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Germany: Twentieth-Century Turning Points

Ursula Hoffmann-Lange

Momentous crises in 1918–19, 1933, 1945, and 1989 have constituted the major turning points in Germany's twentieth-century political history. These crises triggered five changes of political regimes, and they illuminate the connections between elites, crises, and the origins of regimes. Comparatively extensive research on the composition and configuration of German elites before, during, and after the crises has yielded rich data that facilitate an analysis of these connections.¹

The 1918–19 crisis was triggered by military defeat in World War I, and it resulted in the introduction of the Weimar parliamentary regime. In 1933, a deep economic crisis intersected with the Weimar regime's endemic instability to produce the totalitarian Nazi regime. A third crisis in 1945 began with the Nazi regime's defeat in World War II, and it resulted in the division of Germany into two fundamentally different regimes. The liberal democratic Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was established in the west, and the state-socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) was created in the east, where it remained in power for the next forty-five years. In October and November 1989, after the Soviet Union renounced its supremacy in East Central Europe, the GDR state-socialist regime collapsed in the course of a few weeks. In that crisis, new political leaders turned immediately to the FRG for economic and political support, thereby enabling the government in Bonn to determine the conditions under which German reunification took place in October 1990. All these crises are well known, and there is little to be gained from rehearsing them here. I want, instead, to examine the extent to which they were accompanied by fundamental changes in elites that help to account for the origin and

character of Germany's successive political regimes during the twentieth century.

The Crisis of 1918–1919 and the Formation of the Weimar Republic: Military Defeat, Regime Change, and Elite Continuity

To understand the crisis of 1918–19 and the subsequent failure of the first German democratic regime, the Weimar Republic (1919–33), one has to go back to the formation of the German Empire in 1871 and the political regime it produced. Historians and social scientists have often claimed that Germany at that time was following a *Sonderweg*, or unique track, because its socioeconomic modernization and democratization did not coincide (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1967; Blackbourn and Eley, 1985). Defying democratizing trends in other Western European countries, the kaiser retained constitutional power to appoint governments that were exclusively answerable to him, instead of depending upon majority support in the popularly elected parliament, the Reichstag. The Reichstag's power was limited to vetoing legislation initiated by the executive. This dual political structure strongly affected the development of political parties. Lacking responsibility for governing, the parties used the Reichstag primarily as an arena for articulating far-reaching and unrealistic political goals while at the same time engaging in pragmatic wheeling and dealing with the executive to promote the interests of their respective clienteles. This clientelistic politics contributed to a widespread perception of parties as representatives of narrow interests, in contrast with the prestigious, mainly Prussian civil service, which was perceived as the only defender of the public interest. In the typology of regimes that Mattei Dogan and John Higley adopt in chapter 1, the German Empire is best classified as a traditional (monarchical) regime.

The empire brought a multitude of kingdoms and principalities under one German state, and it realized the long-standing desire for German unity. Only a few dissident elite groups felt that the monarchical regime did not correspond to the demands of the time. Thus, the regime enjoyed widespread legitimacy, especially because it oversaw rapid economic growth. However, the regime was not capable of accommodating the emerging labor movement, whose support among the working class grew steadily. By 1912, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was the largest party in the Reichstag, though its representatives were generally treated as political and social outsiders. At the outbreak of World War I, nonetheless, most Germans enthusiastically greeted

Germany's entry into the war, and even the Social Democrats voted in favor of the government's war loans. But as the war dragged on, public support eroded and economic and political discontents increased, especially during the winter famine of 1917–18, the *Steckrübenwinter*. Labor movement elites, whose clienteles were most seriously affected by shortages in food and other goods, split over the question of renewing vital war loans, and a left-wing Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) opposed to the war effort was formed in 1917. In November 1918, after the General Staff admitted that the war was lost and a parliamentary-backed government had been created, mass discontents erupted in several revolutionary insurgencies. These made it clear that merely installing a government with parliamentary support would not placate discontents, and on November 9, 1918, the last government of the German Empire resigned and handed power to Friedrich Ebert, the SPD's leader. On the same day, the kaiser abdicated, and Germany was declared a republic.

The high degree of elite and organizational continuity that characterized this crisis-driven regime change has been documented extensively by Wolfgang Zapf (1965, 140) and highlighted by Ralf Dahrendorf (1967, 215). No large-scale displacement of existing elites analogous to that which occurred in Russia following the Bolshevik seizure of power in late 1917 took place in Germany. Instead, revolutionary insurgencies remained localized, and they were short-lived. To be sure, the introduction of a parliamentary democracy shifted governmental power from the executive to the legislature. But this was only grudgingly accepted by right-wing parties and by elites in other sectors, especially the business, judicial, and military elites. Crucially, most members of the civil service elite, who were accustomed to playing a central role in policy making, resented the decrease in their power that parliamentary dominance involved. Not a few members of all these entrenched elite groups awaited an opportunity to revise or even reverse the constitutional change of regime.

