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**Reviewed by Laurence McFalls, German and European Studies, Université de Montréal**

The social scientific potential of the “natural” experiments generated from postcommunist transitions is far from exhausted. The outlier case of Germany’s unilateral, rapid, complete, and largely successful transfer of institutions from West to East still offers textbook opportunities for political scientists to test their favorite theories—neo-institutionalism in particular. Louise Davidson-Schmich’s book, *Becoming Party Politicians: East German State Legislators in the Decade following Democratization*, on Landtag members in the five new eastern states of the Federal Republic offers an outstanding workmanlike example. Adopting non-dogmatically the theoretical expectations of rational-choice institutionalism, Davidson-Schmich seeks to demonstrate that the institutional logic and incentives of partisan representative democracy imported from the western Länder rapidly imposed party discipline on eastern legislators indistinguishable from that in the western states despite socialization experiences under communism and during an almost revolutionary transition that militated against such behavior.

On the basis of interviews with thirty-four legislators and analyses of parliamentary debates and voting, Davidson-Schmich examines first how eastern politicians—despite their pervasive distrust of and inexperience with political parties—quickly learned that their electoral survival depended not only on joining an established party but in assuming party office and toeing the line. Second, she shows how, once in office, these same politicians, despite a rhetoric emphasizing suprapartisan ideals, quickly submitted to the whip of party discipline, voting in bloc not only to maintain their party’s or coalition’s majority if they supported the government but also, when in opposition, to maintain their party’s electoral profile and to simplify their own decision making—party discipline being a heuristic tool in issue areas beyond a legislator’s personal competence. Third, Davidson Schmich goes on to test the strength of the logic of party disciplin...
particular issues where eastern values and experiences shared by easterners and mass publics would suggest deviations from the western-imposed norm. For example, easterners are in principle more loyal to citizen initiatives and other forms of direct democracy, and in practice eastern legislatures have been as parsimonious as those in the West in yielding party-government power directly to the people. Predictably, only opposition parties, whatever their ideological orientation, have tried to make electoral hay with proposals for greater citizen involvement. Another fascinating case that Davidson-Schmich comparatively analyses is the implementation of Germany's same-sex partnership framework law that all sixteen states had to undertake in 2001. Again, despite apparently lower levels of tolerance for homosexual civil unions in the East, differences in implementation reflected only the partisan composition of governments and the imperatives of party discipline in both parts of the Federal Republic.

The primary interest of Davidson-Schmich's book lies less in its warnings—representative partisan democracy's overwhelming constraints on individual politicians' choice should come as no surprise to observers of German and European politics—than in its systematic treatment of the timing, process and effectiveness of party disciplining. Davidson-Schmich's case is water tight. Still, she might have drawn even more detail and depth from her interviews with eastern legislators, especially since she sets up the alternative, "sociological" explanation of legislators' behavior as a bit of a straw man. Except for school defenders of mechanistic socialization theory (or what et al. Pollack has termed the widespread western thesis of the sozialisierten Ossis, no sociological or cultural analyst of eastern German politics would contest the fact that the logics and incentives of powerful western institutions have altered radically eastern Germans' political, social, and economic behavior. The interesting question is not and whether eastern values have been changed by, or perhaps even induced, western norms. It is particularly ironic that Davidson-Schmich is so quick to dismiss more subtle eastern continuities and specificities since throughout her book she describes the old—and now new—Federal Republic as a "party state" but never once mentions that eastern Germans were masters at following—and manipulating—the powerful institutional incentives of their own party-state.

Frank Biess, a journalist who has written about Postwar Germany, has reviewed the book.

While there are increasingly many excellent books on Germany, I have yet to find a truly comprehensive work on the country. Biess has written a book that will be read by Germans using their fundamental interests and values. Beyond the details of confronting war-related problems, the majority of a human being in the POWs that have the issues. As Biess says, the Eastern front is not only a country that has been defeated but also a country that has been defeated. Germans are now realizing how both societies are "redemptive to each other.

Homecoming is a book about the Battle of Stalingrad and the final wave of the war. It is a book about the transitional period. The sections are divided into two diametrically opposed parts. The last section was written and doing the front, dealing with Germany's first...