The economy is home

Regional structural change in biographies and the expectations of the population

Jochen Roose

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At a glance

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to trigger economic upheaval and changes that will affect the lives of many people. We cannot yet foresee exactly how they will experience these changes. Nevertheless, a comparison with the current and former coal regions of Germany, which have undergone fundamental structural change over the past few years and decades, may offer some insight.

Study

In four current and former coal regions, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung conducted a representative, standardised survey with open, in-depth interviews asking how people are affected by structural change and how they experience it. In four regions (Ruhr area, Saarland, Chemnitz region, and Lusatia), respondents were asked how their job history had been affected by unemployment, how they feel about economic development, and what role they would ascribe to politics in this context. These questions were compared against the rest of Germany in a representative survey. The study is based on 3,817 representatively selected telephone interviews and 20 in-depth interviews per region.

Results

A comparison of job histories in regions of structural change

According to their own statements, the career paths of people in the regions considered by the study are not any less favourable than those of people in other regions. Nevertheless, there is a clear divide between eastern and western Germany.

More specifically:

- Experience of unemployment in a person's job history is more widespread in eastern Germany than in western Germany. In the coal regions considered by the study, respondents did not experience unemployment any more frequently or for longer periods than people from other regions in the same part of the country (eastern or western Germany).

- Concern about personal job security was equally frequent or less frequent in the coal regions considered by the study than in the rest of the same part of the country.

- Following a period of unemployment, 42 percent of respondents felt that their new job was a step up (44 percent in western Germany, 35 percent in eastern Germany). The percentage of respondents in coal regions who felt this way was similar to the average across the respective part of the country.

- Losing one's job is experienced as a drastically negative event. Loss of income is not the only factor; the loss of social integration and meaning also play a role.

Attachment to home and regional economic structure

Many people feel deeply connected to their homes and comfortable within their housing environments. Respondents described the characteristics of their home region in (very) positive terms. This also extended to the economic structure. Change in regional economic structure was experienced as a painful loss, regardless of whether the respondents were economically affected by it.

More specifically:

- A majority of respondents (60 percent) have always lived in the region where they are currently living. This proportion was somewhat higher in the coal regions considered by the study.
- A majority of respondents do not wish to leave their region for a more attractive job. A similar proportion of respondents felt this way in the coal regions considered by the study.
- Around half of respondents were very satisfied with their housing environments, and another 40 percent were satisfied. The proportions were similar across different regions.
- The regional economy is a characteristic of the home region. The loss of characteristic companies and industry sectors is perceived as very painful.
- Housing and living satisfaction is higher among respondents who consider their regional economy to be strong.

Structural change and politics

Besides local businesses, many people have special expectations or hopes regarding political support for the regional economy. While respondents tended to have few concrete ideas about desirable measures, they expected politicians to have an overall concept for the direction in which the regional economy should develop. This can be understood as part of a new conception of home.

More specifically:

- Around 40 percent of respondents expressed the opinion that the regional economy has changed substantially or very substantially over the past ten years.
- Around one third of respondents tended to think that there had been an improvement. This proportion was higher in the Chemnitz region and considerably lower in the Ruhr area.
- The activities of the Commission for Growth, Structural Change and Employment (Coal Commission) were of great concern to respondents. This was especially true for respondents in Lusatia and employees working in the mining industry. The discussions and recommendations of the Commission tended to be viewed negatively in the regions considered by the study, and there were strong doubts about the reliability of its promisses to these regions.

- Slightly more people considered that politics has improved the regional economy, as opposed to making it worse. In the Chemnitz region, substantially more respondents considered there to have been an improvement (55 percent) than a deterioration (29 percent).

- According to respondents, the CDU is the party that is most capable of helping the region with its economic situation (20 to 27 percent, depending on the region). However, just as many respondents thought this goal was unachievable by any party or did not feel confident enough to answer (between 22 and 29 percent in each case). The SPD was named by 16 percent of respondents in the Ruhr area only. Everywhere else, the SPD and all other parties were cited by a single-digit percentage of respondents.

- People expected and lamented the lack of an "overall concept" for structural change, i. e. a guiding policy for the direction of economic development that also supports identification.

The study demonstrates the scope of structural change. Economic changes affecting jobs are not the only problem; anchors for personal identity are also being lost. The regional economy, with its characteristic companies and industry sectors, is a part of people's home. Structural change amounts to losing one's home, which is mourned beyond the economic ramifications themselves. The economy is part of home, and the loss of regional economic structure is painful. In addition to supporting structural change, politicians must address this pain, for example by remembrance in museums, symbolic recognition, and a recognisable plan for the future that also offers an alternative for identification.

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1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is exposing the economy of Germany to pressure in ways and with consequences that cannot be foreseen as of May 2020. We must expect that some industries will face a deep crisis in the medium or long term, leading to fundamental change. Although it is difficult for us to predict today what the economy might look like after the pandemic ends, one thing has already become clear: it will be very different from just a few months ago. Nor can we foresee the consequences of this change on people. We cannot say today how people's job histories will change, which disruptions they will face, how they will understand these changes, and what the role of politics will be in this process. But the answers to these questions are greatly important, and so it is worth searching for at least some partial similarities with developments and experiences from the past. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic and its anticipated economic consequences also shine a new light on this study on how people experience structural change in current and former coal regions of Germany.

The present study was conducted and concluded before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Much of the analysis was performed before the pandemic. The study was motivated by the decision of the federal government to withdraw from coal mining and coal-fired power generation in Germany. The final report of the Commission for Growth, Structural Change and Employment (also known as the "Coal Commission" for short) proposes to phase out coal-fired power generation by 2038, but also suggests various measures to support affected regions (BMWi 2019). The Structural Strengthening Act *(Strukturstärkungsgesetz)* of the federal government provides a legal framework for supporting these regions. Additional measures will follow at the state and municipal levels.

With the work of the Coal Commission and the ensuing laws and funding instruments that are currently being passed, we are witnessing a political process to actively support structural change in regions affected by the phase-out of coal. Unlike economic or technological developments, which unfold relatively quickly and less predictably, there is a will to purposefully shape structural change in parallel to the phase-out of coal-fired power generation.

The regions in question are therefore of particular interest to this study, which examines structural change and how people perceive it. But the study is not limited to the change unfolding in (former) coal regions. The economy is subject to an ongoing process of change. In 2018, around 670,000 new businesses were registered in Germany, and around 640,000 businesses were deregistered (source: Federal Statistical Office 2020). These numbers are driven by various causes and developments, innovations and shifts in economic structure across every region of Germany.

For individuals, such changes are often associated with deep biographical fractures. Starting a new job is a life decision that can have far-reaching ramifications. Founding a company can be a risk that may determine the future course of one's life. Similarly, a failed venture into self-employment can mark a deep turning point in one's personal life. The same is true of unemployment. Shifts in economic structure often manifest as dramatic life events within the lives of individuals.

If these changes cumulatively affect an entire region, rather than just individuals, the process acquires another dimension. Certain sectors and companies can shape entire regions. Accordingly, the prosperity of a region is largely dependent on the fate of its industries. A long-standing economic tradition might come to an end, or an influential company might move away from the region or experience a crisis, rendering economic realignment necessary for the region. Structural change usually entails this kind of regional reorientation. People are often quick to turn to politics to support the structural change or, depending on their political orientation, to manage or guarantee it.

In this study, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung explores the question of how people experience and deal with regional structural change. The study focuses on four regions currently or formerly shaped by coal mining. The Ruhr area is a large metropolitan area in western Germany which is historically marked by coal mining and coal and steel industry. Saarland, also in western Germany, is a coal mining area encompassing several smaller cities which is less industrialised than the Ruhr area. The Chemnitz region in eastern Germany used to profit from the mining (coal and ore) in the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) south of the city Chemnitz. However, coal mining ended already in the 1970s. Lusatia used to be the largest mining area for brown coal in the GDR and still contributes nearly a third of the German brown coal production.

In the coal production and mining industry, political decisions have long played an important role. The phasing out of coal mining in the Ruhr area has become the paradigmatic example of an active structural policy and extensive support for workers losing their jobs. Also the other regions in this study were subject to extensive though different political measures to support structural change. This study wishes to investigate how structural change is reflected in the lives of individuals, how people feel about the economic development of their region, and what role they ascribe to politics in connection with these issues.

The design of the study is briefly presented in Section 2, with further details in the appendix. Section 3 presents the current and former coal regions on which the study focuses in particular and gives a comparison of their economic situation. The results of the study are organised into three key topics. Section 4 shows how structural change is reflected in the job histories of individuals, in particular in terms of job changes and unemployment. The dramatic nature of losing one's job is apparent, but it also becomes clear that people often feel positively about their new career paths after a period of unemployment. Section 5 discusses perceptions of the region as a whole. People's deep attachment to their home is reflected in special appreciation for many aspects of their region, including an appreciation of its economic structure. A transformation of the regional economy during structural change therefore entails a change to their home, and this is often a painful experience. Finally, Section 6 examines structural change and the role of politics. The complex reasons behind structural change are only perceived to a limited extent. Politics plays an important role in people's perceptions and is often invested with great expectations. People are often not able to say exactly what they think should happen, but they place their trust and hope in politics to preserve quality of life in the region. These aspects are presented in detail with representative data and impressions derived from in-depth interviews. The conclusion (Section 7) summarises the key findings of the study.

The study compares the changes in coal regions against the rest of Germany. This can provide important insight for discourse on the Structural Strengthening Act. But the relevance of the study's findings is by no means limited to this specific decision or even just the coal regions. The conclusions of the study offer a more fundamental understanding of how economic change is experienced by individuals, what it means for them, and what role politics should and can play in economic change. In this broader sense, the findings also offer valuable insight into the role of politics in the structural change that will be triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Study: multilateral comparisons

This study is designed as a multiple comparison. Four regions that have been shaped by coal mining are investigated in greater detail: the Ruhr area, Saarland, the Chemnitz region, and Lusatia. Each region is discussed in comparison to eastern and western Germany, respectively.

The selection of these comparisons was motivated by the many substantial dimensions of structural change, in particular those relating to the phase-out of coal mining. The decision to discontinue coal-fired power generation in Germany will entail the end of coal production for many brown coal (lignite) mining regions 18 years from now. But coal mining in general was historically even more extensive across Germany than today, and the phase-out of black coal mining goes back much further. Several regions in Germany are currently or have previously been shaped by the mining and steel industry and are facing fundamental structural change due to the phase-out of coal production. Each of the four selected regions is strongly characterised by coal mining and, in response to the impending end of coal production, has faced the challenge of initiating and implementing structural change in different ways and at different points in time. Accordingly, they are described as “coal regions” in the following, even though in some cases actual coal production ceased long ago.

The Ruhr area has historically been shaped by coal mining – and its decline. In its large metropolitan region, a politically moderated structural change away from coal production has been under way for some 60 years. For the Ruhr area, structural change is a challenge that has been passed down through the generations.

By contrast, Lusatia is still heavily economically dependent on brown coal mining. With the reunification of Germany and the transformation from a state-controlled economy to a market economy, there has already been a fundamental structural change, one that also affected brown coal mining businesses. For Lusatia, the decision to phase out brown coal mining and power generation represents another fundamental change. Unlike the Ruhr area, Lusatia tends to be more rural than urban. This raises its own set of challenges in connection with structural change.

Saarland is another region of western Germany that was heavily marked by black coal and the phase-out of black coal mining in Germany. Like the Ruhr area, it underwent an extended exit process subsidised by the government; this process was briefly accelerated again in 2012. Saarland has a very different residential and economic structure to the Ruhr area, which manifests in considerably different structural change.

The Chemnitz region is the second region in eastern Germany considered by the study. It was historically shaped by black coal mining.[1] However, coal mining within the region was fully discontinued as early as in 1977. Mechanical engineering and automotive manufacturing were already prominent in the Chemnitz region during the GDR, and they still are today. Like all of eastern Germany, the Chemnitz region experienced a severe crisis after the Wende following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, it has recovered and is performing better than the eastern German average.

The four selected regions represent therefore a variety of constellations where economic structural change is taking place or has taken place in the wake of coal production. Of course, the selection does not capture the full diversity of the structural change in German regions. The coal and steel industries are not the only sectors that are massively changing or declining. Other industries, including shipbuilding, textiles, agriculture, and retail, have also undergone fundamental changes with extensive job losses over the past few decades, and some regions have been very severely affected. In other regions, the economy is prospering, which also implies various ongoing adjustments and transitions to new technologies and consumer habits. This diversity cannot be fully captured by a few regional studies.

This study is based on standardised telephone interviews and qualitative, in-depth interviews. In each of the four regions (Ruhr area, Saarland, Chemnitz region, and Lusatia), a minimum of 500 standardised telephone interviews were conducted. In addition, 1,803 interviews were conducted from a nationwide, random sample that also randomly included some respondents from the four regions considered by the study. The data is representative of both the population in the four regions and the population across the whole of Germany and is divided into eastern and western Germany.[2]

Another 20 in-depth interviews were additionally conducted in each of the four regions. Over a one-hour telephone conversation, the respondents were guided to report their experience and perception of economic development in their region. In each region, some of the interviewees were currently or formerly affected by the structural change in question, i. e. some of the interviewees were currently or formerly employed in the coal and steel industry (Ruhr area, Saarland, and Lusatia) or the mechanical engineering and automotive manufacturing industry (Chemnitz region). The other respondents lived in these regions but were not employed in these industries.

More details about the study design can be found in the appendix.

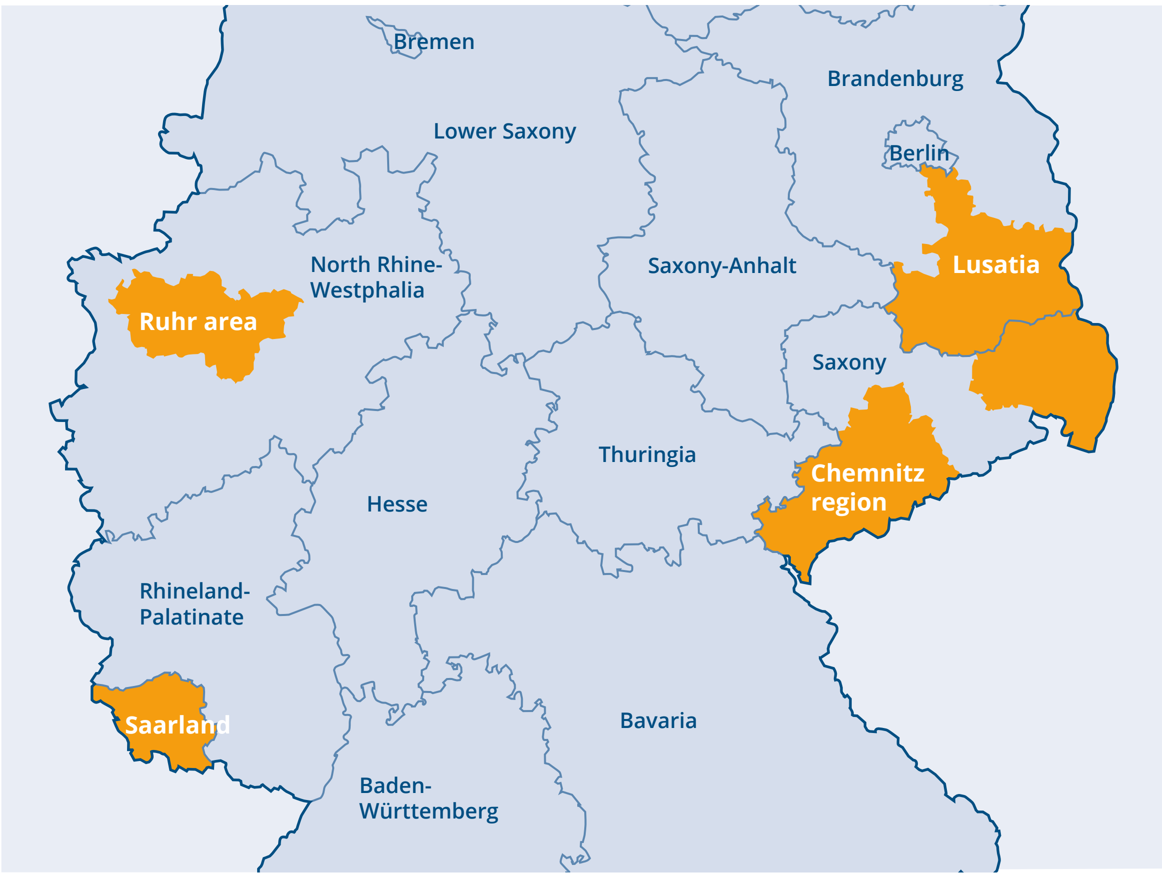
1 The name “Chemnitz region” is a translation of the German term “Region Chemnitz” adopted by the Planning Association for the Chemnitz Region *(Planungsverband Region Chemnitz)* and encompasses the areas around Chemnitz, as well as Zwickau and parts of the Erzgebirge. For more details, see the appendix on methodology (Section 8).

2 In this study, Berlin is considered part of neither eastern nor western Germany and is treated separately. Though situated in eastern Germany, Berlin belonged in its western part to West Germany and in its eastern part to East Germany until 1990. Due to inner-city mobility and people moving to Berlin from all parts of Germany, today it is inadequate to consider Berlin as part of eastern or western Germany.

3 Comparison of regions of structural change

In every region, small economic changes and large-scale structural transformations unfold according to the region's specific structure and history. The initial situation is different in each case, and the various weaknesses and potentials of a region influence its subsequent development. The character of the four regions considered by the study is briefly presented below, followed by a comparison of certain macrodata across eastern and western Germany.

Figure 1: The regions considered by the study



Source: own representation. © istock by Getty images/Rainer Lesniewski

3.1 Ruhr area

The Ruhr area contains the largest urban agglomeration in Germany, with a total of 5.1 million inhabitants. Its largest cities are Dortmund, Essen, and Duisburg, which have around half a million inhabitants each. But the Ruhr area also includes the districts of Wesel, Recklinghausen, Unna, and Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis, which have lower population density despite a large total population. The geographic boundaries typically chosen for the Ruhr area correspond to the boundaries of today's Ruhr Regional Association *(Regionalverband Ruhr),* which was originally founded in 1920 as the Residential Association for the Ruhr Coal District *(Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk).*

Besides its long history of coal production, the Ruhr area also looks back on a long history of the phase-out of coal production and politically influenced structural change (Goch 2002, Bogumil et al. 2012). The Ruhr area had been shaped by coal mining since the first half of the 19th century, after which coal mining continuously gained in importance (Czierpka 2019). Towards the end of the 19th century, because of its connections with the mining industry and the equally flourishing coal and iron processing industry, the population of the Ruhr area increased rapidly. In 1922, the Ruhr mining industry was employing more than half a million people (Gebhardt 1957: 493).[1] The global economic depression prompted a clear decline in the number of workers, but after the Second World War the mining industry once again began to grow, employing around 480,000 people by the early 1950s (Gebhardt 1957: 493).

1957 marks the first milestone of the decline of coal mining in the Ruhr area, as growing competition from other fossil fuels forced a reduction in coal production. Initially thought to be a temporary phenomenon, this in fact heralded the beginning of a constant decline in coal production. "The decline began with the coal crisis of 1957 and plunged the Ruhr mining industry into economic insignificance, to the extent that the closure of the last remaining mine in December 2018 was little more than a symbolic act with no impact on the regional economy" (Czierpka 2019: 13, translated by the author).

The reduction of jobs in the coal production and mining industry was accompanied by considerable subsidies. The social democratic party became a prominent advocate of slowly phasing out coal mining in the Ruhr area and other mining regions by cushioning the process with extensive subsidies and social programmes (Nonn 2001: 311 ff.). Accordingly, it rose to become the dominant political movement in the Ruhr area from the 1960s onwards (Rohe 1986).

Brown coal opencast mining is still active on the border of the Ruhr area, drawing from a long tradition that has been upheld to this day. Consequently, the Ruhr area is also affected by the end of coal-fired power generation.

In parallel to the phase-out of coal production and the decline of the wider mining industry, federal and state politicians have sought to enact economic structural change. At its heart, their strategy revolved around attracting universities and research institutes. In the mid-1960s, universities were founded in Dortmund, Bochum, Duisburg, and Essen, and many technical colleges were opened in the early 1970s. The Ruhr area developed from an industrial region into a knowledge-centred region (Bogumil et al. 2012: 39 ff., Bogumil/Heinze 2019).

3.2 Saarland

The federal state of Saarland is the second region of focus of this study. Located on the border with the French mining region of Lorraine, Saarland was defined as the "Territory of the Saar Basin" *(Saargebiet)* in the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. While the national border divided the mining region itself between France and Germany, the borders drawn up on the German side sought to integrate the residential areas where miners lived in the administrative district (Hellwig 1992: 328). Other than the city of Saarbrücken with 330,000 inhabitants, the region is characterised by relatively small towns and rural areas.

Like the Ruhr area, Saarland was historically strongly shaped by black coal mining; accordingly, it also felt the effects of the changes in the mining industry from the late 1950s onwards. Saarland too has undergone decades of structural change while transitioning away from the black coal production and mining industry (Jellonnek 2004: 235 ff., Dörrenbächer 2007, Lerch 2007). However, Saarland has substantially fewer inhabitants and is not characterised by a large, urban agglomeration zone.

The numbers of persons employed by the mining industry in Saarland followed a similar development to the Ruhr area (Haßler 2012). In the 1920s, the number of mining workers in Saarland peaked at more than 70,000 before declining as a result of the global economic depression. Following the turmoil of the Second World War, employment in the mining industry increased sharply once again before falling from just under 65,000 (1957) to around 21,000 (1974) due to the coal crisis. After a temporary increase, jobs once again began to decrease considerably in the mid-1980s. In 1984, just under 25,000 people were employed in the Saarland mining industry. Over the next few years, this number declined continuously.

In 2007, the federal government came to an agreement with the state governments of North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland on a socially responsible phase-out of subsidised black coal mining in Germany by 2018 (cf. German Bundestag 2007). This paved the way for Saarland to discontinue black coal mining. However, in 2008, mine collapses triggered a strong earthquake in Saarland. In response, mine closures were accelerated in Saarland, and a mine in the north of North Rhine-Westphalia was kept open for longer. The last mine in Saarland was closed in 2012, and the Ibbenbühren mine in North Rhine-Westphalia took over its workforce.

The expansion of the mechanical engineering and automotive manufacturing industries is a decisive factor of the structural change in Saarland, although it alone was not able to compensate for job losses in the mining industry. The Ford factory in Saarlouis and its suppliers are greatly important for Saarland, together with a few other companies (Schulz/Dörrenbächer 2007). The information technology sector (Roscher 2007) and the service sector were also expanded (Jellonnek 2004: 236). A key aspect of regional economic support consisted in founding research institutes with the goal of fostering a close exchange between science and industry (Roscher 2007: 149). The region also participates in the cross-border Saar-Lor-Lux association with regions in France and Luxembourg (Jellonnek 2004: 241 ff; Lorig/Regolot 2016).

Unlike the Ruhr area, the social democratic party never rose to a dominant position in Saarland. This is partly explained by the strong presence of Catholicism among the population (Jellonnek 2004: 245 ff.). Nevertheless, Oskar Lafontaine won three state elections from 1985 as the lead candidate for the SPD to become the head of state government. His departure from the Saar-SPD to join Die Linke marked a decisive turning point for his former party.

3.3 Lusatia

In eastern Germany, the region of Lusatia extends from the south of Brandenburg to Saxony.[2] A clear delineation was defined in terms of districts for reasons of data availability. Consequently, parts of the "Berlin Speckgürtel" (the surrounding part of Berlin) were also included in this region to the north, although they would typically not be considered part of Lusatia in the narrower sense. The largest city in Lusatia is Cottbus, with just over 100,000 inhabitants. The part of Lusatia around Brandenburg is particularly sparsely populated, whereas the population density is slightly higher in the Bautzen and Görlitz districts of Saxony.

Brown coal mining is of great importance for Lusatia. After its loss of territory following the First World War, Germany had reduced access to black coal. This made brown coal more relevant as an energy source. At the start of the Weimar Republic, brown coal production increased sharply across all of Germany and in particular in Lusatia.

In the GDR, brown coal was the central energy source for power generation. Accordingly, brown coal power generation and the brown coal opencast mines in Lusatia became very important. The number of persons employed by the brown coal mining industry in Lusatia rose from 45,000 in 1958 to 79,000 in 1988 (source: Statistik der Kohlenwirtschaft e. V. 2020).

Reunification also marked a deep turning point for brown coal mining and power generation. By 1992, the number of persons employed by the industry had halved to around 39,000. By 1995, this number had halved once again (19,000), continuing to drop to around 7,100 employees over the next five years. Over the following years, these job losses slowed down.[3]

The decision to cease coal-fired power generation in Germany means that the history of brown coal production will also come to an end in Lusatia in 2038. A considerable number of jobs will once again be lost. The RWI estimates that in 2016 there were 13,245 employees in Lusatia who were directly or indirectly dependent on the brown coal sector (RWI 2017: 40).