The numerical strength of center-left parties in the Reichstag made them the obvious candidates to form and lead a new government. Handing power to center-left forces also seemed the only way to prevent insurgencies from becoming more widespread. The previously marginalized but electorally powerful SPD thus moved to the center of the Weimar stage. But SPD leaders faced many difficulties. Apart from labor union leaders, they had few elite allies. Most existing elites refused to accept the former SPD outcasts as the core of an altered political elite. In particular, conflict-of-interest rules under the old regime had prevented civil servants from becoming members of the SPD and had thus contributed to a homogeneously conservative political out-

look among leaders of the bureaucracy. Social Democrat Party ministers nevertheless had to rely on these bureaucratic leaders, who quite frequently used their expertise to subvert the programs of their new political masters. Reflecting their generally humble social backgrounds, moreover, SPD leaders lacked assertiveness and were overly cautious and deferential in dealing with the civil service and other elites.

The obstacles to cooperation between SPD leaders and other party elites were exacerbated by the fact that political leaders were, in general, ill-prepared to operate a parliamentary democracy. They had little understanding of their new responsibilities in democratic governance, they shared no code of democratic political behavior, and they lacked any serious consensus about democratic institutions and procedures. Their conflicting ideological goals had not been tempered, and their clientelistic practices remained unchanged. A deep socioeconomic cleavage continued to separate the Social Democrats from their bourgeois opponents. In short, the crisis and resulting regime transition of 1918–19 were unaccompanied by a significant change in the mode of elite behavior. Accommodation and cooperation were conspicuously absent, and as a consequence all coalition governments in the Weimar regime were highly unstable. When another crisis in the form of drastic economic decline began in the late 1920s, even short-lived coalitions with majority support in the Reichstag became untenable.

Weimar Breakdown and the Nazi Ascendancy

While there is agreement that constitutional and economic factors exacerbated the Weimar Republic's political problems,² the refusal of most elite groups to cooperate within a democratic institutional framework and to bridge traditional cleavage lines was clearly the primary cause of its breakdown. Unchecked mass mobilizations by competing and disunited elites fueled widespread public dissatisfaction and eventually brought Germany to the brink of civil war. Political pragmatism was denounced for the "foul compromises" it involved, and extremists on the left and the right regularly blamed the "party system" for the country's economic and political woes. The party system was, in fact, a classic example of polarized pluralism (Sartori, 1976), involving a centrifugal "politics of outbidding" and a consequent erosion of electoral support for moderate parties. This was shown clearly by the rapidly increasing support for extremist parties during the last electoral period in which a government backed by a parliamentary majority could be formed. Between 1928 and 1930, the Communist Party (KPD)

share of the vote rose from 10.6 percent to 13.1 percent, and the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) vote increased from 2.6 percent to 18.3 percent. In the July 1932 election, the combined share of these two anti-system parties rose to 51.6 percent (NSDAP: 37.3 percent; KPD: 14.3 percent; cf. Bracher, Funke, and Jacobsen, 1988, 630–31).

A special feature of the Weimar constitution nevertheless provided a way to avoid total government paralysis. This was the (in)famous Clause 48, which gave the directly elected president the right to issue emergency decrees. Its purpose was to ensure that governmental institutions would function even in the absence of a government supported by a Reichstag majority. While the first president, Friedrich Ebert, only rarely made use of this instrument, his successor, Wilhelm von Hindenburg, increasingly invoked it to avoid ungovernability in the midst of an ever more drastic economic crisis, which by 1932 saw six million persons, more than 40 percent of the labor force, unemployed (Lepsius, 1978, 61; Bracher, Funke, and Jacobsen, 1988, 636–37). In the summer of 1930, the last majority-backed government resigned, and Hindenburg appointed Heinrich Brüning, of the Center Party, to head a government that relied entirely on the president's emergency decree power. This in effect restored the dual structure of government that had existed during the German Empire, changing the Weimar regime's fundamental character even before its final collapse in 1933.

Elite recruitment patterns reflected these developments. At the beginning of the Weimar Republic, members of the executive were drawn predominantly from parliament in conformance with the customary pattern of parliamentary democratic regimes. By the end of the 1920s, however, the predemocratic pattern of recruiting government members from the administration and from among nonpolitical experts (the so-called *Fachleute*) had reemerged (Best, 1989). Moreover, entirely new political elites had emerged at the head of movements situated at both extremes of the political spectrum, the communists on the left and the Nazis on the right. The social composition of these new elites differed greatly from that of the established civil service, military, and business elites, as well as from the elites of the democratic parties. Consequently, elite change was more pronounced during the second half of the 1920s than during the 1918–19 regime transition. However, this change did not derive from elite circulation within established institutions and organizations; rather, it resulted from basic changes in the structure of the political party system.

