 9–10.

⁹⁰ Lorenz, Anter, and Reutter, "Entstehung und Inhalt der brandenburgischen Verfassung," 53.

⁹¹ Hesse, "Der Beitrag Der Verfassungen in Den Neuen Bundesländern Zur Verfassungsentwicklung in Deutschland."

⁹² Hesse.

most different from the other states. Accordingly, in Brandenburg, there was a much higher number of *Volksbegehren*. The high total number of initiatives should be interpreted rather cautiously. There is a plethora of possible explanations: there might be fewer administrative hurdles, the population might have been less content with the policies, or they might have been promoted stronger through the government. However, clearly, in Brandenburg, the introduction of elements of direct democracy worked particularly well, at least if one judges from the number of initiatives.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, in the view of the politicians of the first election period, the Brandenburgian way coincided with innovative politics. However, perhaps because they were innovative, many of these elements are also found in the other new states, without being popularized as being innovative. Brandenburg wanted to enact the kind of politics that “the old states often dreamed about but never practiced”.⁹³ The ideals of the Brandenburgian way were also clearly in divergence from the FRG: Brandenburg wanted to practice consensus instead of party politics, an active state-led transition to capitalism in contrast to “less state – more market” and direct instead of representative democracy. The conventional definition of the Brandenburgian way as consensus politics did not sufficiently represent all these objectives which slowly came together in form of the Brandenburgian way. Therefore, this paper used its own definition of the Brandenburgian way, defining it along the three dimensions of direct democracy, labor market policies, and consensus politics. However, the innovativeness of these policies seems to have been slightly overstated, in some respects more than in others. While in Brandenburg there was a more tolerant atmosphere between the MPs, there was party politics. The main difference was that in Brandenburg consensus was created at the expense of the CDU while in other states the PDS was excluded. However, in Brandenburg, the exclusion of the CDU was not as strong as the exclusion of the PDS in other states, where it occurred mostly out of principle to not work together with the old regime. Active employment measures were also applied in all states, mainly since their funding was federal. This contrasts with how strongly the government linked labor market policies to the Brandenburgian way. It can only be stated that Brandenburg went a Brandenburgian way by lobbying more strongly than the other states for funding. Additionally, Brandenburg does not seem to have been particularly successful in preventing unemployment through negotiations with businesses. Lastly, elements of direct democracy, which were at first seen as scandalous in the federal republic, were finally also implemented in the other new states. In Brandenburg these measures were most frequently used, however, it is not possible to deduct why exactly this is the case.

Through the analysis of the three dimensions, a variety of conclusions about the Brandenburgian way can be drawn. Firstly, some of its elements, such as direct democracy and the desire to conduct consensus politics were products of the SED regime and the 1989 revolution and hence visible in all new states. However, the explicit desire of Brandenburg to use these experiences to diverge from the status quo made these features more visible. Secondly, the extent to which these features could emerge also related to the political circumstances of the time. Since Brandenburg’s government had a different coalition than the federal government Brandenburg could assume stronger positions on certain issues. It allowed them for example to collaborate with the PDS, which the federal CDU strictly opposed, or to protest more strongly in the Bundesrat when finances for ABS were cut. Thirdly, it shows that the Brandenburgian way was strongly limited by the economic circumstances of the post-reunification period. Negotiations with companies still could not increase employment opportunities to the necessary extent and popular initiatives

⁹³ Landtag Brandenburg, “Brandenburg Plenarprotokoll 1/14,” 1092, (my translation).

often had to be turned down because they conflicted with strategies for economic development. Lastly, this analysis also showed some limitations in measuring the Brandenburgian way. If Brandenburg pioneered certain policies, such as direct democracy, it could be that other states followed hence making it impossible to measure the Brandenburgian way. This is especially complex when considering cases in which the Brandenburgian way related to federal funding since here a successful execution of the Brandenburgian way would mean funding for all new states.

Today, differences between the east and the west of Germany remain. Most recently, the debate about these differences has reemerged due to the high share of votes the populist right-wing party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) gains in the new states. East Germans still have many frustrations about their position in the federal republic and feel as if they are the losers of reunification. The Brandenburgian way represents an effort to gain autonomy within the stoic and overbearing system of the FRG. However, it also shows just how small the impact of such policies was on the economic circumstances. The end of the SED regime still did not mean full autonomy, since freedom in a material sense was still to come. Further research on the post-reunification experience in East Germany is needed to help overcome the differences between East and West, and to add to the understanding of West Germans of the experience of their Eastern counterparts.

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