



Germany, East — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as the German Democratic Republic (GDR)]

05/08/1945 End Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [of USSR, Communist (One-Party) Ideocracy]: The period was a transformative era, beginning with the end of World War II. This marked the cessation of the fascist autocracy under Adolf Hitler and the commencement of an occupation regime by the Allied Powers—namely the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. In the Soviet-occupied zone, the immediate post-war period was characterized by significant reforms including land redistribution, nationalization of key industries, and the establishment of a new political order. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) encouraged the formation of antifascist blocs and political parties, albeit steering towards a communist agenda. A pivotal moment was the forced merger in April 1946 of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) into the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), laying the groundwork for a single-party state (Fulbrook 2008). During this period, no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held (LIED). Additionally, LIED considers the presence of political liberties as absent. V-Dem does not treat the first years of East Germany in their data. In 1949, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. V-Dem only provides data since 1949. For this year, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

10/07/1949 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Communist (One-Party) Ideocracy: On this date, a separate East German state under leadership of the communist party, the SED, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established. On 10/15/1950 non-competitive legislative elections were held, and the communist-dominated National Front of the German Democratic Republic (Nationale Front der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik – NFDDR) won 99 percent of the vote.¹ The period from 1945 to 1954 was heavily influenced by the Soviet Union, which had a significant impact on the political and social systems of East Germany. The country was part of the Eastern Bloc and adhered to communist ideology. The SED made the teaching of Marxism–Leninism and the Russian language compulsory in schools.² The SED maintained strict control over the government, economy, and society. The regime was characterized by a lack of political freedoms, with the Stasi (state security service) playing a crucial role in surveillance and suppression of dissent. The economy was centrally planned and state-controlled, focusing on industrialization and collectivization. Private enterprise was limited, and most of the industry and agriculture were state-owned. Cultural and educational policies were aimed at promoting socialist ideals. The regime-controlled media and restricted access to Western influences. Although declared fully sovereign in 1954, the GDR's sovereignty was limited, as the Soviet Union had significant influence over its policies and decision-making processes. East Germany was a member of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, aligning its foreign policy with Soviet interests. Especially the USSR would not allow for a regime change (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 61, Gallagher 1987). The GDR was a de facto one-party state. Other institutional popular front parties were permitted to exist only in alliance with the SED (Kupferberg 2002). According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our

interpretation of not free. For this period, political liberties were still absent according to LIED and V-Dem PCLI. Until 1989, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. For 1990, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 1950 to 1959, based on Polity5's evaluation, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. Between 1960 and 1988, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. The collapse of the East German regime unfolded in several distinct steps. On 10/18/1989, the resignation of Erich Honecker under pressure from mass protests and party elites marked the end of the ideocratic phase of SED rule. While the ideological legitimacy of the system collapsed, the party initially retained organizational control. After Honecker's resignation on 10/18/1989, opposition groups that had previously operated under the umbrella of church organizations or in informal dissident circles began to establish themselves as formal political parties and movements. Neues Forum, Demokratie Jetzt, and Demokratischer Aufbruch were among the first to organize openly and claim a role in shaping the political future of the GDR. Massive protests and emigration destabilized the SED regime further and eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall on 11/09/1989. From late November 1989 onward, traditional bloc parties such as the CDU and LDPD, long subordinated to the SED, declared their independence and began to reposition themselves as genuine competitors. On 12/01/1989, the People's Chamber amended the constitution by abolishing the SED's leading role, formally ending the legal foundation of one-party rule and the SED-leadership initiated reforms and opened talks with opposition forces.

12/07/1989 End Communist (One-Party) Ideocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: On this date, the Zentrale Runde Tisch (Central Round Table) was established, after the regime had lost control. The Central Round Table institutionalized a form of dual power, effectively ending the SED's monopoly. This transitional phase was consolidated when free elections to the People's Chamber were scheduled for 03/18/1990.

03/18/1990 End Communist (One-Party) Ideocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: The communist party (SED) lost in competitive election which were forced on the regime by mass demonstrations (Pfaff 2006: 242). V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as free and fair while their CEI scores them as somewhat clean. Furthermore, for the first time political liberties were achieved according to V-Dem's PCLI. Whereas LIED's data does treat East Germany for 1990. While the March 1990 elections in East Germany created the formal conditions of democracy, the institutionalization of checks and balances and the protection of civil liberties remained fragile. This transitional regime is therefore best seen as a borderline case between a liberal and an electoral democracy.

10/03/1990 End Germany, East [Electoral Democracy]: On this date, the territory became part of Germany, which is institutionally a continuation of Germany, West enlarged by the territory of Germany, East.

For the time after 10/03/1990, see Germany.

Additional sources (Kocka 1999, Fulbrook 2009)

Notes

¹ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/europerussiacentral-asia-region/east-germany-1949-1990/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Unity_Party_of_Germany

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