The rise of the Nazis would not have been possible without the support of sizable portions of the established elites, who perceived them as a vehicle for restoring their own dominance. The Nazi regime's initial measures during and after 1933 appeared to confirm this perception.

They were mainly directed against the left-wing elites and their supporters, allowing right-wing and centrist elites to continue their usual activities. But the Nazi elite was in no way inclined to share power with traditional conservative groups, and it gradually assumed control over ever wider areas of Germany's political and social life. After Hitler was appointed chancellor in January 1933, the Nazis first abolished what remained of the Weimar parliamentary system. By the so-called Enabling Act of March 1933, the Nazi government granted itself legislative powers and curbed its responsibility to the Reichstag. The Enabling Act was passed by the Reichstag with the approval of the center-right parties. Within a year, the Nazi government subjected all important interest groups (labor unions, churches, professional associations, and even business associations) to government control by installing Nazi loyalists in strategic leadership positions. Recognizing the particular importance of the mass media, the Nazi government also took full control of the state-owned radio system as early as the spring of 1933 (Diller, 1980).

This "streamlining" (*Gleichschaltung*) of German society was accomplished without dismantling established organizational structures. Most elites were allowed to remain in their positions, provided they accept the Nazi policy guidelines for their organizations. Acquiescence by the majority of German elites in the gradual usurpation of power was remarkable. Rainer Baum (1981) attributes it to the prior absence of elite consensus about standards of political conduct, which he traces back to the cultural heterogeneity and value dissensus of the wider German society. Baum argues that this heterogeneity and dissensus fostered a "moral indifference" among German elites that enabled them to collaborate in even the worst atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime.

Initial continuity in organizational structure and elite position holding were part of the Nazis' legalistic strategy that was intended to reassure established elites and the populace. However, from the mid-1930s on, once the Nazis had entrenched themselves, the established elites became expendable, and they were increasingly replaced by Nazi Party functionaries. The business elite was the only one that was left largely untouched. Cooperation between political and business elites resembled that which occurred during the years of the German Empire. The Nazi and imperial regimes both provided favorable conditions for German business by disciplining labor and supporting industrial development.

The West German Elites and Regime after 1945

Germany's defeat and unconditional surrender in 1945 constituted a fundamental political crisis that involved the Nazi regime's total dis-

mantling. However, the western Allied Forces (the United States, Britain, France) had no inclination to replace basic social and economic structures in the western parts of Germany, which they controlled. Already in the summer of 1945, they permitted democratic parties to reorganize or form, and they thereafter gradually transferred governmental power to these parties. The first postwar state elections were held in 1946–47.

The United States High Command initiated two programs aimed at a far-reaching transformation of the political system and political culture within the American-occupied zone. Through a denazification program, all former Nazi collaborators were to be eliminated from public life. An accompanying reeducation program was supposed to promote democratic values, especially among young Germans. While the latter program was a success, the former was doomed to fail, because it falsely assumed the existence of a pool of anti-Nazi Germans who were capable of taking over all relevant elite positions. This seriously underestimated the extent to which the Nazis had penetrated German society. In reality, practically all holders of senior positions in the civil service had been actively involved with the Nazi regime, either as party members or as loyal supporters. Because there were no qualified candidates to replace them, they were allowed to remain in their positions, or they were only temporarily displaced. Thus, the extent of change in elite composition in 1945 and after was not as far-reaching as many had expected and hoped.

Only in the political and media elites was there thorough change, with persons unconnected to the Nazi regime taking all important positions. The western Allied Forces instituted a policy of licensing the political parties that could compete in electoral contests. This amounted to reconstructing the party system from top to bottom, and it fostered the emergence of a new political elite. Its core consisted of politicians such as the SPD's Kurt Schumacher, who had been prominent in centrist or left-wing parties (including communist) during the Weimar Republic. But the bulk of the new political elite were newcomers who started their political careers during the immediate postwar years and who could not have been involved in the Nazi regime because of their youth (Zapf, 1965, 148; Zelinsky, 1979).