Besides brown coal mining and power generation, Lusatia's manufacturing industry is characterised by mechanical engineering and the manufacture of glass and ceramics, rubber and plastic goods, and chemical products (Seibert et al. 2018: 27). Tourism also plays an important role in the region, especially in the Spreewald.

Lusatia has one university of applied sciences with campuses in Görlitz and Zittau that focuses on the topics of energy and environment, as well as economic and social transformation processes. This means that the research and university landscape is much less developed than in the other regions considered by this study, in large part due to the rural character of the region.

3.4 Chemnitz region

The Planning Association for the Chemnitz Region encompasses five districts in south-western Saxony. It is one of four planning associations in Saxony and is responsible for around 1.4 million inhabitants. With 247,000 inhabitants, Chemnitz is the largest city in this region, followed by Zwickau with around 90,000 inhabitants. Both of these cities are considerably smaller than the large cities in the neighbouring regions of Leipzig, Dresden, and Halle.

Like the three other regions described above, the Chemnitz region is characterised by a history of coal mining that extends back more than 100 years. However, black coal mining was discontinued in the region in the 1970s. Black coal mining ceased in Lugau-Oelsnitz in 1971, and the last black coal to be mined in Zwickau was in 1978 (Zukunftsregion Chemnitz-Zwickau 2008: 4). Nevertheless, the impact of the region’s coal mining history continues to be felt. In the 19th century, the Chemnitz region was already an important industrial area, earning itself the name of “Saxon Manchester” (Rellecke 2004: 257).

After severe war damage, the region gained great significance for industrial production during the GDR era. Saxony was the industrial heart of the GDR’s economy. Like in many other regions, the reunification and transformation to a market economy triggered many deep ruptures across Saxony (Brezinski/Fritsch 1995). However, the region’s economy recovered relatively quickly, and today it holds a relatively strong position compared to other parts of eastern Germany (Behr 2016).

Automotive manufacturing is a key focus of the economy in the Chemnitz region. Towards the late 18th century and early 19th century, the companies Wanderer and DKW were founded in Chemnitz, active in the field of automotive development and other areas. In 1932, together with the automotive manufacturers Horch and Audi from the Cologne area, Auto Union AG was founded by these two companies, with headquarters in Zschopau, a little to the south of Chemnitz, later renamed as Audi (Audi AG). During the GDR era, the tradition of automotive manufacturing was continued with the production of the Trabant. The Audi plants in Saxony were incorporated into the VEB Sachsenring automotive manufacturing plants in Zwickau (Handelsblatt 2007). Today, Volkswagen has manufacturing plants in Chemnitz and Zwickau, and MAN has a plant in Plauen. There are also many suppliers throughout the region. Besides the automotive industry, the Chemnitz region also has a long tradition of mechanical engineering that continues to this day.

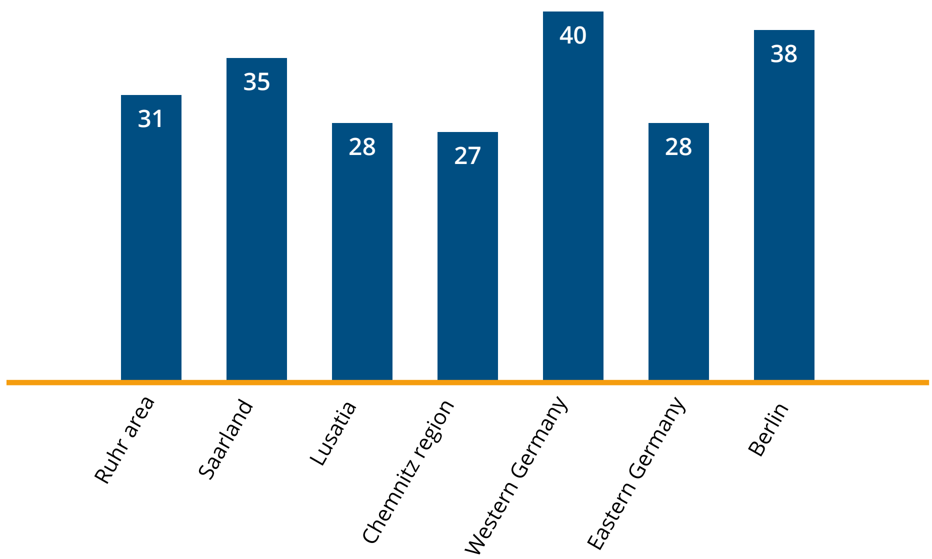
Like the rest of Saxony, the Chemnitz region has a highly developed academic landscape that is closely linked to the economy. There is a technical university in Chemnitz, and Zwickau has another technical university that focuses on mining. The region also has two universities of applied sciences and 26 research institutes.

Politically, Saxony has historically been and continues to be a stronghold of the CDU. Since the reunification, the head of government in Saxony has been a member of the CDU without interruption. However, in the 2019 elections (European and state elections), the AfD made clear gains, especially in Saxony, almost equalling the votes of the CDU in many constituencies (Neu 2019). In the constituencies of the Chemnitz region, the AfD consistently achieved a slightly higher share of votes than the national average in the 2019 state elections.

3.5 Regional economy: a comparison of seven regions

Structural change is an ongoing process that affects every region of Germany. This study therefore adopts a perspective that looks beyond the four regions themselves to compare them against the national average. However, it would be wrong to neglect the transformation of eastern Germany from a state-controlled economy to a market economy when adopting this perspective. Although the change began more than 30 years ago, its consequences are still felt today (IWH 2019, Krause/Ostner 2010). Western and eastern Germany are therefore considered separately in the comparisons performed in the next sections. Given the special status of Berlin, it would be just as problematic to allocate it to either western or eastern Germany. Berlin is therefore considered separately wherever relevant, although the comparison with Berlin does not play much of a role in this study.[4]

Figure 2: Gross domestic product per capita
2016 in euro thousands

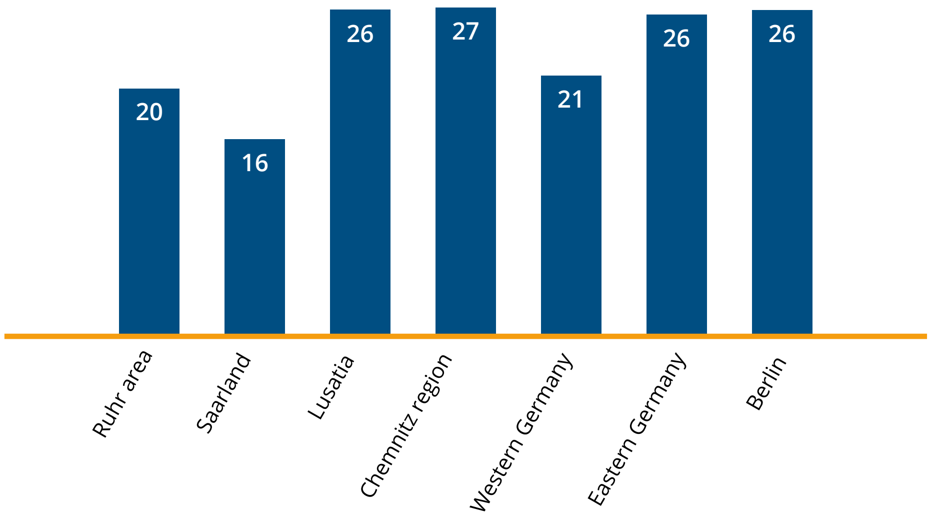


Source: Federal Statistical Office.

All four regions examined by the study are struggling to contend with structural change. In each case, their gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is lower than the rest of eastern or western Germany. For the eastern German regions, this difference is very small.[5] The Chemnitz region has a GDP per capita of € 27,200. In Lusatia, the GDP per capita is € 27,500. Both regions are therefore slightly below the average of € 27,700 across eastern Germany.

The difference is much greater in the western German regions. The Ruhr area has a GDP per capita of € 31,100, which is higher than the eastern German regions, but nevertheless well below the average of € 40,500 across western Germany. With € 34,800, Saarland has a substantially higher GDP per capita than the Ruhr area, but it nevertheless remains below the western German average.

Figure 3: Change in gross domestic product per capita
in percent, 2006–2016

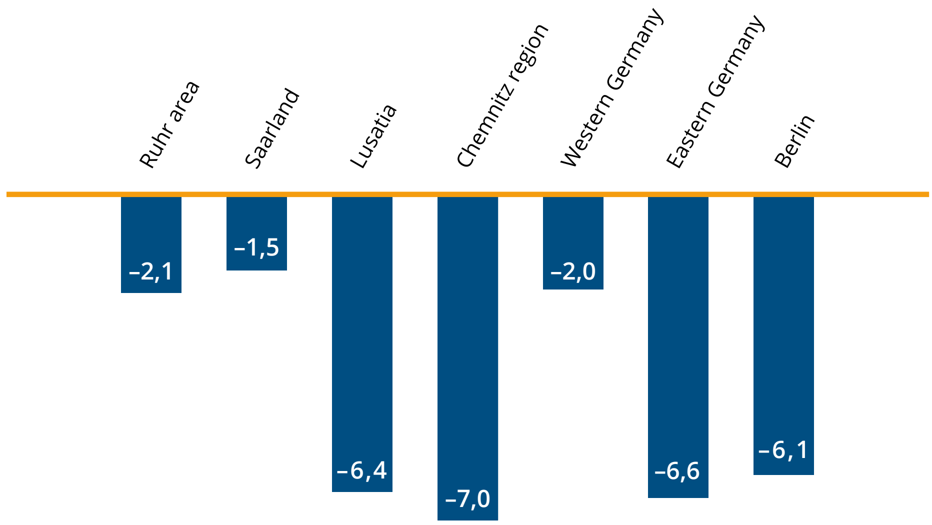


Source: Federal Statistical Office.

Germany has a long history of growth. From 2006 to 2016, the GDP per capita grew by 23.2 percent. During this time, growth rates were higher in eastern Germany than in western Germany. The regions considered here participated in this growth in very different ways. The Chemnitz region saw an increase of 26.6 percent in GDP per capita over the past ten years. Lusatia experienced an almost identical increase of 26.4 percent. In both regions, the increase was slightly higher than the eastern German average (26.0 percent).

There was slightly less growth in the western German regions. The GDP per capita in the Ruhr area grew by 20.0 percent over the same period, whereas Saarland experienced a lower growth of 15.9 percent. This means that both regions grew more slowly than the western German average between 2006 and 2016. Overall, western Germany saw growth of 21.1 percent.

Figure 4: Change in the unemployment rate
in percent, 2009–2019



Source: Federal Statistical Office.

The unemployment rate in Germany fell substantially between 2009 and 2019. This was true across Germany as a whole and in each region considered here individually. The Chemnitz region recorded the sharpest decline in unemployment. Its unemployment rate fell by 7.0 percentage points between 2009 and 2019. As of 2019, its unemployment is at 5.6 percent. Lusatia also registered a considerable decline in unemployment of 6.4 percentage points. Its current level of unemployment is slightly higher, at 7.0 percent. Although the decline in the Chemnitz region was larger than the average across eastern Germany, which experienced a decrease of 6.6 percentage points overall, Lusatia was practically equivalent to the average. Its current level of unemployment is also identical to the average.

The decline in unemployment was much smaller in western Germany, bearing in mind that the initial levels were already considerably lower. In the Ruhr area, unemployment fell by 2.1 percentage points to 9.0 percent between 2009 and 2019. Thus, unemployment in the Ruhr area is higher than the eastern German average and substantially higher than the western German average. In Saarland, unemployment fell somewhat less over the same period, decreasing by 1.5 percentage points. At 6.2 percent, the current level of unemployment in Saarland is, however, lower than in the Ruhr area and in eastern Germany. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate in Saarland is higher than the western German average (4.9 percent).

Compared to western Germany as a whole, the Ruhr area and Saarland are facing particular challenges in terms of structural change. Their economic strength is lower than the rest of western Germany, and they have higher unemployment. Nevertheless, they have a better position than eastern Germany in terms of economic strength, and Saarland has a lower unemployment rate than eastern Germany as a whole. By contrast, the Ruhr area has higher unemployment than the average across eastern Germany.

The current basic economic parameters of Lusatia and the Chemnitz region, on the other hand, do not deviate considerably from the eastern German average. Both their economic strength and their unemployment rates are very similar to the average. The wider catch-up process of eastern Germany also took place in these regions. The decline in unemployment and the increase in economic strength were much stronger than in western Germany.

1 There is some variation between sources on figures from before the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany (Nonn 2001: 387, Abelshauser 1990: 437, cited from Czierpka 2019: 16, Goch 2002: 110). However, all sources agree on the development trends in the number of employees.

2 Lusatia extends into Poland to the east, and into the Czech Republic to the south. The areas located in neighbouring countries were, however, not included in this study.

3 Due to restructuring, the number of employees is no longer directly comparable with the previous figures from 2008 onwards. By 2007, the number of employees in the brown coal mining industry had fallen to around 5,500, excluding workers in brown coal power plants. In subsequent years, the number of employees working in brown coal mining and power plants combined rose by a few hundreds.

4 For the comparison with Berlin, the relatively low count of just 97 respondents from Berlin should also be borne in mind when interpreting the survey results. See the methodology in the appendix for more details.

5 Official statistics are only directly available for Saarland. The remaining information is based on the data for each district. The values of each district are summarised as an average weighted by population or employees subject to social insurance.

4 Job histories under structural change

For individuals, change in economic structures entails a change of jobs, or sometimes losing one's job. A change amounting to a minor detail in unemployment statistics at the regional level can be hugely important to the individuals affected by it. "For most people, becoming unemployed is one of the most drastically negative experiences that can happen, with a multitude of consequences for their subjective well-being" (Frese 2008, translation by the author). Financial difficulties can be the tip of the iceberg. A loss of social contacts, frustration when searching for a new job, a lack of perceived appreciation, or even depression may be consequences of unemployment. Having said that, different people experience unemployment differently. "Some people experience the first few weeks of unemployment as a vacation" (Frese 2008). Unsurprisingly, the prospects of finding another job later have a decisive influence on this experience. Consequently, the situation of the regional labour market plays an major role, but so does the ability and willingness of an individual to improve one's own chances of finding a new job, for example by moving, completing further training, or becoming self-employed.

In the following, we compare the frequency and duration of people's experience of unemployment, their paths out of unemployment, and how they retrospectively evaluate changes in their personal job history.

4.1 Experience of unemployment

As described previously, among the regions considered by the study, the unemployment rate is currently highest in the Ruhr area at 9.0 percent, followed by Lusatia. In Saarland, unemployment is also above the western German average, while the current unemployment rate in the Chemnitz region is slightly below the eastern German average (but above the western German average). Conversely, even in the most severely affected region, the Ruhr area, 91 percent of the civilian workforce is unaffected by unemployment. Given that many individuals have retired or are not part of the workforce for other reasons, unemployment only affects a small minority of people.

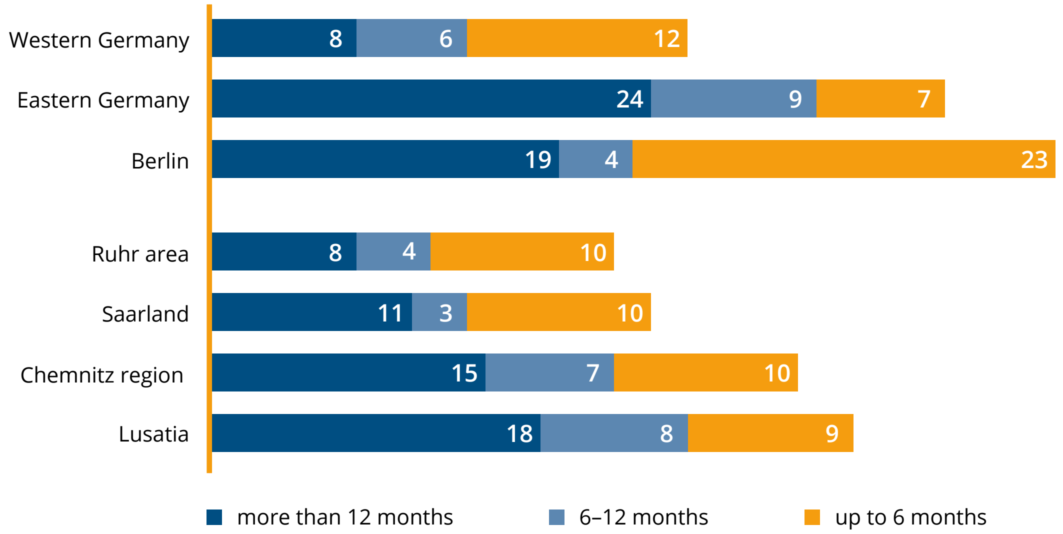
However, this is only a snapshot. Unemployment is often such a drastic life event that it lowers life satisfaction over an extended period of time, even after the period of unemployment itself has ended (von Scheve/Esche/Schupp 2016). Similarly, the fear of impending unemployment represents a clear impairment in living conditions. Therefore, as an experience or perceived threat, unemployment is potentially relevant to a considerably larger proportion of the population.

In the survey by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 31 percent of respondents stated that unemployment was currently or had previously been part of their personal job history.[1] At 26 percent, this proportion was substantially lower in western Germany than in eastern Germany (excluding Berlin), where it was 40 percent. This difference is not surprising in light of the structural disruption that followed the reunification.[2]

One might expect the experience of unemployment to be more widespread in coal regions than across the rest of each part of the country due to the phase-out of coal production. However, this assumption does not prove true. In the Ruhr area, 22 percent of respondents reported that they had been unemployed at some point in their personal job history. This figure was higher in Saarland, at 25 percent, although this value remains close to the average in western Germany (26 percent). Similarly, in both eastern German regions, experience of unemployment was not higher than in the rest of eastern Germany, but in fact lower. In the Chemnitz region, 32 percent of respondents reported personal experience of unemployment. In Lusatia, 35 percent of respondents reported the same. But across eastern Germany as a whole, the corresponding figure was 40 percent.

Figure 5: Unemployment in job history

How long have you been unemployed in total over the course of your life?



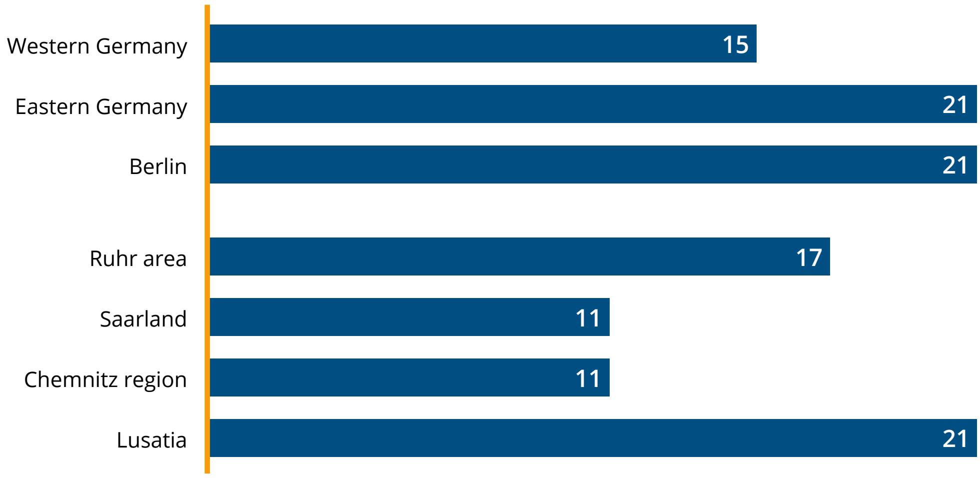
Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: never unemployed, no answer.

Comparing experience of unemployment for longer than twelve months reveals similar trends. In the Ruhr area, 8 percent of respondents stated that they had been unemployed for more than twelve months in total over their entire job history. This differs only slightly from the corresponding figure in Saarland (11 percent) and the western German average (8 percent). In eastern Germany, experience of unemployment for longer than twelve months in total was again more common. In the Chemnitz region, 15 percent of respondents said that they had been unemployed for more than twelve months in total over their job history, compared to 18 percent in Lusatia, and 24 percent across the whole of eastern Germany (excluding Berlin). This does not support the conclusion that coal regions are disproportionately affected by unemployment. Respondents in every part of Germany reported phases of unemployment over the course of their professional lives.[3]

Concern about unemployment was also not substantially more pronounced in the regions of structural change examined by the study than in the rest of each part of the country. Overall, a large majority of respondents felt that their current job was secure. In eastern Germany, 21 percent of respondents expressed doubts about job security, and Lusatia aligned with this average exactly. By contrast, only 11 percent of respondents in the Chemnitz region feared losing their job. In the Ruhr area, 17 percent of respondents did not consider their job to be secure, compared to an average of 15 percent across western Germany and just 11 percent in Saarland. Thus, in Saarland and the Chemnitz region, more people felt that their job was secure than the average in the respective part of the country, but concern about job security was not more widespread than this average for any of the regions considered by the study.

Figure 6: Job insecurity

Do you believe that your job is secure? Here: no.



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 2,405 respondents (only currently employed). Missing values out of 100 %: yes, no answer.

Beyond the current unemployment rates stated at the beginning of this section, unemployment does not appear to disproportionately affect any of the four regions under consideration. This holds true with respect to both experience of unemployment and experience of extended unemployment in the job history of respondents, as well as with respect to their concern about job security. Unemployment and job security concerns seem to have a more general character that does not directly relate to coal regions in particular.

However, this does not imply that the phase-out of coal production was not problematic for the individuals affected by it. The in-depth interviews clearly demonstrated how many people have suffered from the end of coal, even if early retirement programmes ensured that they did not experience major financial difficulties. "My former husband (…) suffered so badly that he had to take the redundancy package and basically retire at 50+. (…) We all knew that there was no longer any future for it all. But he was heartbroken. He'd dedicated his body and soul to it. And for my father and grandfather, work-related subjects were their favourite topic of discussion. What's going on down at the works? (…)

You were at home there too" (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, Linke).[4] Another respondent from Saarland reports: "I had three uncles, and they all took early retirement back then. You can tell that things had fallen out of balance. Between work and family. Or friends. There was no longer any work life, so they had already lost one pillar of support in life. Financially, as far as I know, their pensions didn't limit them too much (...). But they were still missing purpose in life" (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). A young respondent from Saarland currently working on dismantling coal production longs for the hard work underground: "If the black coal mines reopened, I'd go back to work in them straight away" (Saarland, 18–30, m, currently mining industry, Linke).

The situation in Lusatia is different, since the phase-out of brown coal mining has not yet happened. At the time of the interview phase, the "Commission for Growth, Structural Change, and Employment" (also abbreviated to the "Coal Commission") was in the process of negotiating the timing and modalities of the phase-out of coal-fired power generation, and hence the end of brown coal production. For brown coal mining workers in Lusatia, this was naturally an urgent topic that was followed with great attention, but also great concern and scepticism (see Section 6.3).

One respondent employed in the brown coal mining industry in Lusatia described her assessment of the region as follows: "Many people aren't sure what's coming next" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, SPD). Another said: "Things risk getting worse if coal goes away. People have been scared of this for years" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, Linke). One younger respondent reported the effects of unclear future prospects: "There are uncertainties everywhere. People already have to think about whether to take the next step. Whether they can have a house built, or buy one, or whether they need to keep moving away open as an option. Or should you just accept having to commute further? These fears and worries are there, you can feel them every day" (Lusatia, 18–30, f, currently mining industry, SPD). These concerns and uncertainties of individuals do not relate directly to their own job situations, but more generally to the development of living conditions throughout the region.

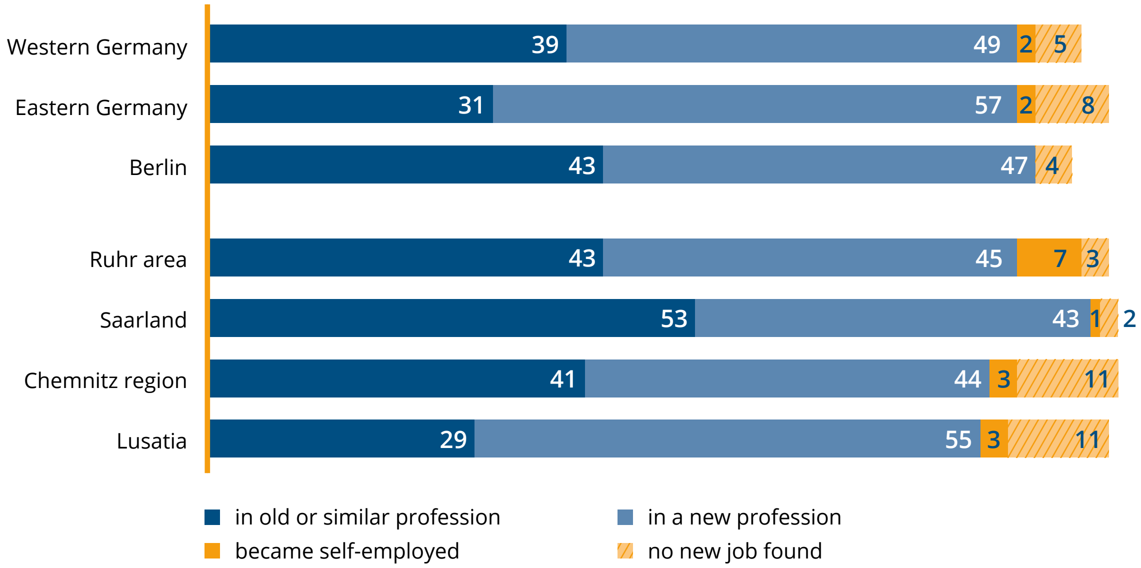
4.2 Paths out of unemployment

Unemployment is typically a temporary phenomenon. Only 5 percent of respondents reported that they did not find another job after becoming unemployed. By contrast, 94 percent returned to work after either a brief or extended period of unemployment. However, their paths out of unemployment varied, shedding some light on the possibilities that may or may not be available within a given regional economy.

