

GERMAN RESPONSES TO REGIME CHANGE: CULTURE, CLASS, ECONOMY OR CONTEXT?

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Glasgow: CSPP *Studies in Public Policy* No. 244, 1995.

ISSN: 0140-8240

Abstract

The object is to identify how Germans, East and West, have responded to dramatic changes in their political and economic regimes, and to test alternative explanations for what has happened. Since every German has lived under at least two regimes, one before and one after the turning point of re-unification in 1990, evaluations of the present are made in the light of an experience of another regime before the Berlin Wall fell. The article draws upon a 1993 survey that asked East and West Germans the same questions about past and present regimes. The first section reviews competing hypotheses about a homogeneous German culture, a theory of a historic national culture as post-1945 Sovietization counting most. The hypotheses are rejected because the evidence shows there is not homogeneity but wide variations in regime evaluations in both parts of Germany. The following sections test alternative hypotheses about the causes of differences. At first glance, economic costs and benefits appear most important and context secondary. But a causal model shows that context--evaluating regimes in the light of experience of the GDR or the Federal Republic--is indirectly as well as directly dominant.