The conditions in which reconstruction of the party system took place not only brought a substantially new group of politicians to power but also encouraged fundamental changes in the roles of political parties and the nature of party competition. The licensing policy resulted in the formation of a four-party system consisting of two new and two traditional parties. The founding of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and its Bavarian affiliate, the Christian Social Union (CSU), in 1945 was a deliberate attempt to overcome the religious

cleavage between Catholics and Protestants. The formation of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) at about the same time ended the long-standing division of the liberal movement into left-wing libertarians and right-wing national liberals. Continuity in both organization and political outlook was, however, greater in the SPD, whose leaders conclusively abandoned their socialist, pacifist, and anticlerical orthodoxies only in the late 1950s. Like the SPD, the Communist Party was also able to rebuild its pre-Nazi organization. But the party failed to reestablish itself as an important political force, mainly because in the eyes of most voters it was associated with the simultaneous communist takeover in East Germany.

One of the major problems after any democratic transition is the fate of the former ruling party. The allied powers solved this by completely dismantling Nazi party organization and banning all organized Nazi-like political activities. This made it inevitable, however, that former Nazi party members would try to join other parties. Although a systematic study is still lacking, there is sufficient evidence that this never jeopardized the democratic character of the other parties, because they were able to make a firm commitment to democratic values and procedures a requirement for access to their leadership positions.³

The media elite and the outlets it operated were reorganized in similar fashion. Until 1949, a mandatory licensing system was in effect, and the editors who applied for a publishing license were scrutinized for possible collaboration with the Nazi regime. Initially, radio stations were controlled directly by the occupation authorities. After mid-1948, a broadcasting system run by Germans was gradually built under Allied supervision, which continued until 1955. As in the political realm, the result was a new media elite that was recruited from three different groups: journalists who had worked for newspapers that had been banned by the Nazis or that had at least retained some independent stance after 1933, public figures whose democratic credentials were beyond doubt but who had little or no previous media experience, and many young journalists who were still at early stages of their professional careers (Bausch, 1980; Meyn, 1968).

In other elite sectors, changes were less sweeping. Apart from individuals who had been prominent Nazi collaborators, no systematic purges took place, although the postwar careers of some persons were slowed temporarily. Because the overriding objective was rapid reconstruction from the war's ravages, criteria of professional expertise took precedence over considerations of political purity (Edinger, 1960; Zapf, 1965, 145 ff.). Elite continuity was greatest within the churches that had been able to retain a certain degree of autonomy throughout the years of Nazi dominance. Continuity was also pronounced in the civil service

elite, where initial attempts at thorough denazification were soon abandoned in order to obtain effective administrators (Zelinsky, 1979, 226 ff.; Derlien and Lock, 1994, 62; Derlien, 1993, 328). The business organizations that had been part of the German Labor Front created by the Nazis but had otherwise carried on their activities with only minor Nazi interference were allowed to reinstate their old names and resume functioning. There was a high degree of continuity in the leadership of these business organizations between the Nazi and FRG regimes, with nearly half of all executive officers retaining their positions (Tornow, 1979, 250 ff.). Labor movement leaders, on the other hand, saw the necessity to reorganize trade unions fundamentally in order to overcome their marked weakness during the Weimar regime. A unified labor federation (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, cf. Bernecker, 1979) was created, and its constituent unions were organized according to industries (*Industriegewerkschaften*) rather than occupations or ideological and party affiliations. Despite this organizational discontinuity, many trade union leaders from the pre-1933 period returned to elite positions.

Lewis Edinger (1960, 66–67), using data he collected on members of West German elites in 1956, summarizes the extent of elite continuity between the Nazi and FRG regimes. These data show that fewer than one-tenth of leading postwar politicians had been politically active between 1933 and 1940. By contrast, and with the exceptions of the labor union elite (0 percent) and the media elite (34 percent), at least two-fifths of the other West German elites in 1956 had worked in the same sector between 1933 and 1940.⁴ These figures partly contradict critics who have charged that former Nazi officials continued to play an important role in the political life of postwar West Germany (e.g., Greiffenhagen and Greiffenhagen, 1979, 46). But this charge of an essential continuity in social structure and value orientations is certainly correct as regards the majority of West Germans. It is also true that most persons who had begun their professional careers during the Nazi period were able to continue their careers after the war. However, such career continuity is probably inevitable after the fall of any authoritarian or totalitarian regime with which the professionals who worked in public and private bureaucracies were forced to comply. The charge of Nazi continuity is, to this extent, misleading or innocuous.