After being unemployed, 37 percent of respondents returned to their old job or a similar job. This was more frequently the case for respondents in western Germany (39 percent) than for respondents in eastern Germany (31 percent). There were once again clear differences between regions. In the Chemnitz region, 41 percent returned to their old job after being unemployed. In Lusatia, by contrast, only 29 percent were able to find a job in the same profession. In the Ruhr area and Saarland, and similarly in the Chemnitz region, more people successfully found employment in the same or a similar profession than on average across western Germany.

Figure 7: Type of job after being unemployed

Did you find another job in your old profession after being unemployed, or did you find a job in another profession?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 1,135 respondents (only respondents with unemployment in their job history). Missing values out of 100 %: no answer.

Of those who found a new job after being unemployed, only a small fraction moved house for their work. 17 percent of respondents reported changing their place of residence for a new job. This was higher among respondents currently living in western Germany (20 percent) than among those currently living in eastern Germany (6 percent). In both the Ruhr area and Saarland, 11 percent of formerly unemployed respondents reported moving house for their new job, but far more people relocated for their job after being unemployed on average across western Germany, at 20 percent. In Lusatia, at 9 percent, more respondents moved for their new job after being unemployed than the eastern German average (6 percent). The Chemnitz region was below this average, at 4 percent. Overall, moving house for a new job after a period of unemployment tended to be the exception rather than the rule.[5]

By contrast, further training was quite commonplace during periods of unemployment. In total, 42 percent of all respondents completed further training after their initial education. Among respondents with experience of unemployment, this proportion was slightly higher, with 47 percent. A higher proportion of respondents from eastern Germany completed further training than the proportion from western Germany, but respondents from eastern Germany were particularly likely to complete further training while unemployed. Among the respondents from western Germany who had been unemployed, 18 percent completed further training while unemployed. Among respondents from eastern Germany, the corresponding proportion was 36 percent. However, the proportion of unemployed persons in coal regions who completed further training while unemployed was not higher than the average in each part of the country.

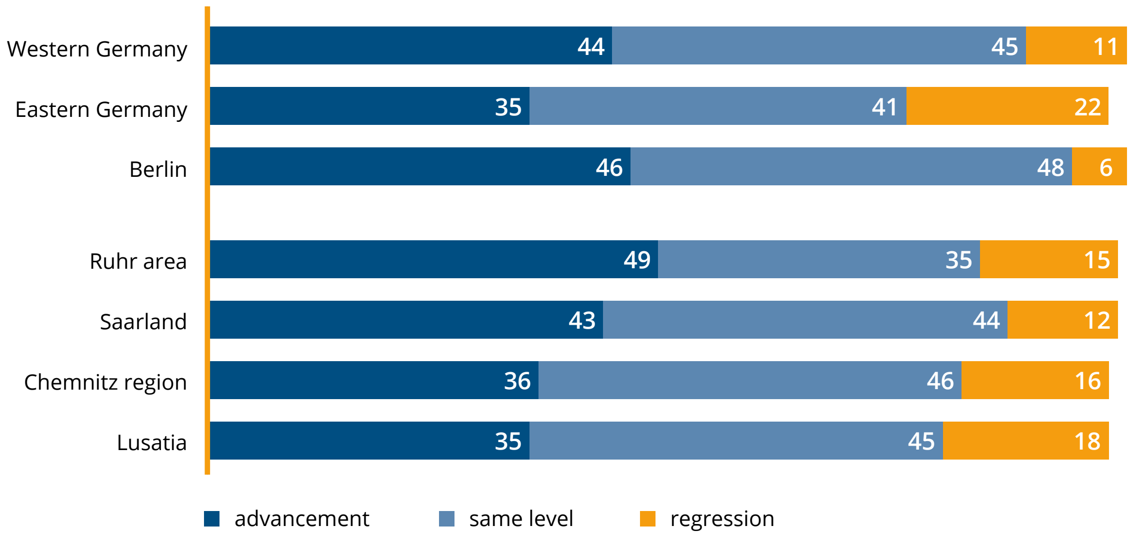
Only a small minority chose to end their unemployment by becoming self-employed. Since only a few respondents followed this strategy to end their unemployment, the very small number of cases does not allow any differences to be identified between regions. In general, self-employment as a form of employment differs somewhat between eastern and western Germany. Among employed respondents, 11 percent were self-employed. In western Germany, this figure was 12 percent, or somewhat higher than in eastern Germany, where it was 8 percent. Neither Saarland, the Ruhr area, Lusatia, nor the Chemnitz region deviated from this observation. A trend of increased self-employment was therefore not visible in response to difficult local labour market conditions, at least not in the regions of structural change examined here.

4.3 After unemployment

Unemployment itself is a drastic and negative experience for many people. Nevertheless, the vast majority of people return to work after some time. To evaluate this process, however, it is crucial to consider how their job situation evolves after a period of unemployment, i. e. whether they regressed professionally, maintained the same level, or possibly even advanced in terms of their position. Respondents with experience of unemployment in their professional careers were asked to evaluate whether their position after being unemployed was a step up or a step down relative to their previous position, or whether their position had remained at an equivalent level.[6]

The results are surprising. New jobs after unemployment only corresponded to a regression in very few cases. 13 percent of respondents said that their position after unemployment was a step down relative to their position before unemployment. In eastern Germany, this proportion was 22 percent and therefore considerably higher than in western Germany, where only 11 percent spoke of a step down. By contrast, 42 percent felt that their post-unemployment position was a step up from their previous job. At 44 percent, more respondents in western Germany felt they had progressed than in eastern Germany, where 35 percent felt this way. But substantially more people advanced than regressed in both parts of the country.

Figure 8: Advancement and regression after being unemployed
Was the position that you found after being unemployed an advancement, a regression, or the same level as before?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 942 respondents (only respondents who found a job after being unemployed in their job history). Missing values out of 100 %: no answer.

For regions especially affected by structural change, it might seem reasonable to expect that advancement would be rarer and regression more common. But this did not prove to be the case. In Saarland, the frequency of the respondents' assessment of advancement and regression coincided with the distribution across western Germany as a whole. By contrast, the Ruhr area showed a slight spread. Although slightly more people advanced, slightly more people also regressed.

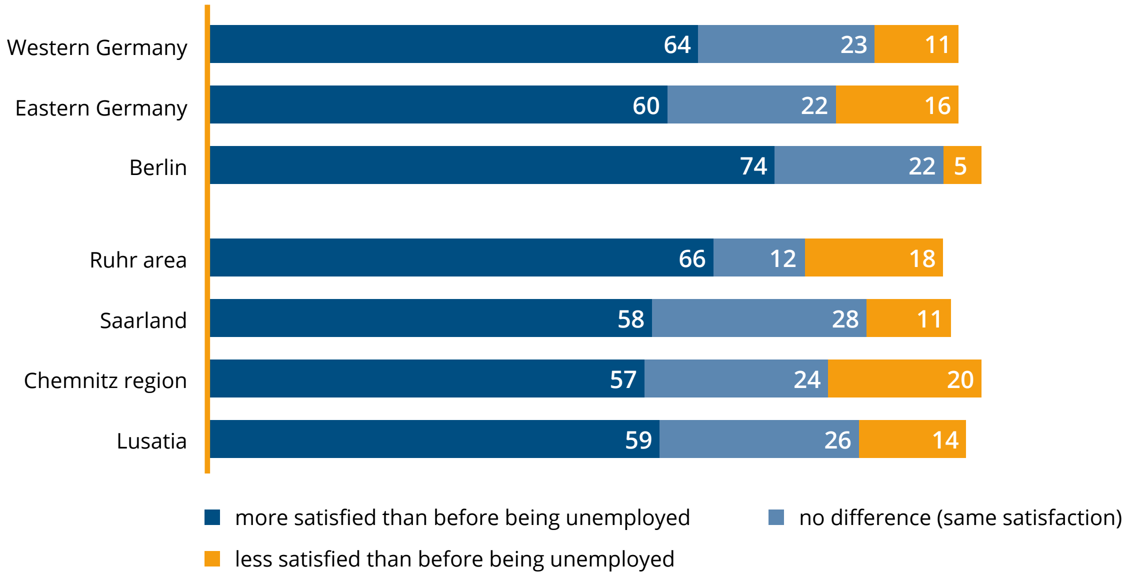
In the Chemnitz region and Lusatia, there was no difference in advancement compared to eastern Germany as a whole. But regression was somewhat less common in these two regions than the eastern German average. In terms of advancement or regression in the position after unemployment, no particularly negative effects are identifiable in regions especially affected by structural change.

In addition to the question on advancement or regression, a second question asked about the respondents' satisfaction with their job situation after being unemployed compared to their situation before being unemployed. As before, this question related to jobs, but it was phrased more broadly, potentially encompassing factors such as commute times and relationships with colleagues, for example.

A clear majority of respondents said they were more satisfied with their job situation after being unemployed than before. 64 percent stated that they felt more satisfied after unemployment than with their former job. Another 23 percent felt there was no difference or a similar number of advantages and disadvantages. Only 12 percent were less satisfied than before. Respondents in western Germany were slightly more satisfied than respondents in eastern Germany, but the difference was small. In western Germany, 11 percent of respondents were not satisfied, compared to 16 percent in eastern Germany.

In the Ruhr area, people reported being both better off and worse off slightly more frequently. The middle category corresponding to no difference was chosen less often than across western Germany as a whole. The respondents' job situations in their new job after being unemployed diverged slightla bit more strongly than on average across western Germany, in a similar manner to the earlier observations regarding professional advancement and regression. In Saarland, slightly fewer respondents were more satisfied with their job situation after being unemployed. Respondents felt there was no difference more often, with the proportion of less satisfied respondents in Saarland being equal to the proportion across western Germany as a whole. Thus, in Saarland, respondents followed a somewhat less favourable course after being unemployed than in the rest of western Germany. Nevertheless, across all western German regions, around 60 percent of respondents felt more satisfied.

Figure 9: Satisfaction with job situation after being unemployed
Are/were you more satisfied or less satisfied with your professional situation after being unemployed than before being unemployed?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 998 respondents (only respondents with unemployment in their job history). Missing values out of 100 %: no answer.

In Lusatia and the Chemnitz region, similar proportions of people felt more satisfied with their job situation after being unemployed than before. In the Chemnitz region, 57 percent said they were more satisfied, compared to 59 percent in Lusatia. This was not much different to the average across eastern Germany (60 percent). With 14 percent, the proportion of less satisfied people in Lusatia was roughly the same as in the rest of eastern Germany (16 percent), whereas this proportion was slightly higher in the Chemnitz region, at 20 percent. In terms of satisfaction with one's job situation after a period of unemployment, the circumstances in the Chemnitz region are somewhat less favourable than the average across the relevant part of the country, but in general it cannot be concluded that situations are more challenging in regions of structural change.

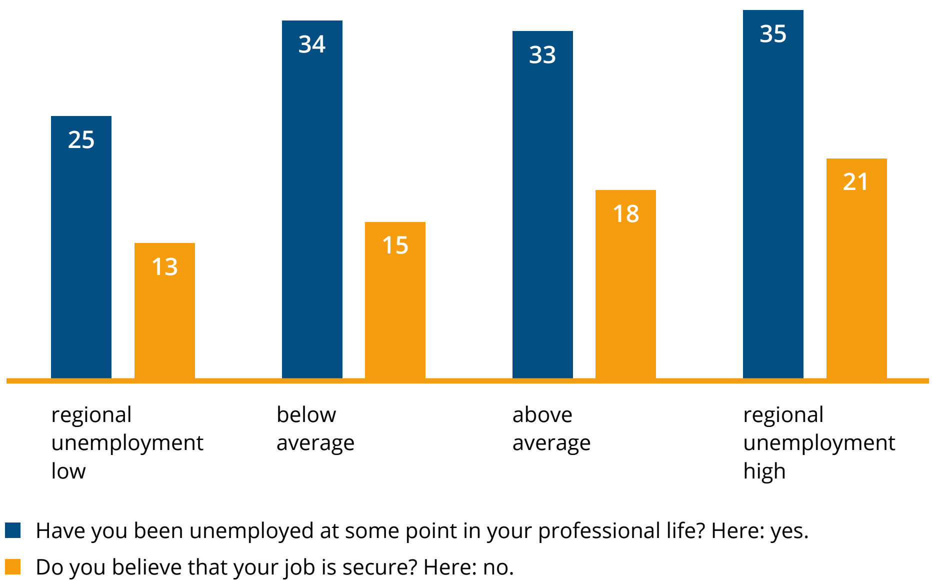
4.4 Career paths and structural change

The comparison of these regions, which have been shaped by coal production in different ways, produces less unambiguous results than initially expected. Experience of unemployment in the job history of respondents was not substantially more common in regions of structural change than in the rest of the same part of the country. Eastern Germany differed very noticeably from western Germany, which is hardly surprising in light of its transformation. But within western Germany itself, respondents in the Ruhr area or Saarland did not experience unemployment in their professional life more commonly than average. Comparing Lusatia and the Chemnitz region against the rest of eastern Germany gives a similar picture.

The phase-out of coal production seems to have been less drastic in these regions than was initially thought. Structural change has also taken place in other parts of Germany, and other large employers have also disappeared. At the same time, in the coal regions governments implemented numerous measures intended to compensate for the loss of jobs. These measures seem to have successfully cushioned the consequences of structural change to such an extent that there were no fundamental differences compared to other parts of the country.

When comparing all districts in Germany, only respondents in districts with particularly low unemployment had less frequent experience of unemployment in their job history than respondents in other districts. In fact, particularly favourable regional labour markets are the exception, rather than particularly unfavourable ones. Respondents living in the quarter of districts with the lowest unemployment rates in Germany experienced unemployment at some point in their lives less frequently than the respondents living in other districts. However, there were no differences among the respondents living in the remaining three quarters of districts. Furthermore, experience of unemployment lasting more than six months was only somewhat more frequent in the quarter of districts with the highest unemployment rates; respondents from the other three quarters of districts experienced unemployment for longer than six months at some point in their working life in equal proportions.[7]

Figure 10: Experience of unemployment and job security



Source: 2019-01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. Unemployment: 3,540 respondents (only persons with employment in their job history). Job security: 2,406 respondents (only persons who were currently employed).

Concern about losing one's job was, however, more widespread in districts with higher unemployment than in districts with lower unemployment. Although this finding may not come as a surprise, it does not exhibit the same step effect as was observed in the actual experience of unemployment. Instead, concern about job security increased gradually with less favourable regional labour market situations.

Most people who became unemployed at some point during their professional life found another job afterwards. Half of those affected had to change professions to find a new job. In eastern Germany, more people had to change professions to find another job. Respondents from eastern Germany were also more likely to complete further training, in particular to find another job after being unemployed. The structural change after reunification is clearly reflected in respondents' job histories.

However, no clear differences can be identified between former coal regions and other parts of Germany. In fact, a change of profession was somewhat less common in these regions than the average in the respective part of the country. A change of profession was somewhat more common among people with a higher level of education and among respondents who experienced a longer period of unemployment. Changing professions was also more likely in regions with lower unemployment. This seems to correspond to regions that can offer alternative opportunities in other professions in case of unemployment. By contrast, respondents from western Germany and respondents who experienced a shorter period of unemployment tended to be more likely to find another job in the same profession after being unemployed.[8]

Self-employment was not a frequently chosen path out of unemployment in any region of Germany. Only a small proportion of respondents reported starting self-employment while being unemployed.

The way that respondents retrospectively evaluated their own professional paths after a period of unemployment was surprising. Many considered their professional development after being unemployed to represent an advancement, and many others felt that they had maintained the same level. By contrast, only a minority felt that their position after being unemployed corresponded to a regression. A slightly higher proportion reported a regression in Lusatia than in the other regions.

The question on satisfaction with one's job after unemployment prompted a very unanimous response. In every region, a majority of respondents were more satisfied with their professional situation after being unemployed than they were with their situation before being unemployed. Respondents in the Ruhr area and the Chemnitz region were slightly more frequent to express greater dissatisfaction with their job situation after being unemployed as compared to before, but even in these regions they were only a small minority. This satisfaction was observed consistently across all population groups, the only trend being that it was expressed somewhat more frequently by older respondents than younger ones.

The choice to approach job histories in the context of structural change with a cross-sectional survey amounts to adopting a specific perspective. Current economic developments are better represented in terms of employment statistics or other economic indicators (see Section 3). A population survey, on the other hand, reveals how people are confronted with disruption over the course of their job histories, and whether this disruption manifests differently in certain regions. This perspective clearly reveals the fundamental turmoil in eastern Germany associated with the transition from a state-controlled economy to a market economy and the violent upheaval of this transformation. Other disruptions, such as the phase-out of coal production, are not reflected in the same way in the job histories of the people living in affected regions. Two factors could be decisive for this. On the one hand, economic structural change is a constant and ongoing process. Accordingly, a substantial part of the population will be affected by it over the course of their working life, but affected individuals will very often find their way back into work after a period of adjustment, possibly in some other constellation, but their new situation may even be more favourable than before. On the other hand, spatial mobility could possibly play a role. This aspect is clearly of secondary importance, given that only around one in every eight respondents reported having changed their place of residence to find work after being unemployed. Some people will also have changed their place of residence in anticipation of impending unemployment and seamlessly started a new job.[9] Together, both factors seem to produce a regional equilibrium in the level of unemployment in job histories.

1 The figure of 31 percent of respondents being currently or previously unemployed is likely to underestimate the true extent of the phenomenon. Unemployed individuals are less likely to participate in surveys. Furthermore, the survey only included persons entitled to vote, but unemployment rates tend to be somewhat higher among foreign nationals.

2 The percentage of respondents who could not or did not wish to give an answer to each question is not presented or discussed. This figure is only mentioned for questions where a considerable proportion of respondents (more than 6 percent) did not give an answer.

3 The probability of having been unemployed or unemployed for longer over the course of a person's job history clearly depends on their age, among other things. After statistically controlling for the age of respondents, the differences in experience of unemployment between the western German regions (Ruhr area and Saarland) and the rest of western Germany remain statistically significant, whereas there are no significant differences between the eastern German regions and the rest of eastern Germany.

4 These details about the interviewee signify the following: currently living in Saarland, 61–75 years of age, female, does not currently and has not previously worked in the mining industry, voting intentions in an upcoming federal election assumed for the following Sunday: Linke.The original quotes from the interviews are reproduced verbatim and are consequently not always grammatically correct. All interview quotes are translated from German.

5 The survey by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung does not indicate that people commute further after finding another job in the same profession following a period of unemployment. However, the available data only allow this question to be analyzed to a very limited extent.

6 This question deliberately intended to prompt a self-assessment. External criteria can also be applied to judge advancement and regression, such as salary or the level of qualifications of the position. However, it has been shown that external assessments and self-assessments differ in many cases (Roose 2017). Probably, self-assessment is based on individual criteria and more complex considerations.

7 The difference between the quarter of districts with the lowest unemployment rates and the other districts also hides a disparity between eastern and western Germany. Without exception, the districts with the lowest unemployment rates of all are located in western Germany, whereas the districts with higher unemployment rates are distributed across both western and eastern Germany.

8 The level of unemployment in the region does not seem to play a decisive role in the likelihood of finding a new job in the same profession after unemployment. Any individual who succeeds in finding another job in the same profession is clearly moving within a labour market segment that is not consistently affected by unemployment within the region. However, a person who was previously working in a sector facing a regional crisis that consequently affects the level of regional unemployment has less favourable prospects of finding another job in the same profession.

9 These respondents were not captured separately in the survey. The survey did, however, find that newcomers to a region were slightly more frequent in regions with particularly low unemployment than in other regions.

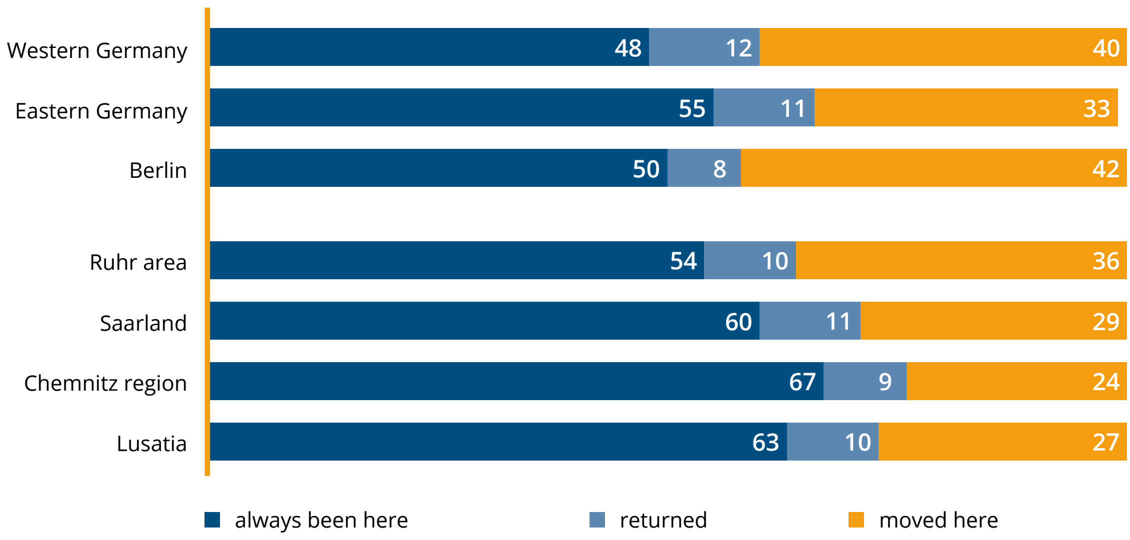
5 Region and home

At first, economic structural change and evolution in the regional labour market prompt people to question their job security and their prospects of finding a new job after being unemployed. But the importance of such changes extends well beyond economic concerns. The place where people live is not just an economic region – it is their home. This section approaches the topic of structural change from a second perspective: the region viewed as a home.

5.1 Attachment to home

Most people in Germany live in the same region as they have always lived. Around 60 percent have always lived in their current region. Of these, one in five temporarily lived in another region at some point, and then moved back. Regularly changing from one region to another is somewhat more common in western Germany than in eastern Germany.

Figure 11: Duration of residence in the region
Which option best describes your situation?

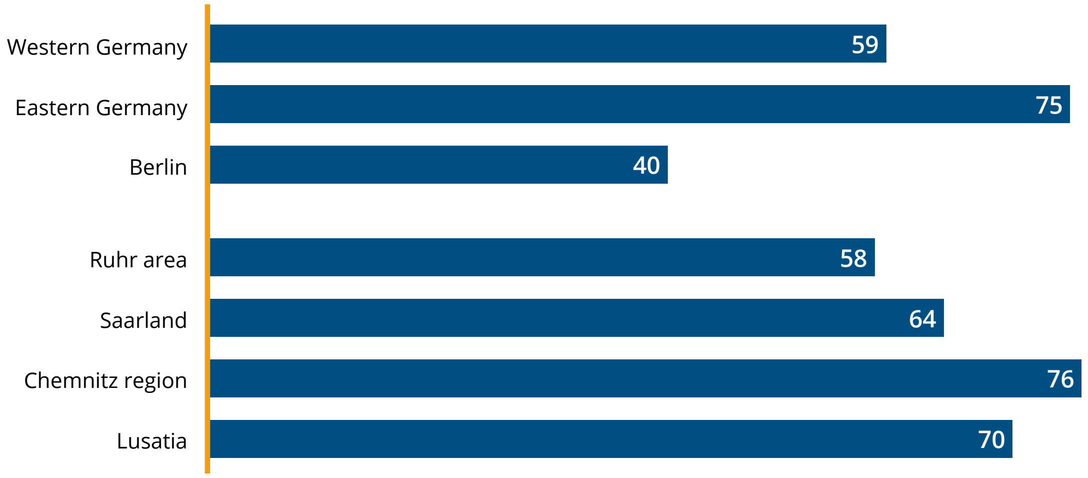


Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

In all four former coal regions, the proportion of people who had moved to their region was lower than in the rest of the respective part of the country. Across western Germany, a total of 40 percent of respondents had moved to their region from another region, and another 12 percent had temporarily lived in another region before returning. In the Ruhr area and Saarland, the proportion of people who had moved to their region was slightly lower, with a similar proportion of returnees. In Lusatia, at 27 percent, the proportion of people who had moved to the region was slightly lower than the eastern German average (33 percent). In the Chemnitz region, an even lower proportion of respondents had moved to their region (24 percent), and the number of returnees was no higher than the German average.

People's attachment to their home region was also reflected in whether they would conceivably be prepared to move to find a better job. Almost two thirds could not imagine moving to another region for a more attractive job.

Figure 12: Links to home and willingness to move
Would you move away from your region for a more attractive job? Here: no.



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: Yes, don't know, no answer.

Eastern Germans tended to be more attached to their home region than western Germans. In eastern Germany, 75 percent of respondents stated they would not move away from their region to find a more attractive job. In western Germany, the corresponding figure was slightly lower, at 59 percent, but respondents who did not wish to leave the region nevertheless remained a majority. People who had already moved to another region were more willing to move again for a more attractive job. The difference between eastern and western Germany is likely linked to the fact that, after the reunification and the difficulties associated with the transformation, many eastern Germans already made the decision to move to western Germany, leaving behind a higher proportion of people in eastern Germany who cannot imagine moving away from their region. Willingness to move was particularly low among people who temporarily lived in another region before returning.

The coal regions did not differ considerably from the national average in each part of the country. In the Ruhr area, at 58 percent, the proportion of respondents who rejected moving coincided with the western German average. In Saarland, it was only slightly higher, at 64 percent. In Lusatia, 70 percent of respondents did not wish to move for a more attractive job, slightly lower than the eastern German average (75 percent). In the Chemnitz region, at 76 percent, the corresponding figure was similar to the average across eastern Germany as a whole.

Identification with one's region was commonplace. When asked to rate their attachment to their city or municipality on a scale of 0 (not attached at all) to 10 (very strongly attached), almost half of respondents (47 percent) chose a value of 8 or higher. Again, identification with one's city or municipality was slightly higher in eastern Germany than in western Germany.

A similar picture emerges from the respondents' answers about pride in their city or municipality. Here, almost half of respondents (45 percent) chose values from 8 to 10, where 10 corresponds to "very proud". In western Germany, 43 percent chose one of these high values. In eastern Germany, the proportion was slightly higher, at 53 percent.

There was no clear difference between the coal regions and the rest of the respective part of the country, neither in terms of attachment to one's city or municipality nor in terms of pride. Attachment to one's home was observed everywhere in Germany. Only around 5 percent stated that they felt little or no attachment to their city or municipality (values 0 to 2 on the scale).

The self-evident character of attachment to home is clearly shown in the in-depth interviews. "It's nice to go somewhere else, but it's always nice to be back. You look forward to getting home again" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, Linke). The place of one's childhood plays a special role with this identification: "If you grew up here, you know your way around. That's how things are supposed to be. If you go somewhere else, it's perfectly nice, but it's always best at home" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP). "It's ideal. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. (...) I was born here, and I want to be buried here" (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU).

Family plays a key role in putting down roots in a home region. "You're connected by your roots. My parents were born here too; they've always lived here" (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, formerly mining industry, AfD). Family is another reason why an individual might decide to return after moving away. A respondent from Saarland said: "I grew up in [place name] and stayed there. We were looking for somewhere to live that was close to family. But then I made a few different stops, depending on my relationships. (...) And then moved back into this area via [other place name]. (...) To stay close to family" (Saarland, 41–50, f, not mining industry, Linke). A respondent from the Chemnitz region cited a very similar reason for returning to the region: "Because my family is here. I also spent some time in western Germany. But it's not so nice when family is so far away" (Chemnitz region, 41–50, f, currently mechanical engineering, non-voter).

For others, friends played the same or a complementary role. "The people, of course. It's just my home" (Chemnitz region, 31–40, f, not mechanical engineering, SPD). "I feel good here too. My whole family lives here, my friends live here" (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter). Another respondent from the Ruhr area described experiencing regional cohesiveness as follows: "When you go out of the house, you always meet someone you know. You can always get talking with them. We used to play football and celebrate together" (Ruhr area, 61–75, m, formerly mining industry, SPD).

The in-depth interviews show how social ties forge connections between people and their regions. This is particularly visible in respondents who were living in the region of their childhood. But friends and family were also important for the people who had moved to their region. People who live nearby are the most important anchor points for a sense of home. However, as the next section shows, they are not the only anchor points.

5.2 Life in the region

In the in-depth interviews, the respondents were asked to describe the advantages and disadvantages of their region – a task they found easy. Virtually all respondents expressed positive associations about the region in which they were living.

Besides family and friends, having pleasant interactions with others was considered most important. "People are open-minded and sympathetic" (Lusatia, 31–40, m, not mining industry, AfD). A respondent from Saarland described his home region as follows: "The people are nice, for sure. You get involved more with people in Saarland. (...) Everyone knows everyone in Saarland. (...) Everything usually runs fairly harmoniously" (Saarland, 18–30, m, not mining industry, other party). "The people are what I like best about here. They are friendly and open-minded" (Chemnitz region, 31–40, f, not mechanical engineering, AfD).

Open-minded, helpful, and forthcoming people are also found in the other regions. "If you need to borrow something, people are very happy to let you, once you've gotten to know one another. That's worth something" (Lusatia, 18–30, f, not mining industry, other party). "It's a fine breed of people. (...) People don't argue over crap for three years straight. Maybe some do, but nobody that I know" (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). Another respondent appreciated people's honesty: "They just talk freely and naturally, most people who come from the Ruhr area. I like that very much, I'm the same way" (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, not mining industry, non-voter). Positive assessments of regional mentality were even expressed by respondents with an otherwise very negative view of the future: "You can't just sit inside and look out of the window. You need to be able to talk to other people every now and again. We can still do that out here in the village, thank God" (Ruhr area, 61–70, m, formerly mining industry, SPD).

A similar proportion of respondents cited the regional landscape as a particular feature that they value about their home region. "There are also some really great areas around here. I've travelled around with people before. They found the countryside beautiful" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, AfD). "It's very green here," said a respondent from the Ruhr area (Ruhr area, 51–60, f, not mining industry, SPD). Another respondent from Saarland felt the same way: "In terms of scenery, it's definitely a beautiful state" (Saarland, 18–30, f, not mining industry, FDP).

Nature was sometimes considered from a practical perspective, for example in terms of providing particularly attractive opportunities for local recreation. “The recreational value is quite high. I don’t have to drive somewhere else to go out into the countryside. I can just go hiking straight from here” (Ruhr area, 51–60, f, not mining industry, CDU). “You’re right next to the mountains. You can go skiing; we have enough snow in the winter. There’s lots of green areas nearby, lots of forests” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, formerly mechanical engineering, Linke). “We have so many recreational spaces, we give the Black Forest a run for its money” (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU).

Regional infrastructure was another aspect highlighted by many respondents when describing their home region in positive terms. “It’s not far to get into town. You can find everything you need there,” explained one respondent from Saarland (Saarland, 41–50, f, currently mining industry, SPD). Another valued the location at a larger scale: “We’re the centre of Europe. I need three quarters of an hour to get to [nearby place], one hour to get to Belgium, half an hour to get to France. It’s such a central location for me, within three hours I’m at the North Sea” (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, AfD). A respondent in Lusatia underlined the benefits of her region with regard to everyday needs: “The cities are very well developed, also in terms of infrastructure. And some of the smaller towns have supermarkets, including big chains. Everyone has what they need for everyday needs” (Lusatia, 31–40, f, not mining industry, CDU).

Other respondents thought of the cultural opportunities offered by their region. “Diversity and being able to travel to other cities quickly without losing much time. You can be in Dortmund in 15 minutes. In 20 minutes, you’re in Essen. And it doesn’t take long to get to Cologne and Düsseldorf. There are plenty of festivities, plenty of museums. We have more than in other cities” (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, CDU). In Lusatia, enthusiasm for cultural opportunities was less common, but one respondent nevertheless highlighted some of the region’s special advantages: “We have a nice zoo. We have a pioneer railway – a mini-railway that runs everywhere” (Lusatia, 51–60, f, not mining industry, AfD).

Respondents also had plenty of praise for their region in other respects. Some spoke in high terms of the university landscape. “We have lots of colleges and universities. Lots of things are being developed there” (Ruhr area, 61–70 m, formerly mining industry, SPD). “We also have the BTU [Brandenburg Technical University]. It supports the region a lot and attracts many students to the city” (Lusatia, 18–30, f, currently mining industry, SPD). Especially in eastern German regions, some respondents were happy about the regional housing market: “I think it’s great that the level of rents isn’t too high. You can afford a nice apartment even on an apprentice’s salary” (Chemnitz region, 18–30, m, not mechanical engineering, Linke). Others mentioned the cityscape. In eastern Germany, respondents were pleased with the positive development after the reunification: “Zwickau has changed for the better. In terms of architecture and all the things they’ve had done. No contest compared to what it was like before” (Chemnitz region, 61–75, f, formerly mechanical engineering, non-voter). Another respondent from the Ruhr area praised the cityscape indirectly: “You can find beauty in ugliness. I’m sure you can find more beautiful places. But I’d have to think about it” (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, CDU).

However, respondents also contrasted these advantages of their home regions with disadvantages. A large majority of respondents were able to cite disadvantages, although they named substantially fewer disadvantages than advantages. Poor infrastructure was the most commonly mentioned factor. This was cited as an issue in all four regions of the study. “This area is not attractive for people who are somewhat immobile. Not everybody has a car”, complained one respondent from the Chemnitz region (Chemnitz region, 51–60, f, not mechanical engineering, non-voter). A respondent from Lusatia complained about traffic density in villages: “Road traffic is a problem. There are lots of trucks around here. People have been talking about the fact that big trucks are driving through villages, and the residents have been protesting” (Lusatia, 51–60, f, not mining industry, AfD). In the Ruhr area, the poor condition of roads was an issue: “So many of our roads are damaged. (...) It starts with the railway, then the motorway. And the bridges” (Ruhr area, 61–70, m, formerly mining industry, SPD).

With the exception of the Ruhr area, respondents complained about how many people are moving away from the region. “Of course, it’s sad. The rate of people moving away from here. Most of the young people who learn a good profession move away. My children moved away too. (...) And they’re not going to come back” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP). Regional emigration is difficult for families: “And then the family is torn apart, and it leads to arguments. It’s definitely a burden” (Chemnitz region, 61–75, f, formerly mechanical engineering, non-voter). Others are worried about the loss of a sense of attachment to the region when people move away: “That people are moving away from Saarland. (...) That there are fewer and fewer young people who feel connected to their home region” (Saarland, 61–75, m, formerly mining industry, AfD).

The impression cited by some respondents that people have a pleasant disposition when interacting with one another was not completely unanimous. On the contrary, some respondents perceived there to be a particularly unpleasant manner or general atmosphere. “I find Saarland very difficult. Very difficult to get settled. Hard to make connections. Even though people from Saarland often claim that they are very open and very hospitable. That wasn’t my experience at all” (Saarland, 18–30, f, not mining industry, FDP). In Lusatia, one respondent answered: “Some people are stuffy here. So untalkative” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, AfD). Others complained of a generally negative atmosphere. “Many people are a bit negative; they prefer to sit at home rather than go out” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). Others linked these impressions to economic problems and a difficult job market. “What makes Chemnitz stand out? People walking around being fed up and staring at the ground. They don’t care about politics. They’re too busy caring about themselves” (Chemnitz region, 61–75, m, not mechanical engineering, SPD). A respondent from the Ruhr area talked about the effect of job cuts at Opel on the general atmosphere: “We saw some people from Opel shopping in the mornings. They looked exhausted; they weren’t taking as good care of themselves. Some were really downcast because they couldn’t get another job. (...) So it’s pretty depressing” (Ruhr area, 51–60, f, not mining industry, SPD).

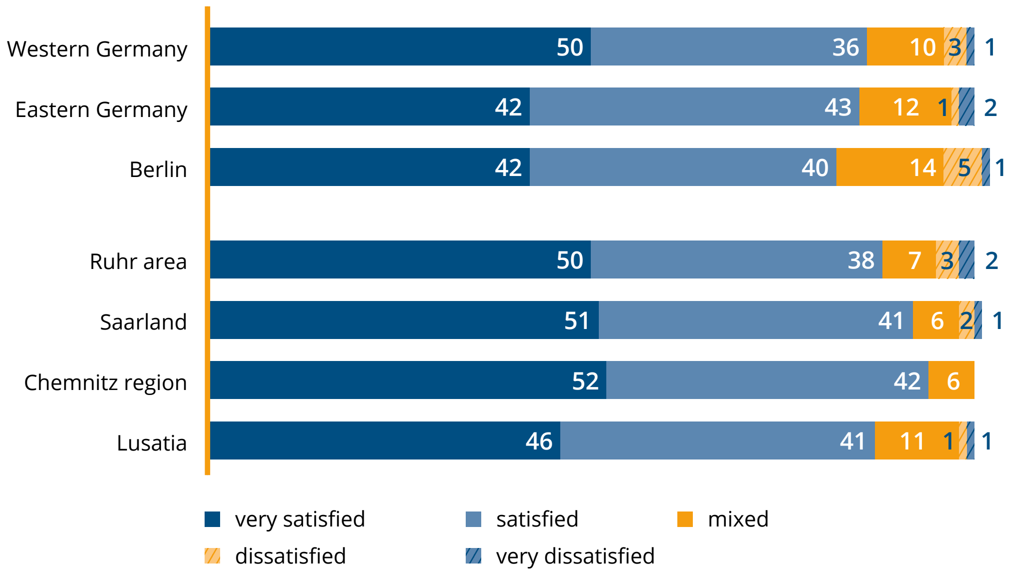
Some respondents also perceived decline and neglect in the cityscape. “It’s all just falling apart. It feels like the cities and towns are dying off. Ghost towns and ghost villages. (...) Sad state of affairs” (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). A respondent from the Chemnitz region described it as follows: “But the city also looks very grey and dreary. There are abandoned houses collapsing on every corner” (Chemnitz region, 18–30, m, not mechanical engineering, Linke).

These more negative views of the home region were sometimes expressed as nuances to an otherwise very positive image. Sometimes, but less often, they represented a negative overall assessment of the region or were part of a generally pessimistic outlook on life. However, such negative perspectives tended to be the exception. In general, people consistently painted a positive picture of their region. They described nature as being especially beautiful in their region, the people as being especially pleasant, the presence of an especially prominent helpfulness, or especially rich and valuable cultural opportunities with especially good infrastructure. These special advantages were particular to each region of the survey, at least in the eyes of the respondents from these regions. This shows that people are attached to their home region and appreciate it as something of special value.

The Germany-wide survey also revealed general satisfaction with housing environments. Half of all Germans were very satisfied with their housing environment. Another 37 percent were satisfied. Only a small minority responded that they were dissatisfied (3 percent) or very dissatisfied (1 percent).

Figure 13: Satisfaction with housing situation

When you think about your housing situation and your housing environment, how satisfied are you with these things?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

Satisfaction with housing environments was very similar across the regions of western Germany compared by the study. In western Germany as a whole, 50 percent of respondents were very satisfied with their housing environments, at 51 percent in Saarland and 50 percent in the Ruhr area. Slightly fewer respondents were very satisfied on average across eastern Germany, at 42 percent. In Lusatia, the proportion was slightly higher, at 46 percent. Satisfaction with housing environments was much higher in the Chemnitz region (52 percent) than the eastern German average (42 percent).

In addition to overall satisfaction, respondents were asked to assess the accessibility of key aspects of amenities to them. Specifically, they were asked how accessible a supermarket or a doctor is to them. Since there are very different constellations of cars and buses, local public transport, and regional public transport across Germany, the respondents were asked to evaluate whether a supermarket or a doctor is very accessible to them, or not at all accessible.

60 percent of Germans expressed the opinion that a shopping facility is very accessible to them. In eastern Germany, the proportion was slightly lower, with 55 percent. In the Ruhr area, at 67 percent, a somewhat higher proportion of respondents answered that a shopping facility is very accessible to them. This reflects the urban structure of the Ruhr area. By contrast, in the Chemnitz region, only 46 percent gave this response. Similarly, in Saarland and Lusatia, the proportion of respondents who felt that a shopping facility is easily accessible was below average. People in smaller towns with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants were most likely to report less or no accessibility to shopping facilities. However, even in such places, a clear majority felt that shopping facilities tended to be good and very accessible.

Table 1: Accessibility of shopping facilities

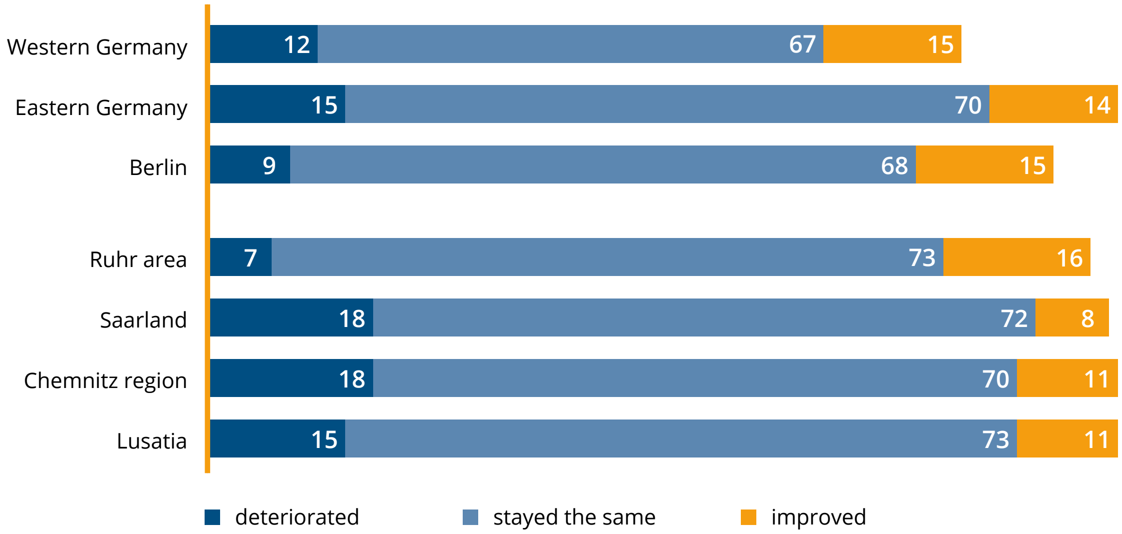
What's it like in your region? For you, is a shopping facility …?

	Western Germany	Eastern Germany	Berlin	Ruhr area	Saarland	Chemnitz region	Lusatia
Very accessible	60	55	78	67	51	46	50
Fairly accessible	30	29	14	26	33	37	29
Not very accessible	9	12	8	6	13	11	15
Not at all accessible	2	4	0	1	3	6	5

Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

Figure 14: Change in shopping facilities

Comparison of the questions: What's it like in your region? For you, is a shopping facility very accessible, fairly accessible, not very accessible, or not at all accessible? and What about around ten years ago? Ten years ago, was a shopping facility very accessible, fairly accessible, not very accessible, or not at all accessible to you?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer for one of the questions.

The vast majority of respondents did not perceive there to have been any change over the past ten years. 67 percent of respondents from western Germany felt that the situation is the same today as it was ten years ago. The proportions of respondents who considered there to have been a deterioration (12 percent) or an improvement (15 percent) were similar. The changes were seen somewhat more negatively in eastern Germany than in western Germany. A deterioration was perceived slightly more often by respondents from eastern Germany (east: 15 percent, west: 12 percent), whereas there was barely any difference in respondents who perceived an improvement (east: 14 percent, west: 15 percent).

When comparing the regions, Saarland and the Chemnitz region had the highest proportion of people who perceived there to have been a deterioration in shopping facilities (18 percent each), whereas only 7 percent of respondents in the Ruhr area felt that shopping facilities had deteriorated.

Table 2: Accessibility of a general practitioner

For you, is a general practitioner …?

	Western Germany	Eastern Germany	Berlin	Ruhr area	Saarland	Chemnitz region	Lusatia
Very accessible	57	52	72	58	53	45	49
Fairly accessible	32	33	20	36	39	40	38
Not very accessible	9	11	7	5	6	12	10
Not at all accessible	1	2	0	1	1	3	3

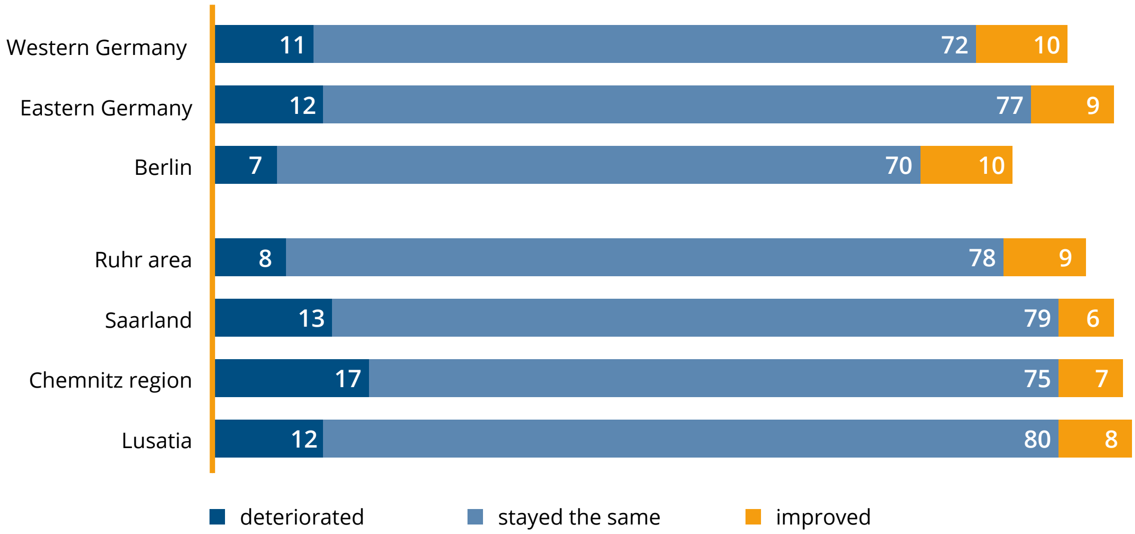
Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

The accessibility of general practitioners was assessed very similarly to the accessibility of shopping facilities. While well over half of respondents across the whole of Germany thought that general practitioners are very accessible (57 percent), another 32 percent considered that general practitioners are at least fairly accessible. With regard to shopping facilities, 60 percent stated that accessibility is very good, and 29 percent chose the fairly accessible category. For both shopping facilities and general practition-ers, 89 percent of the population felt that accessibility is very good or fairly good.

The patterns observed when comparing the accessibility of shopping facilities and general practitioners in different regions are largely identical. In the Chemnitz region and Lusatia, shopping facilities and general practitioners were felt to be some what less accessible than on average across eastern Germany, whereas in Saarland general practitioner accessibility was felt to be more favourable than the western German average.

Figure 15: Change in accessibility of a doctor

Comparison of the questions: For you, is a general practitioner very accessible, fairly accessible, not very accessible, or not at all accessible? and Ten years ago, was a general practitioner very accessible, fairly accessible, not very accessible, or not at all accessible to you?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer for one of the questions.

With regard to the accessibility of general practitioners, a large majority once again did not consider there to have been any change over the past ten years. 73 percent of respondents perceived the current situation to be the same as ten years ago. 11 percent felt there had been a deterioration, whereas 10 percent felt there had been an improvement.

Respondents from the Chemnitz region were most likely to feel that the accessibility of a general practitioner has deteriorated, but even in this region fewer than one in five respondents expressed this opinion. Respondents from Saarland were somewhat less likely to perceive an improvement than the western German average. Once again, the differences were only small.

The respondents' consistently positive descriptions of their regions in the in-depth interviews were reflected in their high satisfaction levels with their housing environments. People also consistently felt that key aspects of amenities such as shopping facilities and general practitioners were very or at least fairly accessible. This high level of satisfaction with housing environments in turn influenced life satisfaction. Of the people who were very satisfied with their housing environments, 49 percent were also very satisfied with their life overall, whereas only 0.3 percent were dissatisfied with their life. By contrast, only 8 percent of the respondents who were very dissatisfied with their housing environments were very satisfied with their lives, whereas 12 percent were very dissatisfied.[1]

5.3 Economy in the region

Life within a region is shaped by the local economic situation, among other aspects. In the context of structural change, it is especially important to pay attention to how respondents evaluate the economy in their region and the changes that they perceive. Some respondents incorporated economic aspects into their description of the region.

When asked what is characteristic of his region, one respondent from Lusatia answered: “Brown coal. (...) Brown coal is the only economic factor in the region. Nothing else matters” (Lusatia, 41–50, m, not mining industry, AfD). One respondent for the Ruhr area combined regional culture and economic characteristics into a summary description of his region: “That’s what we’re like here in the Pott [Ruhr area]. Ruhrpott. (...) The friendly guy from the mining pits” (Ruhr area, 41–45, m, formerly mining industry, non-voter). The economic aspects of home were only this dominant for a few respondents. But when talking about the advantages and disadvantages of the region, the regional economy was mentioned much more frequently.

Economic tradition was most notably praised in the Chemnitz region: “The city of modernity. (...) That’s a Chemnitz brand. It’s not an entertainment city, like, say, Dresden. It’s a city of modernity with this affirmation in the industrial sector” (Chemnitz region, 41–50, f, not mechanical engineering, SPD). A couple of respondents from Saarland also emphasised economic tradition: “Saarland is innovative. Definitely, we do a lot” (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, AfD).