Edinger's data also show that only about one-fifth of the elites in 1956 had participated in the political opposition against the Nazis. Some of those who did not participate had withdrawn to "inner exile" (*innere Emigration*) by giving up public office and working in the private sector or by forgoing careers that would have required political collaboration. But the dominant pattern had been acquiescence. To this

extent, the majority of persons making up the elites of the early Federal Republic may justly be described as Nazi fellow travelers. Edinger concludes that, "[The] totalitarian elite was not succeeded by a counter-elite, but rather by a coalition of elites whose members were drawn largely from the ranks of those individuals who had been neither strong and consistent proponents nor opponents of the totalitarian regime" (Edinger, 1960, 76). According to Edinger, it is unrealistic to expect that a totalitarian elite can be replaced by a democratic counterelite (1960, 76 ff.). This is not because a totalitarian regime lacks opponents but because such opponents usually lack the experience and expertise necessary for effective elite position holding, a shortcoming many fellow travelers do not have.

The East German Elites and Regime after 1945

In Soviet-occupied eastern Germany during and after 1945, the Soviet military administration effected a systematic elite replacement, which was much more swift and extensive than that which took place after the Nazis came to power in 1933. In accordance with communist ideology, this replacement extended to the only major elite that had never been seriously bothered by the Nazis, the business elite. In all important eastern German sectors and organizations, old elites were replaced by members or loyal followers of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which itself resulted from the forced merger of the preexisting Communist and Social Democratic parties. Criteria of expertise were of secondary importance in filling postwar elite positions, and this was a main reason why effective administrative and economic structures were rebuilt at a much slower pace than in western Germany.

Imposed from above, the new GDR elites and regime were not accepted as legitimate by most eastern Germans. The hierarchy of the SED quickly became the only channel for elite recruitment. A differentiation of elite groups by generation, societal sector, or party membership was, therefore, quite limited. In the late 1960s, Peter Christian Ludz (1968) argued that the underground, conspiratorial background of the post-1945 eastern German leadership had fostered the formation of a closed inner elite circle (*strategische Clique*) whose power rested entirely on the military power of the Soviet Union and whose members felt insecure in their positions. The elite's internal coherence derived from the uniform profession of a single ideology, which was the Marxist-Leninist variant of socialism. In the terms put forth by Dogan and Higley in chapter 1, the GDR elite was "ideocratically united."

After construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the GDR enjoyed a

short period of economic and political consolidation. Cautious attempts at reforming the economic system led observers to expect that the generation of prewar communist leaders would be gradually replaced by a group of younger, more technocratically oriented elites. Ludz considered these new elites to be an "institutionalized counter-elite." He predicted that the process of generational elite replacement would lead to a more pragmatic and successful set of economic policies such that the totalitarian state-socialist system would give way to a "consultative authoritarianism."⁵ As it turned out, however, the old communist leaders held on to power, and the fledgling reform policies were soon abandoned. The GDR elite was, in fact, renewed only marginally during the regime's four-decade existence. Accordingly, the average age of its elite members increased considerably. For example, among members of the SED Central Committee, it went from forty-six during the 1960s to sixty-one during the late 1980s, and among Politburo members it went from fifty-two to sixty-five in the same period (Schneider, 1994, 78 ff.; Meyer, 1991, 151 ff.).

Scholars and other observers have debated whether the GDR regime's fall in 1989 was brought about by a revolution or by a process of collapse or implosion stemming from its sclerotic elites and organizational structures. The revolutionary interpretation is made plausible by the mass demonstrations that took place and that culminated in the communist leadership's swift exit. On the other hand, the gerontocratic and monopolistic nature of the GDR elite, whose most powerful members were completely out of touch with East German socioeconomic realities, is consistent with the thesis of a regime implosion. Because the implosion of a regime encourages widespread public protests (cf. Di Palma, 1993), the same crisis may look different from different theoretical perspectives, and this makes any firm classification of the 1989 crisis difficult.

Reunification and Elite Transfer After the 1989 Crisis

The elite changes that occurred in eastern Germany after 1989 were much more extensive than those which took place in western Germany after 1945. This was, to some extent, inevitable given the age structure of the SED elite and because state control of society had been much broader in the GDR than under the Nazi regime.⁶ In particular, private business had been virtually wiped out. In GDR politics, the so-called bloc parties enjoyed only a formal independence and were in reality tied closely to the SED. Similarly, instead of independent voluntary associations, there were only the "mass organizations" created by the

SED for mobilizational purposes: the trade union federation (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, ADGB), cultural organizations (Kulturbund, Schriftstellerverband), the youth organization (FDJ), and a women's organization. The bloc parties and mass organizations all officially acknowledged the SED's "leading role." In elections, all candidates were included on joint candidate or "unity" lists (*Einheitslisten*) and the distribution of parliamentary seats among them was determined beforehand. Only the Protestant and Catholic churches were able to retain a limited amount of autonomy. But because the majority of East Germans were without religious affiliation, church influence was limited.