Some individuals praised the regional labour market specifically as an advantage. For example, a respondent from the Ruhr area described the advantages of his region as follows: “Lots of possibilities. There are also lots of green spaces, (...) leisure activities, (...) training opportunities. I had no problem with any of these things. Not even with finding a job” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). In addition to shopping facilities and the cultural programme, one respondent from the Chemnitz region cited the following: “There’s work. That’s very important” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, currently mechanical engineering, CDU).

However, it was much more common for the regional labour market to be viewed as a disadvantage, which tended to be discussed as part of a general assessment of the region. “In terms of salaries, the statistics show that Saarland and a few other regions are actually, for me, complete backwaters, pretty far behind in everything” (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, Linke). “You also hear in the news that Herne and Wanne-Eickel have the highest unemployment rates” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). When asked what is not doing so well in the region, a respondent from the Chemnitz region said: “The labour market situation. The fact that people from our region generally earn less. (...) And the fact that many have even lost their jobs” (Chemnitz region, 41–50, f, not mechanical engineering, non-voter).

Thus, while some respondents incorporated economic aspects directly into their general assessment of the region, economic issues did not play such a dominant role for others. But when specifically asked about the local economic situation, practically all respondents were able to give an assessment. Most respondents had a clear idea of whether the regional economy is strong or weak overall, and which particular areas are doing well or poorly.

Regarding an assessment of the regional economy, one respondent from the Chemnitz region said: “Many strong areas, like mechanical engineering, with lots of companies and suppliers for the automotive industry and machinery. We’re big on chemical plants. Still lacking in research and development” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, formerly mechanical engineering, Linke). Another respondent from the same region had a much more negative overall assessment, while still naming the same branches of industry as regional pillars: “I suppose the automotive industry, Volkswagen factory. That’s the only sector where there’s still a bit of work. Already at full capacity pretty much. Mostly, there are temporary jobs. Fixed positions are less common” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, f, not mechanical engineering, Grüne). Similarly, respondents in Saarland named a few strong economic sectors: “In any case, the manufacturing industry. (…) Also the steel industry … Bosch and so on. They’re big too. Digital sector: (…) we only have one big player, SAP” (Saarland, 18–30, m, not mining industry, other party). In Saarland and the Ruhr area, some people counted the mining industry among the region’s economically strong sectors: “I think the steel industry is relatively good and stable” (Saarland, 31–40, m, currently mining industry, SPD). “There are lots of jobs at the Krupp steelworks” (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, not mining industry, non-voter). Others named recently established companies: “We’re drowning in logistics companies here” (Ruhr area, 61–75, m, formerly mining industry, SPD). However, this strength was not necessarily perceived as permanent, unlike the previously very stable mining industry: “Everything that’s turning up now is also good – the electronics industries, medical technology, telecommunications etc. But I have the feeling that if you’re not one of the top cracks, you don’t get any security. Everything has become more short-lived” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). Other respondents in various regions named skilled crafts and trades or public utilities. “The old people’s homes and hospitals in Bochum are positive, for example. (…) There are four hospitals in Bochum. So, I think there are prospects in the medical sector” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). “The only thing that experienced growth in recent years was the clinic. I believe it might now be the largest in Brandenburg” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP).

On the topic of weaknesses in the regional economy, especially in sectors that were previously strong and are now in decline, respondents were also able to cite a few examples. In the Chemnitz region, many respondents brought up the decline of the textile industry: “We used to be at the forefront of the textile industry. Now we only have Schiesser and Bruno Banani. Big companies that manufacture things no longer exist” (Chemnitz region, 31–40, m, formerly mechanical engineering, Linke). In the Ruhr area, on the topic of economic decline, the respondents’ minds also turned to large employers that have now shrunk or completely disappeared: “This is the industrial sector now: Opel is closed, the steel sector is shut down, coal mines, closing down, all of the typical things” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). Another respondent from the Ruhr area noted that “Opel and Nokia have now closed in Bochum. And in Herne many things have closed, steel works, chemical plants, small companies, suppliers” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). In Saarland, people cited the decline of the mining industry even more prominently than in the Ruhr area. “Coal is gone now. And the mills won’t last much longer in Saarland either. (…) It doesn’t look so good” (Saarland, 61–75, m, formerly mining industry, AfD).

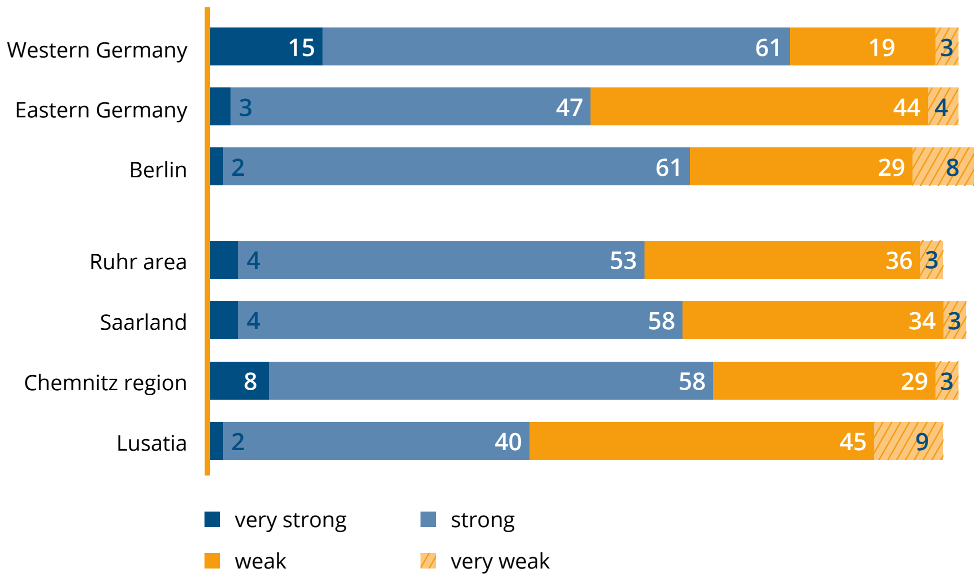
Lusatia is strongly characterised by brown coal, whose end is still imminent. On the topic of economic decline, people from Lusatia therefore tended to think of the phase-out of coal. One respondent reported about his own working environment: "The biggest employer, LEAG, is starting to reduce the number of training places because there will be less need in the future. That is already obvious" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP).

Thus, when asked about the regional economic structure, a diverse range of observations and assessments were given. The assessments are not uniform within each region, and they sometimes contradict one another. The personal employment situation and personal contacts of the respondents influence their view of the regional economy. But the prevalence of narratives about regional economic structure and even personal experiences is striking. This can be seen most clearly with the automotive industry in the Chemnitz region. But the mining industry and the automotive industry were also the first things to come to mind for respondents from Saarland and the Ruhr area, typically followed by large local employers active in other areas. These narratives were often paired with concerns about the stability of these regionally influential employers. The crisis faced by the automotive industry with the imminent conversion to electromobility was just as much of a concern for respondents as the challenging state of competition on the steel market.

The representative survey reveals a predominantly positive view of the regional economy. 59 percent of respondents expressed the belief that the economy is strong in their region, and another 12 percent considered that the regional economy is very strong. Thus, four out of five respondents believed that the economy is strong in their region. Only a minority of 3 percent thought that they were living in a region with a very weak economy.

Figure 16: Strength of the regional economy

When you think about the region where you live, how would you describe the economic situation?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

Far more respondents expressed the belief that they are living in an economically strong or very strong region in western Germany than in eastern Germany. This is hardly a surprise in view of the objective economic statistics. In Saarland, and to an even greater extent in the Ruhr area, the proportion of people who considered their region to be strong or very strong was lower. 62 percent of respondents from Saarland and 57 percent of respondents from the Ruhr area said their region is economically strong or very strong. Nevertheless, respondents who assessed their economy as very weak remained the exception rather than the rule in both regions.

In the Chemnitz region, considerably more people thought that their region is economically strong than the eastern German average. 58 percent of people from the Chemnitz region said their regional economy is strong, and another 8 percent said their regional economy is very strong. These proportions were substantially higher than the eastern German average. Even compared to the western German coal regions, a high proportion of respondents from the Chemnitz region believed that their economy is strong. A greater proportion of respondents considered their region to be strong in the Chemnitz region than in the Ruhr area or Saarland, but this proportion was nevertheless lower than the western German average. Respondents from Lusatia gave a much more negative assessment. Less than half, namely 40 percent, expressed the opinion that the economy is strong in Lusatia, and only another 2 percent considered it to be very strong. By contrast, 9 percent said that the regional economy is very weak, the highest value of any region.[2]

5.4 The importance of home

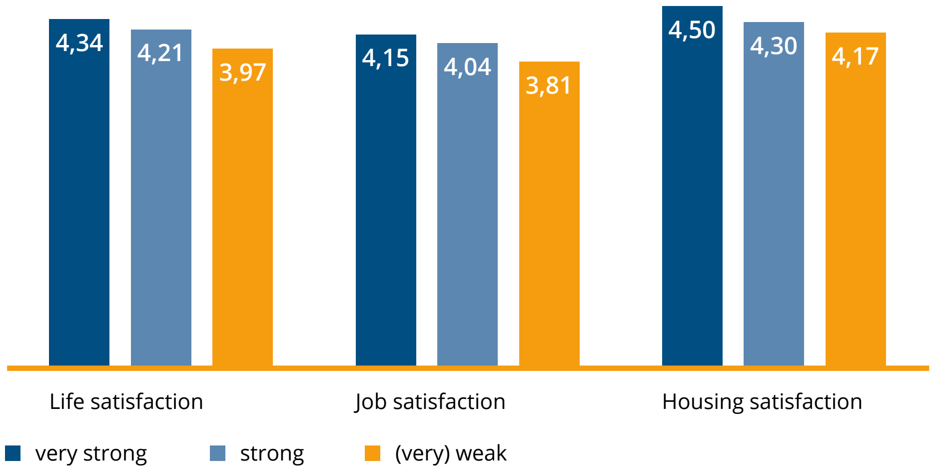
People are attached to their homes. They perceive a special quality in their home regions that distinguishes it from other regions and makes it particularly endearing or pleasant to live in. People care about their family and friends, the landscape, the way people treat one another, and many other characteristics of their region. They consistently become rooted within their home region, whether this region was their place of birth or not.

The interviews show that the regional economy is part of this home. For many people, the characterisation of their region is not limited to landscape or traditions but also extends to economic aspects. In the Ruhr area, where the idea of "heartbeat of steel *[Pulsschlag aus Stahl]*"[3] found its way into popular culture, this economic aspect of regional identity is especially evident. But Lusatia also defines itself in terms of brown coal and its energetic and economic significance for the nation. The Chemnitz region has left its coal traditions behind, but the automotive industry now shapes its identity, and the long tradition of different automotive inventors and manufacturers is considered a self-evident part of the region's historical narrative. And in Saarland, coal mining traditions and the automotive industry also play a key role in regional identity.

Assessments of regional economic strength are clearly linked to life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and housing satisfaction. People who considered their region to be economically very strong scored an average value of 4.34 for life satisfaction on a 5-point scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). By contrast, among those who thought that the economy in their region is weak or very weak, the average value on this scale was considerably lower, at 3.97. The same pattern can also be recognised in satisfaction with job situations and satisfaction with living conditions. In each case, people who considered the regional economy to be very strong were much more satisfied than those who felt that the regional economy is very weak.

Figure 17: Satisfaction and estimated economic strength

If you now think about your life overall, how satisfied would you say you are? And if you think about your job situation, how satisfied are you? If you think about your housing situation and your housing environment, how satisfied are you with these things? Average value on a 5-point scale from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). Shown according to estimated economic strength: When you think about the region where you live, how would you describe the economic situation?

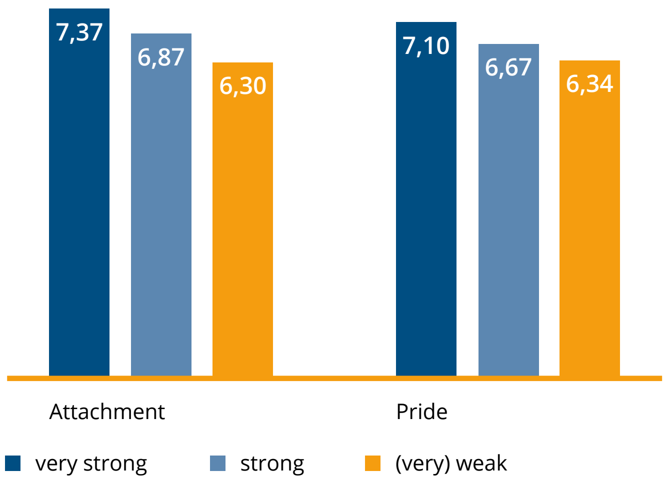


Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. Life and housing satisfaction: 3,817 respondents, job satisfaction: 3,548 respondents.

The respondents' sense of attachment to their city or municipality presents a similar picture to their assessment of the regional economic strength. On a scale of 0 for "not at all attached" to 10 for "very strongly attached", the respondents who considered the regional economy to be very strong scored an average value of 7.37, whereas those who considered the regional economy to be weak or very weak scored an average value of 6.30. With regard to regional pride, the gap was not so large, but the same pattern is observed. The average value on a scale of 0 for "not at all proud" to 10 for "very proud" among respondents who considered the economy of their region to be very strong was 7.10, whereas those who described their regional economy to be weak or very weak scored an average value of 6.34.

Figure 18: Attachment to and pride in city/municipality and estimated economic strength

How strongly do you feel attached to the city or municipality where you live? How proud are you to be a citizen of your city or municipality? Average value on an 11-point scale from "not at all connected/proud" (0) to "very connected/proud" (10). Shown according to estimated economic strength: When you think about the region where you live, how would you describe the economic situation?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. Attachment: 3,808 respondents, pride: 3,731 respondents.

The respondents' sense of home, attachment to their home region, and pride in their home region were also fuelled by the region's economic structure and traditions. Thus, change was experienced as a loss. "Coal and steel are just legends nowadays – sadly" (Saarland, m, 51–60, formerly mining industry, AfD). "There's no joie de vivre because you won't find any new prospects in Bochum. Everything is being shut down, but nothing new is being built. People are worrying: what will happen to me, to my family? (...) It's an awful feeling" (Ruhr area, f, 51–60, not mining industry, SPD). One respondent from Lusatia described a decline in structural change that he believes is yet to come: "If the money crumbles away bit by bit, then purchasing power will also crumble. Then training. It's a spiral that can no longer be stopped. (...) The region is going to become poor" (Lusatia, m, 61–75, currently mining industry, FDP).

Attachment to the economic structure of one's home region is the origin of the grief experienced when facing structural change. A respondent from the Ruhr area described the suffering caused by change very directly, even though nobody in her family was directly affected by job losses: "The closure of the last mine is very sad, just like the closure of the Opel factory in 2015. (...) Everything was torn down, people saw the ruins, that was very negative. (...) When Opel was closed, none of my family were working there, but there's this feeling that the Opel factory belongs in Bochum – people were proud of it. Aunt, uncle, grandpa, grandma, father all worked there. These are personal memories. It's really sad to see it being torn down. It belongs in Bochum, many jobs depended on it. It was really very sad. In my own family, everyone had already retired" (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, not mining industry, non-voter). A respondent from Saarland spoke in very similar terms: “People are living in mining villages, in mining houses on housing estates. If you talk to them, they spend all day long mourning the good old days, and they haven’t managed to adapt” (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, AfD). Another respondent from Saarland also expressed her sadness: “It’s a shame that the good times are over. When people were still doing well. You had to work a lot – but there was a good economy in Saarland” (Saarland, 51–60, f, formerly mining industry, CDU).

Thus, large industrial sectors and businesses influence perceptions of a region, including those of the region’s residents themselves. This effect extends beyond employees and their families. It shapes people’s perception of home. Economic changes are consequently experienced as changes to one’s home.

1 However, these figures cannot determine the direction of causality. It might seem reasonable to think that satisfaction with one’s housing environment would also lead to life satisfaction. But it would also be conceivable that a generally positive disposition might lead to positive views of both life as a whole and one’s housing environment in particular.

2 It is not surprising that the subjective assessment of the regional economy correlates with the economic strength as shown by the official statistics for the districts of each respondent. However, the correlation is by no means perfect. 59 percent of the respondents who said the regional economy is very strong were living in the economically strongest quarter of districts in Germany, as determined by the GDP per capita (for 2016). But 9 percent of the respondents who considered the regional economy to be very strong were living in the economically weakest districts in Germany. Conversely, regardless of the economic situation in their districts according to the official statistics, only a few respondents considered their regional economy to be weak. Of the respondents who considered their regional economy to be very weak, 31 percent were living in the quarter of districts with the lowest GDP per capita. Conversely, 24 percent of the respondents who expressed the belief that their regional economy is very weak lived in the economically strongest quarter of districts. Such discrepancies between subjective assessments and the economic strength shown in official statistics may be caused by misperceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the economy or diverging ideas about how these strengths and weaknesses should be measured on the one hand, or conceptions of the region that deviate from its partitioning into districts for the official statistics on the other.

3 From Herbert Grönemeyer’s song “Bochum” in his album “4630 Bochum”, EMI, 1984.

6 Structural change

In market economies, structural changes are the norm, not the exception. The likelihood of products and services succeeding on the market can change for a variety of reasons. Market actors disappear, others emerge. Globalisation and the formation of a global network of production and sales markets has made these processes even faster, more diverse, and more complex. Accordingly, they can seem opaque to individuals. This lack of transparency is evident when the respondents talk about structural change, but they are nevertheless able to describe general perceptions and their expectations of politicians.

6.1 Change in economic structure

Structural change was often seen as an ongoing and normal process. One respondent from the Ruhr area described change as follows: “Every age comes with its own change. In the past, lots of people lost their jobs when the mines were closed. These people then moved on to other fields. And other companies moved here. So, there is always some kind of change under way” (Ruhr area, 61–75, f, not mining industry, CDU). “This kind of structural change is a completely normal path” (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter).

In regions shaped by coal mining and affected by the phase-out of coal mining and processing, whether recently or in the more distant past, respondents also saw structural change as closely linked to the changes unfolding within the mining industry. One respondent from the Ruhr area described structural change in his region as follows: “Take the mining industry, which is currently disappearing. The people who worked in this industry – many of them aren’t old enough to retire yet. Now they have to look for other jobs and retrain for them. Many of them suffer negative consequences if they struggle to find a new job, if they don’t manage to cope with the change. That’s what structural change is like” (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter). A common view was to see structural change as a very difficult process that challenges and occasionally overwhelms a region. “The region is fighting. A transformation process is happening. I don’t know if you can fill the vacuum that losing the industry would leave behind” (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, Linke).

But change was not only perceived as negative, although this was the predominant perspective. Several respondents also emphasised the positive effects of phasing out coal processing. “The mines have been closed, but new worlds have opened up” (Ruhr area, 51–60, f, not mining industry, CDU). Improved air quality is a prominent aspect. “Everyone used to just equate the Ruhr area with soot and dirt. Not anymore. (...) The air is clear. Before, you couldn’t hang out any bedding or it would be covered with soot” (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU).

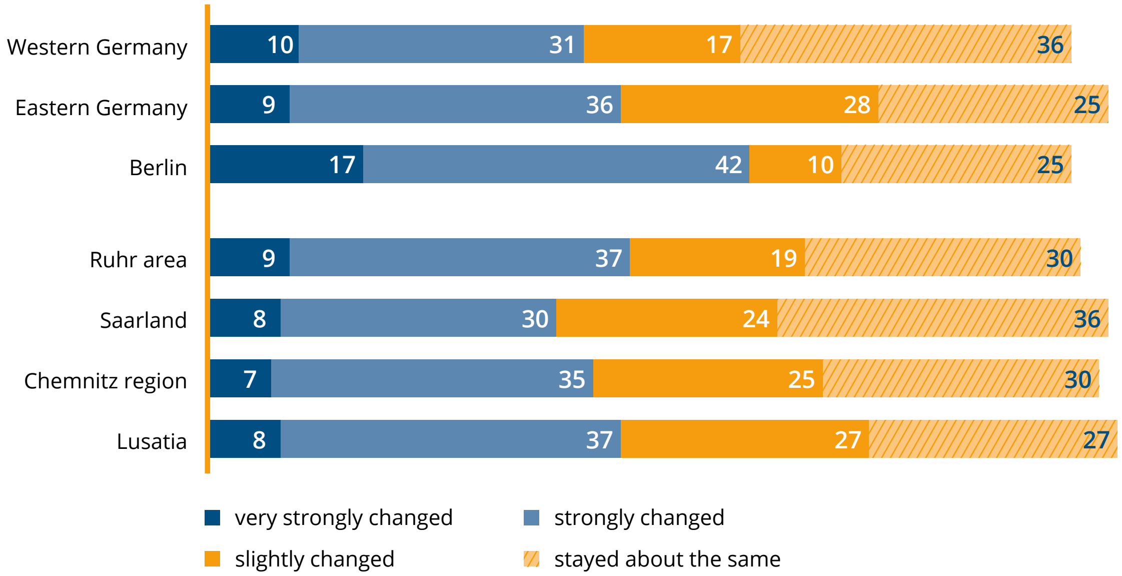
But the phase-out of coal production and consumption was by no means the only structural change cited in coal regions. Past or future changes within the automotive industry were often mentioned. “They say that the automotive industry is being shut down” (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). The changeover to electro-mobility and the changes expected to come with it were a particular concern for respondents from Saarland and the Chemnitz region. “If more businesses are needed for electric cars, we should look at [company name] as an example, to see what they’re doing. (…) Getting it right in the next few years will be a matter of life or death for many industries” (Saarland, 18–30, m, not mining industry, other party). A respondent from Chemnitz expressed a similar view: “Take the automotive supplier industry: what we currently have is for cars with internal combustion engines. There’s going to be structural change in the medium and long term. Because we’re deciding to get rid of all the internal combustion engines. That’s going to become a huge problem” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, not mechanical engineering, FDP). A respondent from Saarland even predicted that car manufacturing will lose its place as a dominant industry: “Building cars is not the future, that phase is over. Suppliers like Bosch and Ford are mostly going to be a thing of the past. You only need 120 parts to build an electric car, but you need 2,500 parts to build a regular car” (Saarland, 51–60, m, not mining industry, non-voter).

The topic of structural change often reminded respondents from eastern Germany of the fall of the Berlin wall and the economic transformation that followed the reunification. “The collapse of an entire industry was a serious matter after the Wende. Many industries also collapsed in the 2000s” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, not mechanical engineering, FDP). “Lots of things dried up after the wall came down. Many opencast mines were closed,” recalled a respondent from Lusatia (Lusatia, 51–60, currently mining industry, AfD). The transformation was a period of comprehensive change for eastern Germans: “Of course, the region was changing, but it wasn’t just people working in textiles who suddenly became unemployed. It happened to many others too. There was a general phase of upheaval (…). But I think that eastern Germany, and especially Chemnitz, fought well to get things back under control” (Chemnitz region, 41–50, m, currently mechanical engineering, CDU).

Respondents from regions that are currently or were previously heavily influenced by coal production reported fundamental structural change. This change relates to the mining industry, which is directly affected by the decline of coal production, but also to the automotive industry, which has either replaced or at least become complementary to the mining industry as the dominant branch of the economy in three of the four regions. In eastern Germany, experience of the transformation after reunification is added to these fundamental economic changes. It seems reasonable to assume that people perceive the regions considered by the survey to be more heavily affected by changes in the economy than other parts of Germany.

Figure 19: Extent of economic change

How strongly do you feel the economic situation in your region has changed over the last ten years?

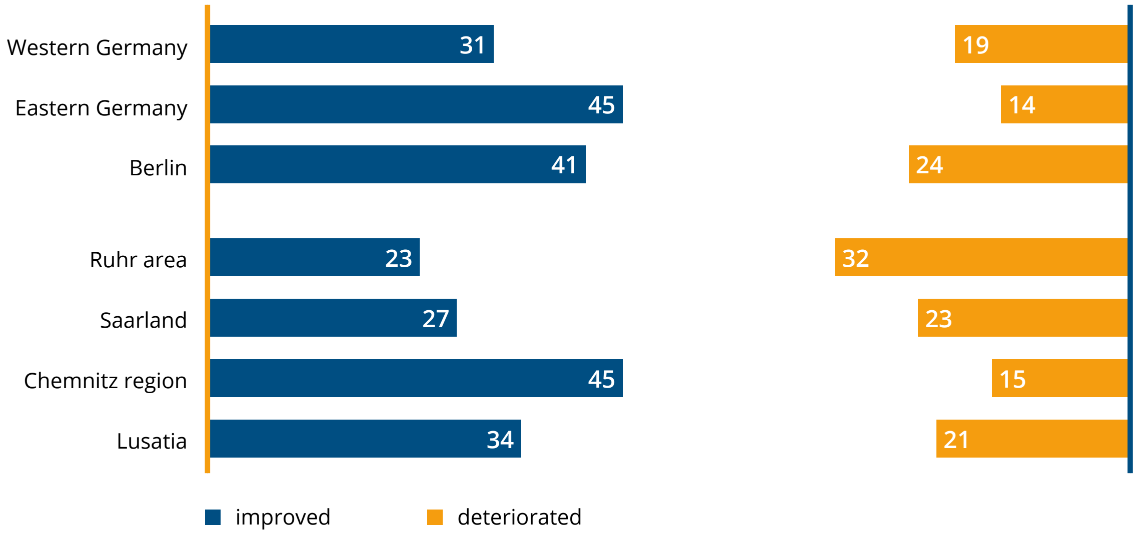


Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

The assumption that people perceive structural change to be unfolding more extensively in the four coal regions than in other areas cannot be confirmed as such. One third of people in Germany considered that there had been great changes over the last ten years. Another 10 percent considered that there had been very great changes. The differences between western and eastern Germany were not very large. In the Ruhr area, 46 percent of respondents said that the regional economy changed strongly or very strongly over the last ten years. In Saarland, this percentage was lower (38 percent). There was no clear east-west divide on this question. In eastern Germany, 45 percent of respondents said that the regional economy changed strongly or very strongly over the past decade; in western Germany, the percentage was slightly lower (41 percent).