During the 1980s, a dissident movement began to form under the umbrella of the Protestant church and among artists and writers. But its opportunities for organized activity were quite restricted. Only after the numbers of legal and illegal emigrants began to swell in the late summer of 1989 did the dissidents become more assertive and start to form new parties. During the short period between autumn 1989 and spring 1990, the bloc parties and mass organizations of the GDR reorganized and claimed full autonomy from the SED. This reorganization involved the replacement of old leaders by younger ones. As new political parties and voluntary organizations proliferated, the media also claimed independence from political control. In rapid fashion, the elite structure was becoming more pluralistic.

This process of elite change accelerated throughout 1990. However, developments at both elite and mass levels were increasingly shaped by the dynamics of the reunification process. Once the border between East and West Germany was opened in November 1989, attempts to preserve an independent GDR were probably doomed, if for no other reason than that East Germany's economic condition relative to West Germany's simply did not permit the former's meaningful independence. As early as December 1989, West Germany's federal chancellor Helmut Kohl announced a ten-point plan for reunifying the two states. In East Germany, the former bloc parties and mass organizations immediately began to prepare for mergers with their West German counterparts.

It was obvious that the two states could not be reunified on equal terms; the much larger, richer, more powerful, and more stable West Germany would necessarily predominate. This quickly became apparent in the mergers of political parties and voluntary associations. In addition to their much smaller size, the East German parties and associations disposed of less well-developed organizational infrastructures, few or no funds, and they were greatly weakened by having to cope

with turbulent internal conflicts triggered by the GDR regime's sudden collapse.

The sweeping elite change that took place in eastern Germany after 1945 had been accomplished by deliberately accepting a slower pace of postwar reconstruction. After 1989, in contrast, the shortage of candidates for leadership positions with the experience and expertise to work effectively within yet another new set of political and economic structures meant that vacant positions were frequently filled by western Germans with the necessary credentials. In other words, there was a widespread transfer of elites from western to eastern Germany. This was partly the consequence of the distinctive demographic configuration of Germany's division, in which western Germans outnumbered eastern Germans four to one. The result was a rapid and successful transformation of virtually all political and economic structures in eastern Germany. This widespread and probably historically unprecedented transfer of elites has often been perceived as a kind of "colonization" by western Germany. Consequently, eastern Germany today possesses only a few indigenous leaders who can serve as objects of political identification and loyalty, and this has fostered strong alienation and bitterness among many who live in that part of the country.

Data from a new study of German elites, carried out in 1995, reveal the extent of eastern German under-representation within the elites of united Germany (Büerklin and Rebenstorf, 1996). Only 11.9 percent of the more than three thousand elite persons studied lived in the GDR before 1989. The proportions of former GDR inhabitants are highest within the political elite (32 percent) and lowest in the military elite (0 percent), the business elite (0.4 percent) and the civil service elite (2.5 percent). When pre-1989 party memberships and political offices are examined, it becomes apparent that the old GDR political elite was swept away. Fewer than half of those elected to the parliaments of the five eastern German states in late 1990 had been members of the SED or one of the bloc parties before 1989, and only about one in ten had held a political office (Derlien and Lock, 1994, 75 ff.). Turnover in the political elite is equally apparent when the composition of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor to the SED, is examined. Only slightly more than a third (eleven out of thirty) of the PDS deputies in the present Bundestag were SED members before 1990. Another eleven deputies held political or administrative positions in the GDR, but their positions were at the local or regional level only. Most of the PDS leaders are fairly young persons who worked as teachers or academics before 1990. They come from professional backgrounds that are very different from those of the old SED leaders. On the other hand,

continuity at subelite levels has been greater within the PDS than within the other parties now active in eastern Germany.

The East German dissident movement of the 1980s has not played much of a role as a recruitment reservoir for the new elites. As already noted, this movement in the GDR was especially weak, in part because, for discontented citizens of the GDR, "exit" was always a more promising alternative than "voice" (Hirschman, 1992). Veterans of the East German opposition groups that did manage to form have lacked the political experience and the organizational basis necessary for effective political parties in reunified Germany. As former dissidents, moreover, they mostly acted out of idealistic motives, without much clear idea of the kind of political system they sought and without really aspiring to elite positions. Only one of the several opposition groups in the GDR, Bündnis '90, enjoyed even modest electoral success in the reunified regime. However, its leadership soon recognized that the group could only survive by merging with the (formerly West) German Greens, and this was accomplished in 1993. A few former dissidents have found their way into the leadership of the established political parties. Others have held on to their ideals and become outspoken critics of parliamentary democracy, which in their eyes has little to do with their democratic ideals. The great majority of former dissidents, however, have given up politics in favor of professional careers (Pollack, 1995, 41).

The 1995 German elite study also reveals the composition of elites outside the political sphere (Bürklin and Rebenstorf, 1996). Given formal qualification requirements, it is not surprising that the elite transfer from western to eastern Germany was most pronounced in the civil service. In addition to the fact that most of the federal administration has remained in Bonn, where it is staffed overwhelmingly by western Germans, the proportion of western Germans among secretaries in the several eastern German state governments amounts to about one-third. In the academic and media elites located in eastern Germany, the proportion of western Germans is close to one-half. In other sectors, such as business, voluntary associations, the military, and the judiciary, no elite transfer occurred, since practically all major companies, interest associations, military bases, and federal courts have remained in the western part of the country. This may change, however, with the transfer of federal government institutions to Berlin planned for 1999.

In some sectors, one has to study a broader stratum of leadership positions in order to grasp the scope of the elite transfer that has occurred. Thus, only a fifth of the directors of East German enterprises privatized by the Treuhandanstalt⁷ and only a quarter of the judges at the labor courts in the eastern German states are eastern Germans (Solga, 1996, 104). Within the bureaucracies of the eastern German

states, the proportions of personnel from western Germany are especially large where legal training is a job qualification, such as the ministries of justice, economics, and finance. They are smaller in ministries that deal mainly with technical matters, such as agriculture, environmental issues, and traffic management (Derlien, 1993, 328). Because the holders of these subelite and middle-level positions presumably constitute the pools from which elites will be recruited, it will be several decades until the western skewing in German elite composition is overcome.

The German Patterns and Their Implications

This review of political crises, regime change, and elite change in Germany leads to three major conclusions. The first concerns the extent and consequences of conflicts that derive from crises. Crises that result in regime changes usually stem from deep divisions within a society. Opposing groups of political elites normally blame one another for a crisis, and this mutual blaming is a serious liability for any new regime that follows. A crucial precondition for the success of the new political regime, especially if it is a newly created democracy, is, therefore, that the old regime has been so seriously discredited by the crisis that brought it down that it is no longer perceived as a viable political alternative by the bulk of elite groups and the majority of citizens. This was the outcome in two of Germany's four major crises during the twentieth century. In 1945, there could not be the shadow of a doubt that Nazi Germany bore sole responsibility for the outbreak of World War II and for Germany's subsequent devastation. Similarly, the breakdown of the GDR regime resulted from its obvious failure to govern East Germany effectively. A poor economic record, mass emigration, and widespread public protests testified to that failure. According to Guiseppi Di Palma (1993), dismal economic situations were especially delegitimizing for the state-socialist systems in Eastern Europe exactly because the promise of prosperity was so central a part of communist doctrine.

The outcomes of the 1918–19 and 1933 crises were very different because of the elite disunity that existed both before and after them. Opposing political camps offered conflicting explanations for the looming political crises and then, subsequently, for their occurrence. Samuel P. Huntington (1991) has observed that every regime change produces "losers" who indulge in nostalgia for the old system. In a similar vein, Guillermo O'Donnell (1992, 25 ff.) has argued that new democratic regimes encounter greater difficulties where a preceding authoritarian

regime was relatively successful economically than where the preceding regime produced economic disaster. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany had become one of the major industrial nations of the world. The imperial regime was, therefore, widely seen as having fostered economic development and success. Because of the high costs of World War I, the country suffered a major economic setback. By 1918, industrial production had fallen to 57 percent of its prewar level. Moreover, economic recovery was achingly slow; it was only in 1927 that Germany regained its prewar level of industrial production (Bracher, Funke, and Jacobsen, 1988, 637). At the same time, governmental instability was pronounced. Elites on the right as well as the left blamed the democratic political system for the country's economic miseries. Right-wing elites denied that Germany had been one of the driving forces behind the outbreak of World War I, propagating instead the "stabbed-in-the-back" idea that it was revolution at home that caused Germany's defeat. On the left, communist and radical socialist elites blamed the capitalist economic system for the continuing miseries. They held the Social Democrats responsible for preventing necessary changes in the capitalist system and for collaborating with bourgeois forces. Thus, opposing elite explanations of the causes of the old regime's downfall and of subsequent difficulties were a central legacy of the 1918–19 political crisis, and it constituted one of the Weimar Republic's major liabilities. The legacy was erased only with the Nazis' ascendancy in 1933. Their legalistic strategy of claiming political leadership while at the same time preserving capitalist economic structures and permitting a high degree of elite continuity (except among left-wing parties and trade unions) contributed to the widespread expectation that the new Nazi regime would restore the stability and order for which German elites and their followers longed after the turbulent 1920s.