Figure 20: Direction of economic change

In which direction has the economic situation changed in your region over the last ten years?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: stayed about the same, neither improved nor deteriorated, don't know, no answer.

However, there was indeed an east-west divide regarding the direction of change. In western Germany, 31 percent of respondents considered there to have been an improvement, and 19 percent considered there to have been a deterioration. By comparison, respondents from eastern Germany viewed the development more favourably. 45 percent considered there to have been an improvement, and 14 percent believed that the regional economy is worse today than it was ten years ago.

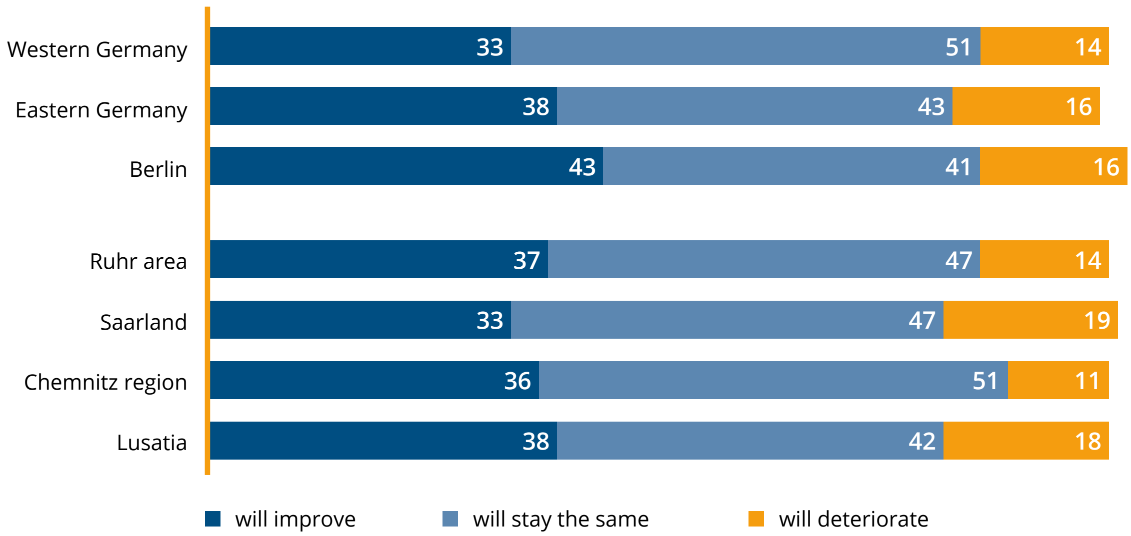
Respondents from Saarland evaluated the economic development somewhat more negatively than the western German average. Nevertheless, there were slightly more people who thought there had been an improvement (27 percent) than who thought there had been a decline (23 percent). Respondents from the Ruhr area adopted a distinctly more negative perspective. Only 23 percent of them perceived there to have been an improvement, with almost one third (32 percent) stating that there had been a decline in the economic situation of the region.

In eastern Germany, the economic development of the past ten years was consistently viewed as positive. In Lusatia, one third of respondents adopted the view that the region's economy had improved. This was lower than the average across eastern Germany. However, people from the Chemnitz region expressed a positive assessment at the same rate as the eastern German average. 45 percent believed that the regional economy had improved. By contrast, 15 percent perceived there to have been rather a decline instead (14 percent in total across eastern Germany).

Thus, the view of regional economic development was considerably more positive in eastern Germany than in western Germany. That being said, in eastern Germany, the development proceeded from a less favourable starting point. In this regard, the assessments of the respondents coincided with the economic data. Overall, there was not a very pronounced relationship between the actual economic development and the perceived economic development. Although the GDP per capita only shrank in three German districts or independent cities from 2007 to 2016, well over a quarter of the population still judged the economic situation to have deteriorated. In the top third of all districts in terms of relative economic growth over this period, 39 percent thought that the regional economy had improved. But even in the bottom third, 31 percent of respondents believed that the regional economy had improved. Clearly, the actual economic situation is not directly reflected in people's perceptions.

Figure 21: Expected economic change

What economic change do you expect will happen in your region?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

The outlook towards the future was predominantly positive. Around half of respondents expected the region's economic development to continue on the same path, and one third anticipated an improvement. In coal regions, hopes of economic improvement within the region were somewhat more widespread. In the Chemnitz region, Lusatia, and the Ruhr area, future economic improvement was expected by 36 percent, 38 percent, and 37 percent of respondents respectively. Saarland was close behind with 33 percent. A decline was only expected by a minority. In Saarland and Lusatia, 19 percent and 18 percent of respondents predicted a decline, which was slightly higher than in the Ruhr area (14 percent) or the Chemnitz region (11 percent).

A majority of the respondents who expected either an improvement or a decline anticipated personal consequences for themselves. 61 percent of the respondents who expected an improved economic situation also anticipated personal benefits for themselves. Conversely, 54 percent of those who expected a decline believed that their personal situation would also deteriorate. Personal advantages or disadvantages were expected somewhat more commonly in western Germany than in eastern Germany. When comparing the regions, people in the Chemnitz region were somewhat more likely to think that they would benefit personally from an improved economy (63 percent), compared to 50 percent (Saarland) and 54 percent (Ruhr area and Lusatia) of respondents in the other three regions. Respondents expected to be personally affected by a decline especially frequently in the Ruhr area (54 percent), whereas between 46 percent (Chemnitz region) and 48 percent (Saarland and Lusatia) of respondents in other regions expected to be personally affected.

6.2 Reasons and effects on structural change

Economic structure can change for a variety of reasons. Factors can range from individual decisions by influential employers to changes in technology and customer preferences or social trends. In the German social market economy, these societal and market developments are accompanied by a commitment from politics to intervene in a regulatory capacity and cushion hardships. Thus, changes in the economy can be traced back to some combination of social changes, market processes, and political action. The specific contribution of a given actor to a given development is difficult to isolate in precise terms. Nevertheless, people develop a conception of who is primarily responsible for structural change from their perspective.

When asked about the causes of structural change, respondents in the coal regions gave a wide range of answers, often naming several causes, in some cases depending on the economic sector being discussed. Several respondents named causes in the economy, management decisions, and market processes. Regarding coal production, one respondent from the Ruhr area said: “Mining coal is too expensive. Money is a factor” (Ruhr area, 61–75, f, formerly mining industry, CDU). Another respondent also thought that the market situation was causing change: “Economically speaking, closing the mines made sense and was necessary” (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter). In other economic sectors, competition on other continents was seen as the decisive change in the market. Regarding the decline of the textile industry in the Chemnitz region, one respondent said: “Because many producers and suppliers from Asia started up over there with cheaper prices. That disrupted lot of things” (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, currently mechanical engineering, CDU).

Others viewed unsound economic decisions as the primary cause. “It’s mostly to do with bad management decisions,” said one respondent from the Ruhr area about the automotive industry (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). A respondent from Saarland went further in her judgement and attributed the changes to a fundamental decline in values among employers: “Our employers are not on our side. There isn’t a social conscience anymore. (…) There’s only greed” (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, Linke).

In a more general sense, cultural change also appeared as a justification for economic change. “Different priorities, a different way of life, everything has become so fast-paced” (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, formerly mining industry, AfD). “There was a shift in thinking that we're not here on this planet to work, that we should be focusing on ourselves instead" (Lusatia, 18–30, f, not mining industry, other party). According to this perspective, people are collectively changing the market and ultimately changing economic structure through their outlook on life and their values.

Politics was, however, the most commonly cited cause of structural change. Often, politics was vaguely named as the cause without concrete ideas about which actors are involved or at what levels. Regarding change in the region, one respondent from the Ruhr area said: "It seems to me that it's not all entirely unintentional. I keep feeling like it's just the next level, that people are eroding the old foundations. The fabric of society is changing. (...) I think that politics is not doing itself any favours with this" (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, Linke). Another considered politics to play a positive role but did not have concrete ideas about what exactly is being done: "We are doing relatively well with structural change. It's working partly thanks to politics. (...) I feel like they care about making sure something happens" (Saarland, 31–40, m, currently mining industry, SPD).

But respondents often also had more concrete thoughts and observations about the role of politics in structural change. For regions affected by structural change, the energy transition and the phase-out of coal were greatly important. This is discussed separately in the following section. As an example of other political interventions, respondents cited incentives for establishing companies: "They offer incentives to businesses, reduced commercial taxes for the first three years. I don't know what goes on but I'm sure that people make deals behind closed doors" (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). A respondent from Lusatia saw clear differences between federal states: "It depends on whether the state is governed by the SPD or the CDU. If you compare Brandenburg and Saxony, you can tell. (...) You get the impression that more things happen in Saxony. More people care about work there, about new business ideas. Upcoming industries were skilfully and sensibly helped to settle there" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, Linke).

Some respondents cited the founding of universities or research institutes, the expansion of infrastructure, or, especially in Saarland, the development of industrial culture. "They're actively working on developing the location as a science centre. BTU Cottbus. I know that" (Lusatia, 18–30, m, currently mining industry, SPD). However, such topics were more frequently associated with failures that respondents reproached of politics (see Section 6.4).

Two topics that were repeatedly brought up, predominantly as criticism of politics, were the Hartz reforms (also known as the Agenda 2010) and refugee policy.

Some respondents expressed the view that the Agenda 2010 and Hartz reforms reflect the influence of politics on economic structural change. "Politics is involved with the fact that, (...) after the 400-euro jobs were introduced, since then it has become very extreme. If you open the newspaper, more than half are 400-euro jobs" (Ruhr area, 4–50, f, not mining industry, non-voter).[1] Another respondent called this the "Hartz IV spiral, many, many mini-jobs" (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). A respondent from Saarland felt that temporary work is a problem. "Ever since it's been promoted, people do what they want. (...) And if you ever speak up and say that it's not right, you get fired. It makes me so angry" (Saarland, m, 51–60, formerly mining industry, AfD). These complaints originated almost exclusively from western Germany. By contrast, in eastern Germany people tended to complain about social benefits being too high or too easily accessible. "People should really stop and think about what it lets you do. And maybe send some of the people who just think 'get Hartz IV and do what you want all day' back to work every now and again" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, not mining industry, CDU). Others complained about low wage levels, resulting in little difference compared to class II unemployment benefits (Hartz IV).[2] "What I find so unfair: many Hartz IV recipients sometimes get more than a hairdresser who's working" (Chemnitz region, 51–60, f, formerly mechanical engineering, non-voter).

With regard to changes in the region, including economic changes, many respondents immediately turned to the topic of refugee migration. "That we've had a lot of new citizens since 2015. Due to the economic situation. Due to wars or presidents who felt like kicking people out of their country. For me, that's a very strong change" (Saarland, 61–75, m, formerly mining industry, AfD). The respondents who brought up this topic perceived it to be a direct consequence of political decisions. "Politics has an impact. There's no way to avoid it. The over-the-top refugee policy. There are economic and political factors in migration backgrounds" (Chemnitz region, 51–60, f, not mechanical engineering, non-voter). "I'm not someone who is very politically knowledgeable, but I think we maybe could have avoided the whole immigration thing, even the mine closures. We didn't do enough, we just waited to see what would happen. Then you couldn't stop it anymore" (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, formerly mining industry, AfD). The idea the Chancellor Merkel made a completely free and single-handed decision about accepting refugees also featured in the interviews: "From Ms Merkel – foreigners from Syria – they come over from there and make trouble and get given apartments. I don't understand it. (...) You feel like you're surrounded by foreigners. – [Interviewer:] Is Ms Merkel responsible for this? - [Respondent:] Yes. I would say so. – [Interviewer:] She alone, or ...? – [Respondent:] Well, she started it. Made sure they can come in" (Saarland, 18–30, f, not mining industry, Linke).

The perspectives adopted by these respondents did not appear to account for any conditions that might also have contributed at least partially to this decision, such as the civil war in Syria, the migratory pressure on the EU as a whole, or the desire to provide assistance to Austria and other EU countries that had previously been especially burdened with the acceptance of refugees. The refugee issue was instead more commonly seen as being directly caused by politics, and in particular by Chancellor Merkel herself. The idea of politics being a decisive factor in the phase-out of coal was also widespread in connection with the topic of structural change in the coal regions, but this idea of a direct political decision was even more strongly present in connection with the topic of refugee policy among the respondents who brought up this issue. The respondent quoted above did not think that politics has an effect in any other area. "No, not really," she answered when prompted. She was not allowed to complete her desired training as a child minder due to insufficient schooling, but it did not occur to her to view this as a political decision.

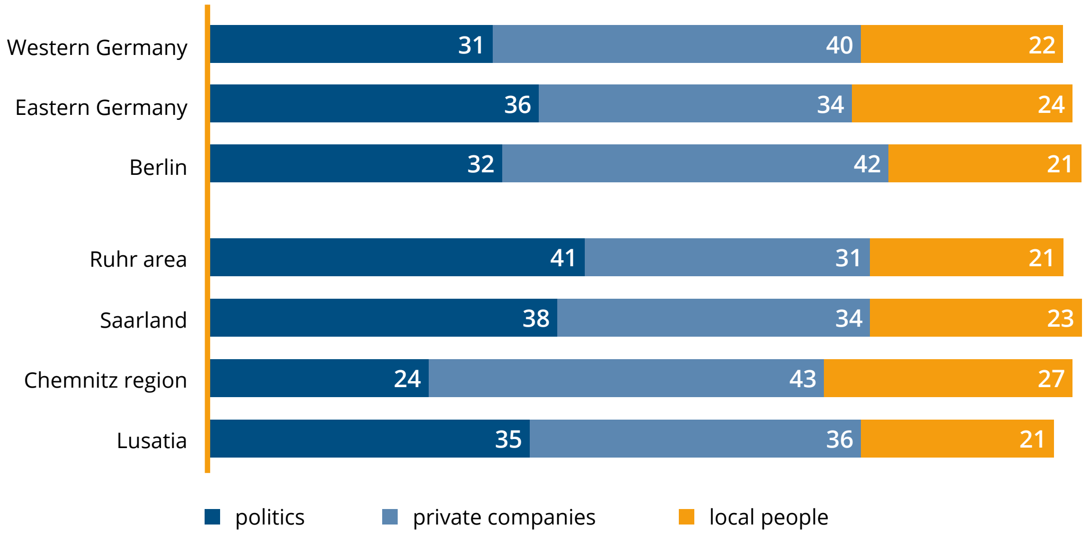
In the representative survey, when the respondents were asked about which actors have the greatest influence on the regional economy, private companies were most frequently named. 39 percent of respondents chose this answer. However, a widespread attribution of responsibility to politics was also apparent. In total, 32 percent of respondents chose political actors as their answer. Of these, local politicians were most frequently cited. A total of 16 percent of all respondents expressed the opinion that local politics has the greatest influence on the regional economic situation. National politics was given the most prominent role by 10 percent of respondents. The European Union (EU) was only cited as the most important actor by a small proportion of respondents (5 percent). For more than a fifth of respondents (22 percent), local people play the decisive role. Although a higher number of respondents stated they could not or did not wish to answer this question, at 6 percent, this is nevertheless an astonishingly small proportion given the complexity of economic developments and the many conceivable factors of influence.

On average across western Germany, 40 percent of respondents considered that private companies are the most important actor in influencing the region's economic situation. By contrast, this proportion was lower in eastern Germany and in three of the coal regions, namely the Ruhr area, Saarland, and Lusatia. In Lusatia, the corresponding proportion was 36 percent. On average across eastern Germany, it was 34 percent. Similarly, in the western German coal regions of Saarland and the Ruhr area, the proportion of respondents who see private companies as the most important actor for the regional economy was 34 percent and 31 percent respectively, and therefore lower than the western German average. These figures appear to reflect the experience of fundamental and in some cases politically influenced structural change, with the phase-out of coal production in the west and most notably the transformation of the whole of eastern Germany after the reunification. In western Germany, only 31 percent of respondents saw politics as the most important actor in influencing the economic situation of the region. The eastern German average was slightly higher, at 36 percent, but this proportion was even higher in the western German coal regions. At 38 percent in Saarland and 41 percent in the Ruhr area, respondents from these two regions adopted this perspective substantially more often than the western German average.

The Chemnitz region was the exception to this trend. This region had the largest proportion of respondents who expressed the opinion that private companies have the greatest influence (43 percent), as well as the smallest proportion of respondents who considered politics to be the most decisive actor (24 percent). In the Chemnitz region, at 27 percent, local people were cited as most decisive for the region's economic situation somewhat more often than in the other regions, although the differences were not very large.

Figure 22: Predominant influence on the regional economy

In your opinion, what primarily determines the economic situation in your region?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Politics: EU, German national government, local politicians. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

In addition to the role of politics, private companies and the local people were also considered to be important. This can also be seen in the in-depth interviews. One respondent from Lusatia expressed the following opinion: "If someone chooses to found a company, it's their job to make it happen. Then they're only indirectly responsible for it. But they can't always blame others when something goes wrong" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, not mining industry, CDU). A respondent from Saarland described a combination of influences from entrepreneurs and politics: "Of course, politics has to create the framework conditions. In terms of infrastructure, extra subsidies, to make it attractive. But the companies themselves have to pull their weight and give it a try" (Saarland, 18–30, f, not mining industry, other party). Finally, the initiative of individuals was also mentioned in some cases (see also Section 6.3). Thus, the assessments given by respondents reference a variety of different actors whose influences on the economic situation are intertwined.

6.3 The phase-out of coal and the Coal Commission

A particular topic that preyed on the minds of respondents in the three regions concerned by it, namely Saarland, the Ruhr area, and most notably Lusatia, was the work of the Commission for Growth, Structural Change, and Employment, known as the Coal Commission for short, which submitted its final report during the final phase of the survey period. The report proposes a phase-out of brown coal mining by 2038, accompanied by numerous measures of structural support in the black and brown coal mining areas of Germany.

The decision to recommend a phase-out was met by opposition from many respondents, especially in Lusatia. “Completely unfounded political decision” (Lusatia, m, 61–75, currently mining industry, FDP). “Negative. No sense or understanding,” judged another respondent (Lusatia, m, 51–60, currently mining industry, SPD). “I’ll say it as clearly as I can. What’s going on right now is complete nonsense,” added another respondent from Saarland (Saarland, m, 18–30, currently mining industry, AfD). The most emotional reactions were expressed by respondents who were currently employed in the coal industry.

Criticism was levelled at the Coal Commission for several reasons. Several respondents in Lusatia emphasised the provisional nature of its resolutions, sometimes expressing scepticism as to whether they will actually be implemented. “Everything being considered with the structural commission, the deals they made, is just a reference for politicians. In the end, it’s the politicians who will decide whether it will be implemented like this. If the measures are implemented, we’ll make some progress economically. But we don’t know whether that will be the case” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP). Another respondent stressed his reservations: “It’s just a recommendation to the government. It’s not what necessarily happens next. Because there’s still no legislation on the issue. People want to see some action now” (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, SPD). The reliability of the announced measures plays a key role for people in the region. One respondent employed by the brown coal mining industry in Lusatia admitted: “Honestly, you have to say the framework conditions described in this paper aren’t bad.” He then added: “Altogether, it gives people some type of hope. Because my colleagues of retirement age are getting cushioned. They don’t have to worry or run away to hide in a corner somewhere. It’s important for everyone to feel some type of security” (Lusatia, m, 18–30, currently mining industry, SPD).

Discussions about the possibility of an earlier exit from brown coal mining were harshly criticised by the respondents from Lusatia. This is understandable in light of the widespread view among these respondents that terminating the production of coal is a fundamental mistake. But it can also be understood in terms of a need for the process to be predictable. The respondents demand reliability. Their comments reveal a deep rejection of protesters, as well as of the Green Party (Grüne). “Some freaks want to make it happen even faster and send their bands of rioters over there. The ones that occupy the diggers in the opencast mines” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, FDP). Another respondent expressed criticism in slightly more reserved terms: “I’m a bit disappointed. (…) They came to an agreement with 30 votes in favour and one against. You can’t come back three days later and say: we want to do something different than what we agreed. It’s unbelievable” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, AfD).

The position taken by the Greens and the protests around and in the opencast mines are clearly a frustration to the brown coal workers in Lusatia: "It's the Alliance 90/The Greens, after the coal compromise was negotiated (…) – it could be an idea for a broad social consensus – but then they immediately stand up and say: no, we don't agree with that, '38 is too late. And then these other organisations get involved … even more radical, occupying the diggers again after the compromise was reached. (…) But they also sat at the table and helped make the compromise happen" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, Linke). Another respondent regretted the lack of willingness to compromise: "Somehow there's no real cooperation, it's always just this way or that way. I find it so extreme. (…) I get the feeling (…) that (…) everyone is a bit stuck on their own opinion and doesn't want to approach the other side" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, other party).

The timing of the brown coal phase-out scenario was met with criticism in Lusatia. On the one hand, some respondents expressed the view that people had reacted too late to foreseeable developments. For example, one respondent from Lusatia said that politics needs to create jobs in the region. "We overslept and missed out on lots of things because we let everything rest on brown coal" (Lusatia, 41–50, m, not mining industry, AfD). Another respondent from the coal industry in Lusatia saw failures on the part of people in the region. "I think we've simply been relying on brown coal for too long. I feel like nobody really wanted to admit that it would come to an end. (…) I think even the people living here themselves have or had left their blinkers on a bit" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, other party).

However, more respondents thought that the problem is not that people are adapting to change too slowly, but that the phase-out of coal production is unfolding too quickly. "Exiting nuclear power was rushed. That's understandable. But rushing everything else too, that's not good. They're ramming through an agenda that's not good for people. It's crazy" (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, Linke).

The focus was most notably on the goal of climate protection, or ending coal-fired power generation as a climate protection measure. Regarding the discontinuation of black coal production in Germany, one employee of the coal industry in Saarland argued as follows: "It's a little sad and hard to understand why we closed our own black coal but we're still buying coal on the global market. The fact that coal is coming to us from China, Australia, and Russia to run our power plants. Apparently, that's supposed to be more environmentally friendly than mining our own coal right here. I don't agree with the government on that point. The ships that come here run on heavy fuel oil and release more CO2 into the air than if we mined our own coal" (Saarland, 41–50, f, currently mining industry, SPD).[3] Others also rejected the end of coal production and coal-fired power generation as having a meaningful contribution in the fight against climate change. "The effect on global climate – it has to be a joke! Anything that we don't emit here, neighbouring countries will emit over there. We'd have gained a lot more if we exported our technology – we really are leaders in power plant technology – if we would just export it" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, SPD). Another respondent also referenced the low emissions of German power plants: "We have the cleanest power plants in the world" (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, CDU). He then added that he has fundamental doubts about the official reasons altogether: "They're just the 'alleged' reasons." On the topic of the energy transition, another respondent said: “It’s not going to work. It just won’t. (...) You can’t succumb to such political delusions against all logic and against science and technology – they’re basically religions at the end of the day” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, FDP).

The problem of energy supply security was repeatedly brought up by respondents: “We’ve set a deadline of 2038. Maybe we should have included a question mark. (...) Because technologies like solar power and wind haven’t reached that point yet; they’re not ready to maintain a stable power supply in Germany. (...) Nobody can tell you what will happen after 2038” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, AfD). “So, they always refrain from saying that you have to phase out slowly, so to speak? (...) What if the sun isn’t shining and the wind isn’t blowing? (...) I find it extreme” (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, other party).

Like for the phase-out of coal, several respondents from the coal regions had scathing opinions about the energy transition: “This ideological delusion of an energy transition is everywhere” (Lusatia, 51–60, currently mining industry, AfD). Fundamental doubts about man-made climate change and the significance of CO2 emissions also played a role. One respondent called it “mumbo-jumbo about CO2” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, FDP). Another disputed the impact of humanity on climate change as a whole. “If the UN says that climate change is happening, then so be it. (...) There are scientists who say that it’s happening, and there are scientists who say that it isn’t. (...) And others say that it’s happening, but it wasn’t caused by humans. (...) I’m of two minds. I’m with the scientists who say there is climate change but it’s not caused by humans” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, AfD).

Doubts about human-influenced climate change as such are rare. Across the German population as a whole, these positions were only expressed by a small minority. The survey also included some respondents who thought that the exit from coal mining was too late rather than too early. “It has to happen as soon as possible and not 20 years from now” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, not mining industry, Grüne). Regarding developments in technologies relating to renewable energies, one respondent expressed the following view: “We are always too slow and too unambitious” (Saarland, 18–30, m, not mining industry, other party). The survey’s finding that people in coal regions and in particular current employees of the coal industry are actively following these questions and discussing them in completely different ways demonstrates once again how important and emotionally charged this topic is for people.

Besides the decision to withdraw from coal production, the respondents also closely monitored discussions about structural aid for affected regions. As well as the issue of the reliability of commitments mentioned above, there was a widespread impression, especially in Lusatia, that a general concept for economic structural change is lacking. “Money is being pumped in for no reason. That’s been tried so many times before. We should be smarter about how it’s done. We’re still missing a plausible concept or a leading figure who we trust to get it done” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, Linke). “I don’t believe that any industrial jobs at the same level as we’re currently earning in mining will settle here to compensate and that the region won’t continue to die out. (...) So money should start flowing again. But I can’t fix everything with money. I don’t have a lot of confidence in politics” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, AfD). “There are dreamers eyeing up projects where you just have to say: there’s no basis for this here, we don't have the people or the companies for it" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, SPD). This doubt sometimes prompted a complete rejection of the phase-out of coal and the imminent structural change: "You can't just break things and get rid of them without knowing what comes next. How things should continue" (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, FDP).

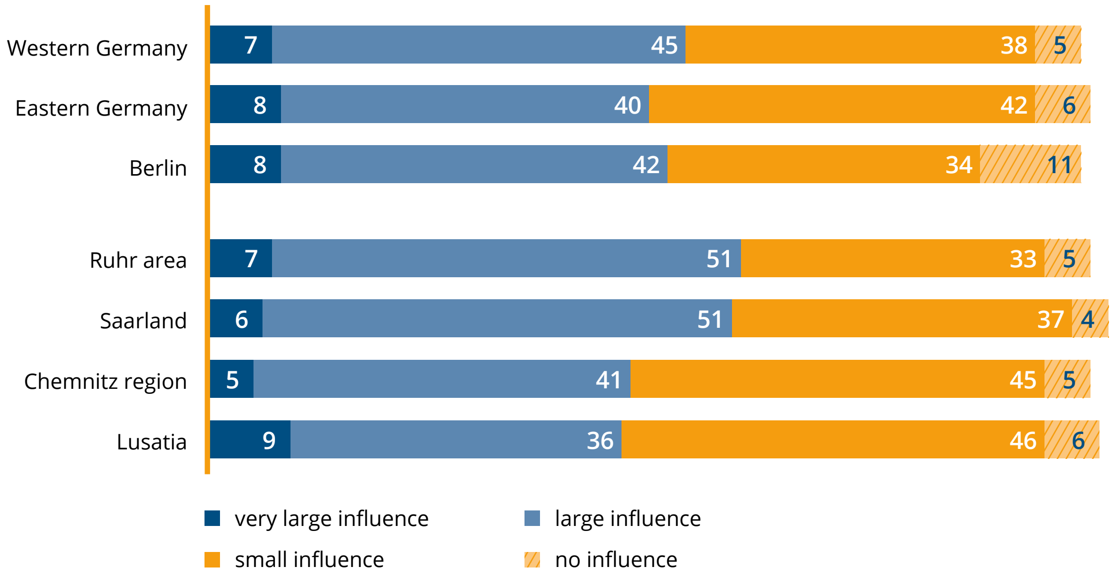
Especially in Lusatia – and even more prominently among its brown coal workers – the work of the Coal Commission was viewed extremely critically, and its proposals were often rejected. People fear for their jobs and the future of the region. This seems to be the most prominent factor that shaped their assessment of the commission's work. In other regions, assessments seem to differ considerably from one another. One respondent from the Ruhr area said: "I think they've already found a good middle ground. (...) This week, they decided that coal mining would be supported for a few more years. But everyone knows that from an environmental point of view it doesn't make sense to keep mining coal" (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter). A respondent from Saarland gave an assessment that was relatively free of emotion: "I don't know. What they did is fine. They need to make sure that the Coal Commission still gets money into Saarland" (Saarland, 31–40, m, currently mining industry, SPD). Another respondent from Saarland ended with this topic: "You do hear about it in the media. But around here you hardly hear about it. Even with your relatives, you don't talk about it anymore. People just accept it" (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). Overall, the work of the commission was rarely discussed in the western German regions or the Chemnitz region.

6.4 Politicians have to fix things

When confronted with the challenge of economic structural change, people often turn their attention to politicians. A consistent majority of respondents believed that politics has a large or very large influence on the region's economic situation. 8 percent were of the opinion that politics has a very large influence on the economic situation in the region, and another 44 percent considered that it has a large influence. In western Germany, the belief that politics has a large or very large influence on the economy was more widespread than in eastern Germany. In western Germany, 52 percent said that politics has a large or very large influence on the economy, while in eastern Germany this opinion was shared by 48 percent of respondents.

Figure 23: Influence of politics on the economic situation

In your opinion, what influence has politics had on the economic situation in your region?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

In the western German coal regions, respondents believed that politics has a (very) large influence slightly more often. 58 percent of the respondents from the Ruhr area said that politics has a large or very large influence on the regional economic situation, as did 57 percent of the respondents from Saarland. Both regions were above the western German average (52 percent). This shows at least some slight reverberations of the political programmes relating to structural change in these regions.

In eastern Germany, respondents had a much more reserved assessment of the role played by politics. In both the Chemnitz region and Lusatia, 45 percent of respondents accorded politics a large or very large influence on the region's economic situation, slightly less than the eastern German average (48 percent). The question of the extent of political influence might reflect differences in comparison standards between eastern and western Germany, since the political influence exerted by the Federal Republic on the economy is of course relatively small when compared against the centrally managed state-controlled economy of the GDR. Recollection of the historical situation in the GDR might be contributing to the differences in assessments observed between eastern and western Germany.

Overall, politics was believed to have a very large influence on the economic situation in the region, with a majority or at least close to a majority expressing this assessment in each of the various regions. Thus, people expected or hoped for political support with matters of economic change, and in some cases expected or hoped for leadership in this change.

Politics “should get more involved, bring in more money,” said a respondent from the Ruhr area (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). A respondent from Lusatia also described his expectations of politics: “I can see opportunities for action in our region too, and politicians have a strict duty to keep on going” (Lusatia, 18–30, m, currently mining industry, SPD). Other respondents formulated demands for direct political intervention in the economy: “Like with Opel. Stand up and say: no, we’re not letting you close down, or you’ll be in trouble! Small threats like that” (Ruhr area, 51–60, f, not mining industry, SPD). “You can’t just lose your grip on things. Politicians have to keep it under control. Anything that belongs to the government also belongs to the citizens in a certain sense. You can’t just sell it all to private investors. You have to put a stop to the whole thing” (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, Linke).

When discussing the role of politics in structural change, some respondents had their eye on ongoing efforts: “We have a relatively young minister president, Mr Hans. He’s fighting for Saarland on every front. I hope his fight is successful” (Saarland, 61–75, m, formerly mining industry, AfD). “I feel like they care about making sure something happens. For start-ups too. (…) State government, cities, municipalities” (Saarland, 31–40, m, currently mining industry, SPD).

Far more often, however, respondents formulated demands for politicians. Many gave the impression that they believed politics has a strong influence and that new companies being settled directly follows from politically determined framework conditions. “We need more companies to settle here if we want to create jobs again. That’s where our politicians have to act. They need to make things happen” (Ruhr area, 61–75, f, formerly mining industry, CDU). “Make the location more attractive for businesses, so that [place name] can also grow a bit and people aren’t forced to leave the region” (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, not mining industry, Grüne). Some respondents felt that industrial jobs are the primary concern: “Of course, everyone wants to keep their big industrial jobs close. But politicians need to make sure that things like that also get built in regions like Lusatia. That’s how I see it” (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP). Other respondents gave priority to settling smaller companies: “Companies shouldn’t be too big. With big companies, it always depends on them. Lots of small and medium-sized companies should settle” (Lusatia, 61–75, m, currently mining industry, AfD).

A variant of this very general idea that structural change can be influenced or controlled manifested as expectations about job creation. “Unemployment has to be reduced,” demanded a respondent from the Ruhr area, without any concrete ideas about how this should be achieved (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter). A respondent from Saarland answered the question about the future tasks of politics as follows: “There should be enough jobs – for everyone” (Saarland, 61–75, f, not mining industry, AfD). In Lusatia, one respondent hoped for help with her job search after the end of coal production. “We should receive support when the time comes, when we are forced to take another path. There should be reasonable opportunities for further training, so that people can find work according to their education, reasonably paid work” (Lusatia, 18–30, f, currently mining industry, SPD).

Some individuals had specific ideas or conceptions about companies being settled. IT companies were one such idea. “I think the IT sector will be promoted more and more here in Chemnitz. It’s already started, and it will get bigger. Politicians could do more, but they're already starting to recognise that. So, things are already good here, and they'll get better" (Chemnitz region, 41–50, m, currently mechanical engineering, CDU). In Lusatia, close attention was paid to the proposal to move a federal authority into the region. Given the results of the Coal Commission, this was understood as a question of credibility, among other things: "To enshrine everything that's been written down on paper into law and make sure that a government agency is located here in the region. Just to send a message saying: yes, we believe in Lusatia" (Lusatia, 31–40, m, currently mining industry, SPD).

When specifically asked about settling new industries in a region, respondents often expressed widespread approval at first: "It's a good thing whenever anyone decides to move here" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, Linke). "The more the better" (Ruhr area, 31–40, m, not mining industry, Grüne). "We would warmly welcome any company that brings us work" (Lusatia, 18–30, f, currently mining industry, SPD).

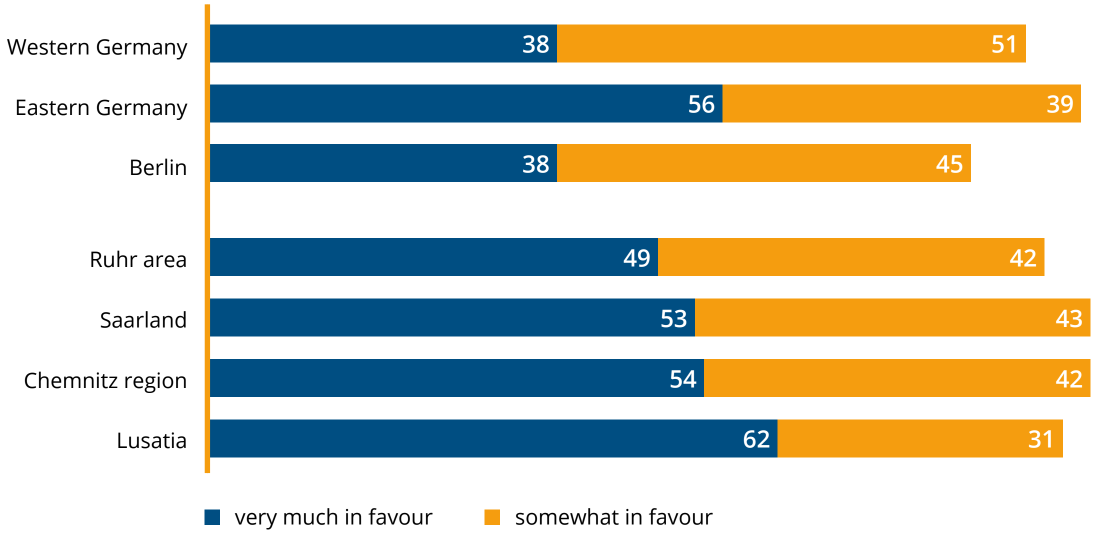
However, the settlement of new companies was not met entirely without reservations. The respondents formulated two criteria. Firstly, any new companies should remain in the region permanently. "It should be something long-term that brings lots of jobs" (Lusatia, 51–60, f, not mining industry, AfD). "It should be a long-term thing. It's important for everybody for there to be a plan. Not just two years, or four years, but a plan for the next few decades, so that my children can live near me, so that I can buy some land and leave them something to inherit" (Lusatia, 41–50, m, not mining industry, AfD).

Secondly, the respondents felt that it was important for any newly emerging industries to be environmentally friendly. "The environment needs to stop being polluted even more. That's something to take into account" (Lusatia, 51–60, f, not mining industry, AfD). "If there's a little steam, that's fine, but nothing blatant" (Ruhr area, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, CDU). In many cases, however, respondents considered the settlement of environmentally harmful industrial companies as impossible or infeasible anyway. "Dirty – nobody needs more of that. We've gotten used to having clean air. People wouldn't be on board anymore" (Saarland, 51–60, m, formerly mining industry, AfD). But the respondents also expected legal regulations to prevent a dirty industry or something similar in the first place: "Loud and dirty don't exist anymore. When you build something from scratch these days, you have to follow very severe standards. So loud and dirty don't happen anymore" (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, not mechanical engineering, non-voter).[4]

Only a small minority from various regions did not attach any importance whatsoever to environmental protection and would welcome environmentally harmful industry simply in order to bring jobs to the region. "We've always had it. Noise and dirt, with coal and everything. (...) In Bochum, it doesn't matter to us. You can live with it" (Ruhr area, 51–60, f, not mining industry, SPD). By contrast, most respondents considered environmental protection to be important when settling new industrial companies.

High approval for new companies being settled in the region was also found by the representative survey. A large majority supported the establishment of new companies, and 41 percent of respondents said they would even highly welcome it. Nevertheless, there were slight differences between regions that reflected the urgency of economic problems, among other things. In western Germany, outside of the coal regions considered by the study, approval for settling new companies was somewhat lower than in the other regions. The proportion of respondents who strongly supported settling new companies was highest in Lusatia, at 62 percent. In the Chemnitz region and Saarland, 54 and 53 percent of respondents strongly supported settling new companies, and similarly in the Ruhr area, half of the respondents (49 percent) were strongly in favour. Opposition to settling new companies in the region was extremely rare. 6 percent of respondents somewhat opposed the settlement of new companies across Germany, and 2 percent strongly opposed it.[5]

Figure 24: Approval for the settlement of new companies in the region
How would you feel about new businesses settling in your region?



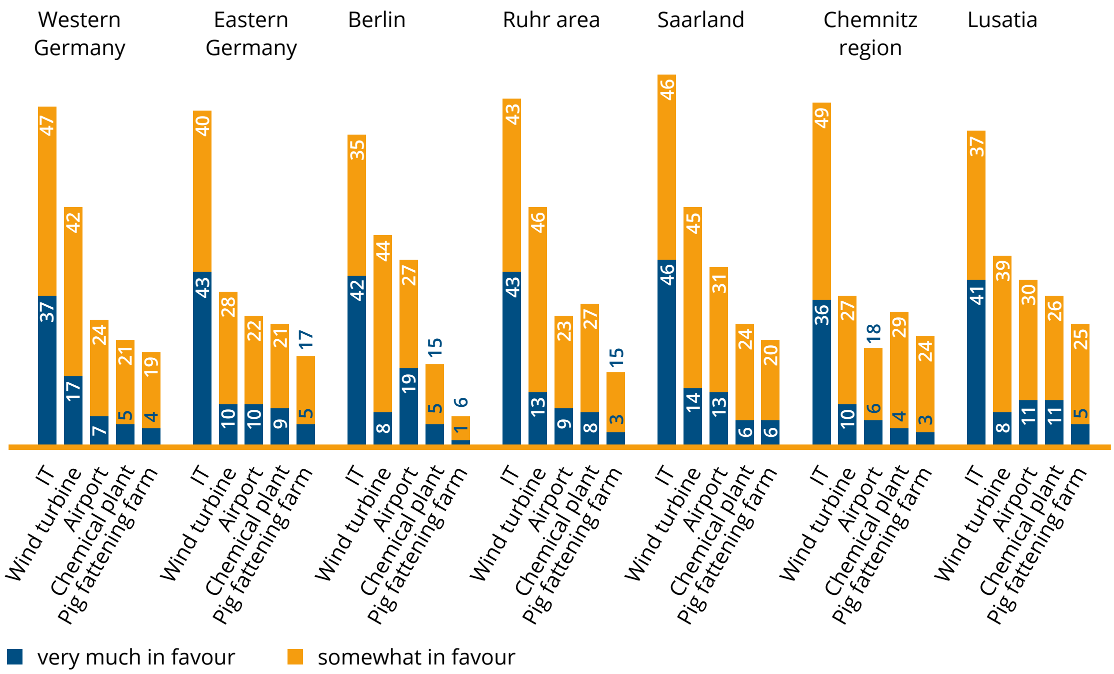
Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: somewhat opposed, very opposed, don't know, no answer.

However, when asked whether specific companies should be settled in the region, the approval rates were lower. This applied to every company suggested as an example. An IT company received the highest approval, which was nevertheless slightly below the approval rate for settling new companies in general. 38 percent of all respondents would welcome a new IT company in their region. This approval rate was highest in Saarland, with 46 percent of respondents saying that they would highly welcome a new IT company. Approval was much lower in the Chemnitz region, where only 36 percent of respondents said they would welcome a new IT company. However, approval for an IT company was extremely high overall.

The other examples of new companies were selected in such a way that residents would associate them with impositions. This demonstrates the extent to which people would be willing to accept downsides when settling new companies.

Figure 25: Approval for the settlement of new companies

To what extent would you support or oppose the following companies being settled in your region?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,734 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: somewhat opposed, very opposed, don't know, no answer.

As expected, approval for establishing a wind turbine park, an airport, a chemical factory, or a pig fattening farm was considerably lower. This held true across every region. In eastern Germany, opposition to wind power was much stronger than in western Germany. Otherwise, approval for settling various companies with negative consequences for residents was higher in Lusatia than in the other regions. 30 percent of the respondents from Lusatia were somewhat or highly in favour of settling a pig fattening farm. On average across eastern and western Germany, only 22 percent of respondents approved of this, with a slightly lower rate of approval in the Ruhr area (18 percent). The results were similar for a chemical plant. In Lusatia, 37 percent of respondents were (highly or somewhat) in favour of settling such a company. In the Chemnitz region, 33 percent of respondents took this position. The eastern German average was 30 percent, well below the approval rate in Lusatia. In the Ruhr area, approval for the chemical industry was also quite high, with 35 percent of respondents being (highly or somewhat) in favour, whereas it was substantially lower in Saarland (30 percent) and on average across western Germany (26 percent).

Across eastern Germany as a whole, and especially in Lusatia, openness to settling new companies appeared to be somewhat higher than in the other regions. Nevertheless, support for settling new companies in the region fell if these companies had negative side effects, and support also fell whenever the potentially settled company was specified more concretely. As such, the attitudes recorded in the survey do not translate directly into a corresponding endorsement of a specific company that might wish to relocate in practice.

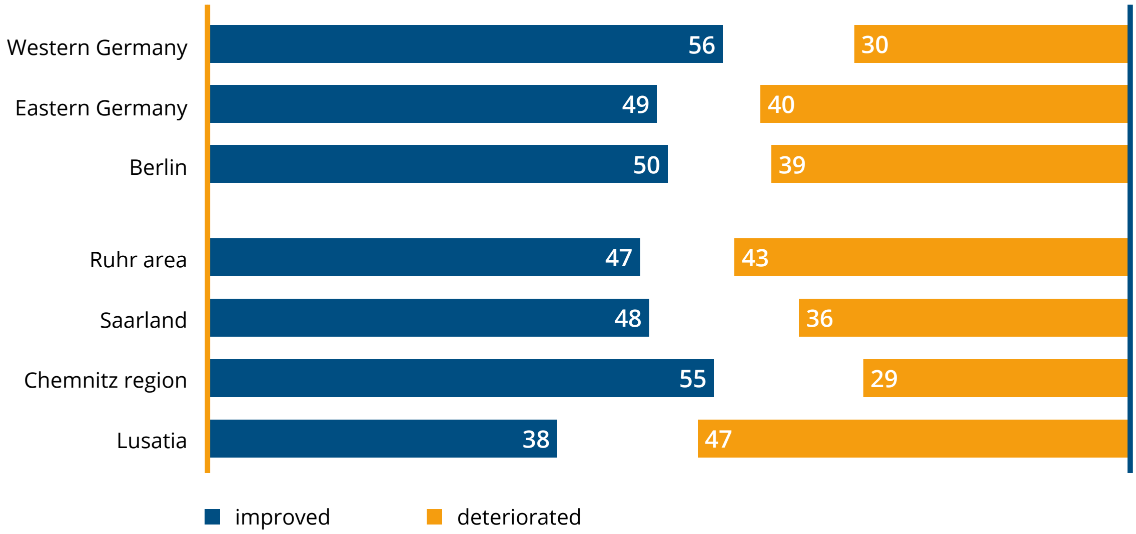
When asked about concrete measures that would make settling companies in the region possible or more likely, at least some of the respondents in the coal regions were able to suggest ideas. The more concrete of these ideas included proposals to support the settlement of businesses financially, through subsidies or tax breaks. "Introduce tax cuts so that companies are more likely to settle here. Tax breaks for companies" (Ruhr area, 18–30, m, not mining industry, non-voter). "Create economic incentives, in other words: investment grants. I'm sure there are lots of people with good ideas who just need the capital for them – give them investment grants" (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, not mechanical engineering, FDP). In Lusatia, one respondent also suggested creating a special economic zone: "This region is going to be battered in the future. It needs a special status. Give tax benefits to companies that settle here" (Lusatia, 51–60, m, currently mining industry, FDP). A resident from Saarland argued that funding should not be limited to newly settled companies: "We should subsidise the industry that's already here and give people security" (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). The respondents seemed to consider the feasibility of giving companies financial support as self-evident.

Expanding transport infrastructure was also suggested as another way to promote the settlement of companies. "You have to invest yourself first; do something about the infrastructure. We're not very well equipped in terms of connections to the Autobahn" (Lusatia, 41–50, m, not mining industry, AfD). In some cases, the perceived need for infrastructure went beyond transport routes. A respondent from Saarland mentioned needs in another area: "To do that, it's of course also important to have the right infrastructure. You need fast internet. You need to be equipped with 5G. We have to make digitalisation happen" (Saarland, 18–30, m, not mining industry, other party). Another respondent saw developing nature and local recreational areas as an infrastructural need: "Just create infrastructure accessible to everyone around the green areas. With dining and shopping. Combine nature and business" (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU). Finally, a respondent from the Chemnitz region gave a noteworthy assessment. He did not see the need for any further expansion, but wished to better exploit existing potential, in particular the potential of current infrastructure, for local recreation: "We have great infrastructure in the east. We should take better advantage of it" (Chemnitz region, 51–60, m, not mechanical engineering, FDP).

Other suggestions to promote the economy included business parks, research and education institutions, and the simplification of bureaucratic processes. Despite this rather long list of proposals and ideas, conceptions of how structural change can be shaped politically tended to be vague at best and typically extremely scattered. Above all, there was a general expectation that politicians should safeguard the region's economic future, regardless of how they achieve this.

The respondents did not find it easy to assess past political performance on the issue of structural change. 13 percent of respondents did not consider themselves to be in a position to give an assessment of this question. But those who did give an assessment of political performance tended to have a positive opinion. 55 percent of respondents believed that politics had improved the economic situation in the region, whereas 32 percent instead thought that politics had made it worse.

Figure 26: Direction of political influence on the regional economy
In hindsight, how do you think politics has influenced the economic situation in your region?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,466 respondents (only respondents who said that politics has an influence). Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

In western Germany, at 56 percent, slightly more people believed that politics had improved the regional economy than in eastern Germany, where 49 percent answered that politics had produced an improvement. In Saarland and the Ruhr area, the proportion of people who thought that politics had achieved an improvement was slightly lower than the western German average. 48 percent of the respondents from Saarland and 47 percent of the respondents from the Ruhr area said that the regional economy had been improved by politics. In the Ruhr area, 43 percent expressed the opinion that politics had made the situation worse. Thus, opinions of political performance were divided in the Ruhr area, where they tended to be more negative than the western German average, whereas in Saarland the proportion of respondents who thought that politics had achieved an improvement was larger than the proportion who considered politics to have made things worse.