A second conclusion concerns the extent of elite change that is necessary to create a stable democratic regime. The German record suggests that a fundamental transformation of the political elite is the most crucial precondition for democratic stability. Only a new political elite can effect a clean and credible break with the old unstable and often undemocratic regime. Such an elite transformation involves creating a new and competitive party system. A previously dominant party must lose its preeminent position. The danger, of course, is that the new competitive system will be polarized, thereby ensuring governmental instability and undermining democratic legitimacy. Thus, it is necessary to avoid both extremes of continued single-party dominance and party-system polarization.

In western Germany after 1945, the presence of the Western occupying powers enforced the complete dismantling of the Nazi Party. Likewise, after 1989 in eastern Germany the SED, though it did not disappear altogether, lost its previously dominant position in several ways. It was largely discredited because of its responsibility for the GDR's poor economic performance. It was stripped of most of its substantial financial assets. And on the basis of large-scale infusions of money and personnel from western Germany, other parties soon became fully competitive. Thus, the elements of the SED that survived the 1989 crisis were forced to undertake a fundamental reorganization and find their place, in the guise of the PDS, as only one of several competing parties. We can say that in the crises of 1945 and 1989 outside help was crucial for the development of a competitive and nonpolarized party system (just as intervention from outside, in the form of Soviet occupation, was crucial to the sweeping regime and elite change in eastern Germany after 1945).

The third conclusion concerns the recruitment bases of new elites after democratization. The German experience of two transitions from totalitarian to democratic regimes (first from the Nazi regime to the FRG regime in western Germany and then from the state-socialist regime in eastern Germany to the reunified German state) confirms Edinger's (1960) observation that totalitarian regimes effectively prevent the development of a counterelite that is capable of running a country after the fall of such a regime. Opponents of a totalitarian regime are normally too weak and too politically inexperienced to constitute an important recruitment base for a posttotalitarian elite. Instead, the members of the new elite must come predominantly from the "grey zone" of individuals who were neither important leaders nor strong opponents of the totalitarian regime (Baylis, 1995, 10). As Edinger observes, in the wake of a totalitarian regime, extensive elite transformation is only possible in two ways: either by replacing existing local elites with "foreigners" or through extensive socioeconomic dislocation (Edinger, 1960, 80). Elite change in eastern Germany occurred in both ways. After 1945, the Nazi elite was completely replaced, amid total economic ruin and dislocation, by communist loyalists who mostly lacked the expertise needed to run complex organizations and who could therefore cling to power only by constructing and perpetuating another totalitarian regime. After 1989, elite transformation was accomplished through a massive transfer of "foreign" elites from western Germany. This latter process was, however, almost certainly a historical exception, and thus it cannot serve as a model for many countries.

Notes

1. The following are the major studies dealing with German elites that are based on systematically collected data: Zapf (1965) for the period 1919–69; Best (1988, 1989) for the period 1867–1933; Edinger (1960) for 1945; Hoffmann-Lange (1992) for the period 1968–81; and Bürklin and Rebenstorf (1997) for 1995. Additionally, the historical analysis by Bendix (1978) includes scattered evidence on German elites before World War I. Ralf Dahrendorf's (1967) well-known analysis of German elite structure is entirely based on the data collected by Wolfgang Zapf, who was his student, but it presents more sweeping generalizations about the changing character of German elites from national unification in 1871 until the early 1960s.

2. Among the constitutional factors, the excessive proportionality of the electoral law and the emergency powers of the president were of primary importance.

3. It is not known if this commitment was always sincere, and resulted from a true conversion, or if only lip service was paid to the altered situation. But this seems to be of only minor importance, because the postwar generation of party leaders were committed democrats. Moreover, as the parties became consolidated, a turn back towards nondemocratic politics became increasingly unlikely.

4. The numbers for the war years are smaller, since about one-tenth of the elites had served in the military between 1944 and 1945. Therefore, 1940 was taken as the year of reference.

5. As Higley, Kullberg, and Pakulski (1996, 135–37) have observed, an elite transformation of this kind did in fact occur in Hungary during the 1970s and 1980s, and it facilitated a relatively smooth transition to a democratic regime during 1989–90 (see also Jacek Wasilewski's discussion in chapter 7).

6. This is not to say that the GDR was more repressive than the Nazi regime, which in fact it was not. In the GDR, as in other Eastern European communist regimes, political repression was considerably relaxed during the 1980s, and a certain amount of political criticism was tolerated (cf. Di Palma, 1993; Higley, Kullberg, and Pakulski, 1996).

7. The Treuhandanstalt was a public agency created in 1990 to serve as a supervisory body for all state-owned enterprises of the former GDR. Its main purpose was to oversee the privatization of eastern German industry, finance corporations, and commercial enterprises by negotiating contracts with private buyers. It existed until the end of 1994, by which time its task had been largely accomplished.

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