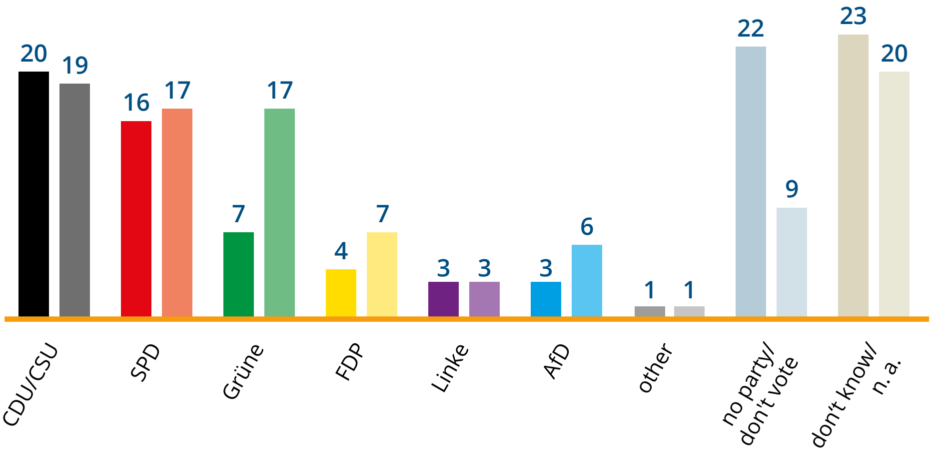
Opinions diverged in the two eastern German regions. In the Chemnitz region, the representative survey found a very positive assessment of political influence. 55 percent considered politics to have produced an improvement. The people from this region viewed the influence of politics much more positively than the eastern German average. In Lusatia, on the other hand, people were much more sceptical. Just 38 percent expressed the opinion that politics had improved the region's economic situation, with considerably more people saying that politics had made things worse (47 percent).

High expectations were placed on politics, and the respondents similarly expressed high hopes that political decision-makers would shape the regional economy for the better. More than anyone else, local politicians were expected to lead the structural change, propose coherent concepts, and thereby provide jobs and prospects for the region. The respondents only had limited ideas about how this might look in practice, and they did not welcome the relocation of every type of company to the region. In spite of this, or perhaps precisely because of it, all eyes were focused on politics.

6.5 Political preferences and structural change

The expectation that politicians should shape or control structural change did not always translate into a specific preference for a political party. When asked which party would be most capable of helping the region with its economic situation, almost half of the respondents (46 percent) did not have an answer or were convinced that no party would be capable of doing this. This answer was more widespread among respondents with little interest in politics and respondents who tended to be somewhat dissatisfied with democracy in Germany. Also, the belief that politics does not have an influence correlated with the belief that no political party would be capable of advancing the region economically. These findings are not overly surprising. It is however interesting that, among the respondents who considered that politics has a very large influence on the region's economic situation, a fairly high proportion (27 percent) believed that no party can help the region economically. By contrast, among the respondents who considered that politics has a large influence, only 17 percent expressed the opinion that no party is suitable. Thus, especially high expectations lead to greater doubts regarding feasibility.

Figure 27: Party that supports the regional economy (dark) –
Party preference in a hypothetical federal election (light) Ruhr area
In your opinion, which party would be able to help the region's economic situation the most?
Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 573 respondents.

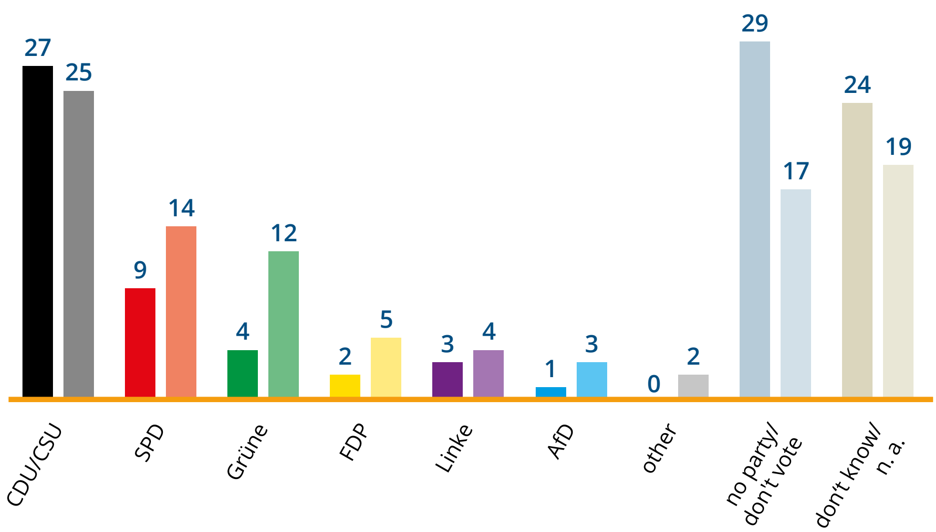
One fifth of the respondents from the Ruhr area thought that the CDU/CSU would be the most competent party for improving the regional economy (20 percent). The SPD was seen as the most competent party for supporting the regional economy by 16 percent of respondents. In agreement with the average across Germany as a whole, around half of the respondents in the Ruhr area either thought that no party would be able to support the economy (22 percent) or did not feel capable of answering this question (23 percent). Only a few respondents considered Die Grünen or any other party to be the political entity most likely to improve the region's economic situation.

Notably, voting preferences in a hypothetical federal election on the following Sunday revealed a very clear shift: many more people wished to vote for Die Grünen, and far fewer people were not able to decide upon a particular party. The high coincidence between voting preferences for a party and the competence accorded to this party on issues relating to the regional economy is also noteworthy. More than 70 percent of the respondents who chose the CDU/CSU or the SPD considered their party to be most competent for improving the region's economy in each case. For the other parties, the corresponding values were around 50 percent or even lower.

Compared to the other regions studied, the Ruhr area was special, as the only region where a party other than the CDU, namely the SPD, was named as the most competent party for improving the regional economy by more than 10 percent of respondents. In every other region, around a quarter of respondents considered the CDU to be the most competent party for improving the economic situation in the region, with fewer than 10 percent of respondents choosing each of the other parties. This reflects the Ruhr area's traditional proximity to the SPD, resulting from the SPD's commitment to subsidising the continuation of coal production and later phasing it out very gradually. In every other region, the economic competence of the CDU was reflected on this issue.

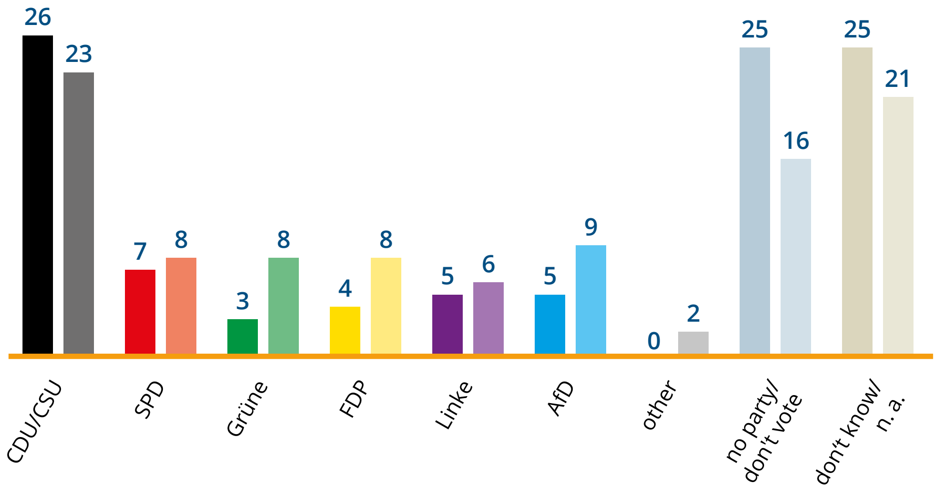
Figure 28: Party that supports the regional economy (dark) – Party preference in a hypothetical federal election (light) Saarland

In your opinion, which party would be able to help the region's economic situation the most?
Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



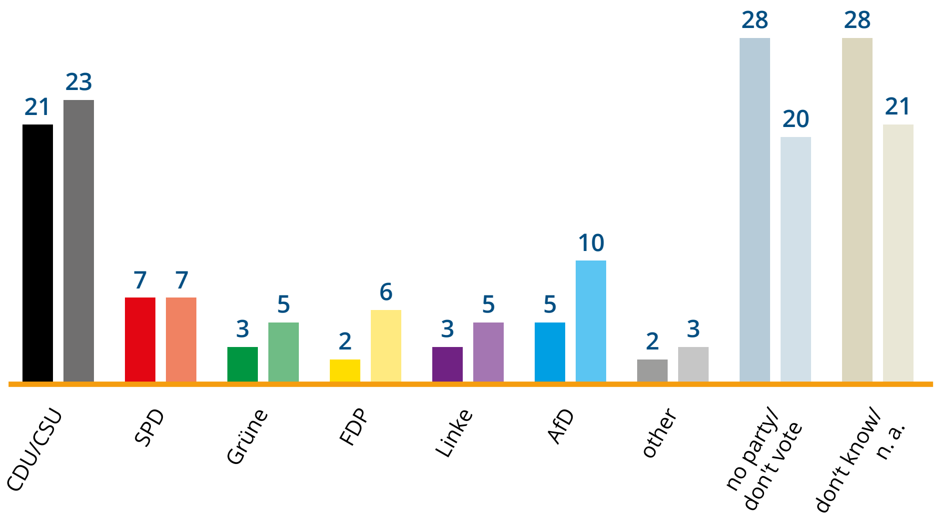
Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 520 respondents.

Figure 29: Party that supports the regional economy (dark) –
Party preference in a hypothetical federal election (light) Chemnitz region
In your opinion, which party would be able to help the region's economic situation the most?
Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 553 respondents.

Figure 30: Party that supports the regional economy (dark) –
Party preference in a hypothetical federal election (light) Lusatia
In your opinion, which party would be able to help the region's economic situation the most?
Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



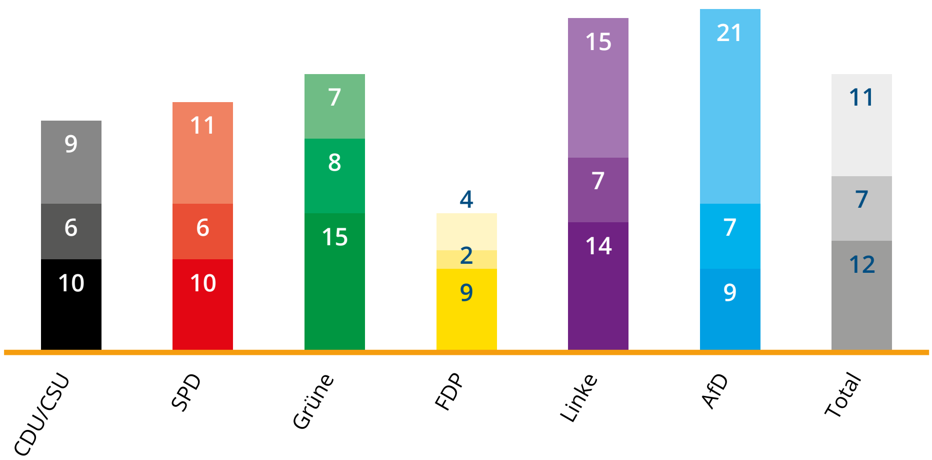
Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 509 respondents.

When the respondents decided which party to vote for in a hypothetical federal election, considerations relating to competence for shaping structural change only played a limited role. Other political issues were of course also relevant, as well as any personal ties that the respondents had formed with specific parties or candidates.

The parties chosen by the respondents displayed a series of well-known trends. Voters for Die Grünen tended to be more educated, favour a liberal migration policy, and report being highly satisfied with democracy, whereas AfD voters conversely reported low satisfaction with democracy, favoured a restrictive migration policy, and expressed extensive concerns about the future of Germany (see also Bergmann/Diermeier/Niehues 2017, Lengfeld/Dilger 2018, Pokorny 2020). In the context of the present study, the question of how the respondents' experience of unemployment, their assessment of the regional economy, and their attachment to their home region fit into the picture is most interesting.

Figure 31: Experience of unemployment in job histories

How long have you been unemployed in total over the course of your life? Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?

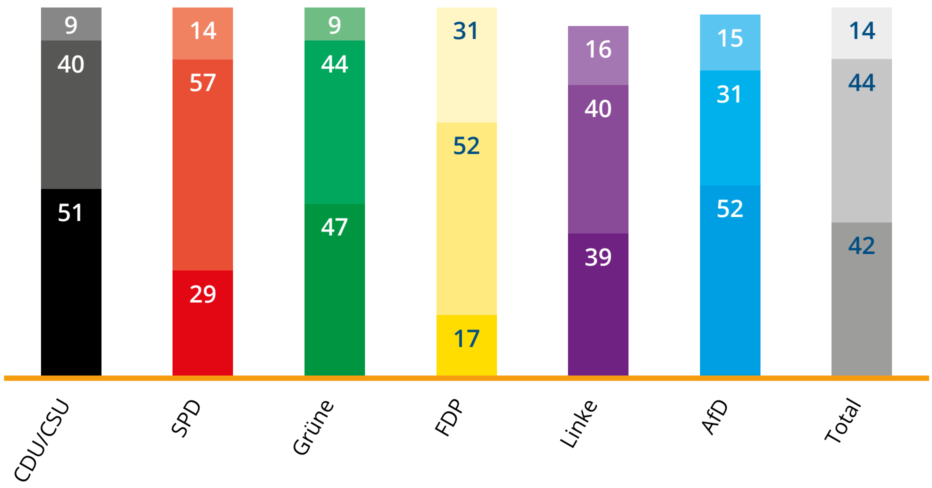


from bottom: up to 6 months; from 6 to 12 months; more than 12 months

Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: never unemployed, don't know, no answer. 6 percent of FDP voters gave no answer.

Among voters for the CDU/CSU, the SPD, and Die Grünen, experience of unemployment largely aligned with the average across the total population. By contrast, voters for the FDP were less likely to report having been unemployed at some point in their job history. However, a comparatively high proportion of FDP voters did not provide any information for this question (6 percent of FDP voters). Voters for Die Linke and the AfD reported longer-than-average periods of unemployment in their job histories. 15 percent of voters for Die Linke were unemployed for more than twelve months over the course of their job history, and this proportion was even higher among AfD voters, at 21 percent (average across Germany: 11 percent). Although the frequency and duration of unemployment differed substantially between eastern and western Germany (see Section 4.1), the differences between voters of specific parties were identical within each of western and eastern Germany.[6]

Figure 32: Professional advancement or regression after being unemployed
Was the position that you found after being unemployed an advancement, a regression, or the same level as before? Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



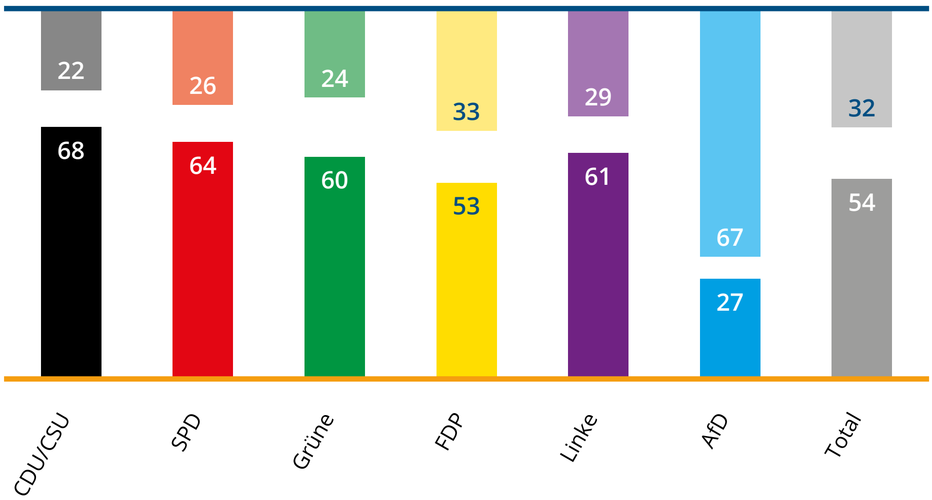
from bottom: advancement; same level; regression

Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 981 respondents (only respondents who found another job after being unemployed). Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

Voters for different parties expressed somewhat different assessments of their new jobs after being unemployed. Around half of the voters for the CDU/CSU, Die Grünen, and the AfD said that their new job after being unemployed was a professional advancement. With 39 percent, voters for Die Linke were less likely to share this view. Only 29 percent of SPD voters perceived an improvement in their new job after being unemployed, and only 17 percent of FDP voters felt their job had improved after unemployment. Conversely, 31 percent of FDP voters felt their new job was a step down after being unemployed, while only around 10 to 15 percent of the voters for other parties felt this way.

Opinions about the region and its economic development also differed in some respects between the supporters of different parties. CDU/CSU voters were most likely to perceive there to have been an improvement in the regional economy over the past ten years, but voters for the SPD and Die Linke also shared this view somewhat more frequently than voters for the other parties (not shown). Compared to other voters, a higher proportion of AfD voters, and in eastern Germany FDP voters, perceived there to have been a deterioration.

Figure 33: Influence of politics on the regional economy according to party affiliation
In your opinion, what influence has politics had on the economic situation in your region? Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?

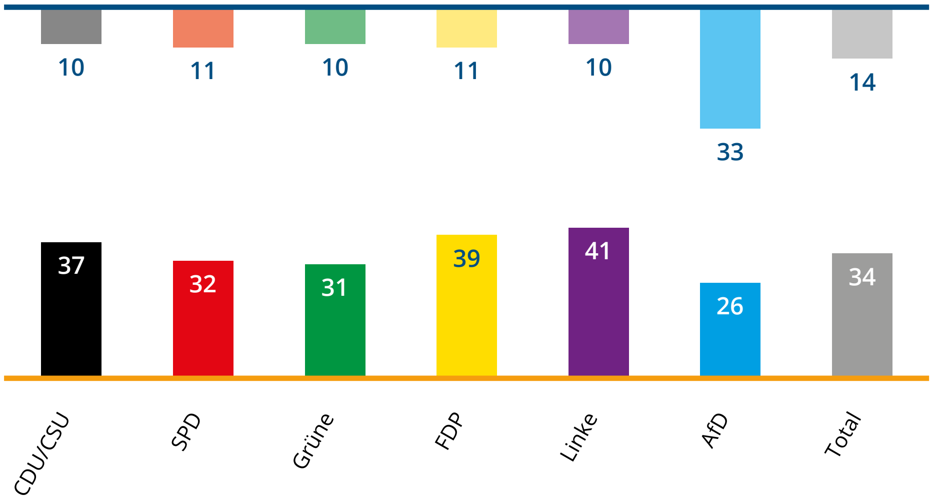


bottom: improved; top: deteriorated

Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,466 respondents (only respondents who said that politics has an influence). Missing values out of 100 %: don't know, no answer.

Supporters of different parties evaluated the role of politics in this development somewhat differently. Many CDU/CSU voters thought that politics had improved the economic situation in the region. 68 percent of these voters expressed this opinion. 60 percent or more of voters for the SPD, Die Grünen, and Die Linke also shared this view. By contrast, AfD voters, and in eastern Germany FDP voters, felt that politics had made things worse more often than voters for other parties. Among AfD supporters, this opinion was shared by a clear majority, with 67 percent of AfD voters expressing the view that politics had made the region's economic situation worse.

Figure 34: Expected change in the regional economy according to party affiliation
What economic change do you expect will happen in your region? Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?

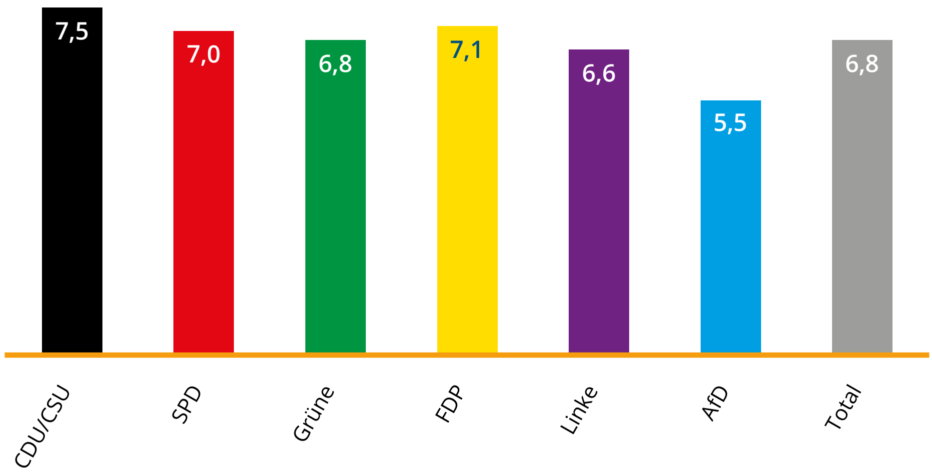


bottom: will improve; top: will deteriorate

Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,727 respondents (only respondents who gave an assessment of change). Missing values out of 100 %: stay the same, don't know, no answer.

Expectations about the future development of the regional economy presented a similar picture. Overall, well over a third of voters expected an improvement, with another half not expecting any change. In western Germany, voters for the CDU/CSU, the FDP, and Die Linke were somewhat more likely to expect an improvement. In eastern Germany, the same was true of CDU/CSU and SPD voters. In western Germany, AfD voters expected a deterioration much more frequently than voters for other parties. 41 percent of AfD voters in western Germany believed that the regional economy will worsen, whereas 10 percent or less of voters for other parties shared this view in western Germany. However, in eastern Germany, AfD voters did not differ from other voters on this issue. 16 percent of AfD voters in eastern Germany expected the economy to deteriorate in their region, compared to 15 percent of CDU voters in eastern Germany and 16 percent of voters for Die Linke. The FDP voters in eastern Germany were much more pessimistic. 37 percent of them believed that the regional economy will worsen.

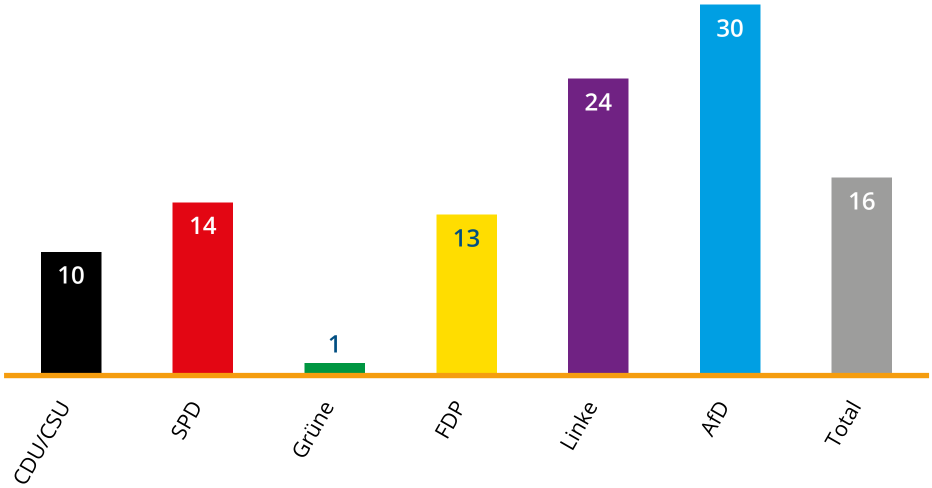
Figure 35: Attachment to city/municipality according to party affiliation
How strongly do you feel attached to the city or municipality where you live? Average score from 0 (not at all attached) to 10 (very attached). Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



Source: 2019–01 survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. 3,817 respondents.

The respondents’ attachment to their home region did not differ much between parties. On a scale of 0 for “not attached at all” to 10 for “very attached”, CDU/CSU voters scored 7.5, slightly above the average of 6.8. Voters for the SPD, the FDP, Die Grünen, and Die Linke all scored roughly the same. By contrast, with a score of 5.5, AfD voters felt somewhat less attached to their home region than voters for other parties. However, the attachment of AfD voters in eastern Germany was at the same level as the eastern German average. Rather, it was the AfD voters in western Germany who felt much less attached to their home region. Among FDP voters, this trend was reversed. In western Germany, with a score of 7.4, FDP voters were more attached to their home region than the western German average (6.7). By contrast, with a score of 5.4, FDP voters in eastern Germany were far below the eastern German average of 7.0.

Figure 36: Dissatisfaction with life according to party affiliation
If you think about your life as a whole, how satisfied do you feel with it? Here: (very) dissatisfied or mixed feelings regarding life satisfaction. Which party would you vote for if next Sunday was a federal election?



Source: survey by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. In percent. 3,817 respondents. Missing values out of 100 %: "very satisfied", "satisfied","no information".

Overall, life satisfaction was extremely high. 34 percent of Germans were very satisfied with their life, and another 50 percent were satisfied (see also Pokorny 2020: 19). The proportion of respondents who said they had mixed feelings or were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied is shown here. This proportion is quite small and differed between the supporters of different parties.

Voters for Die Grünen were the most satisfied. Only 1 percent chose an answer other than very satisfied or satisfied. But a very high proportion of voters for the CDU/CSU, the SPD, and the FDP were also satisfied or very satisfied. In each case, only 10 to 14 percent of these voters had mixed feelings or were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The proportion of dissatisfied respondents was noticeably higher among voters for Die Linke, with 24 percent. But the proportion of dissatisfied voters was highest by far among AfD voters. 30 percent of these voters said they had mixed feelings or were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

The way that people experienced and assessed structural change differed not only between western and eastern Germany, but also between the voters of different parties. Voters for the AfD stood out in particular, but voters for Die Linke and the FDP also exhibited some noteworthy trends.

1 "400-euro jobs" or "mini-jobs" are jobs which are paid up to a certain threshold (currently 450 Euro, at the time of its introduction 400 Euro). For these jobs a reduced and simplified regulation of social insurance applies.

2 Unemployment benefits change with the duration of unemployment. After working for twelve months people are eligible to unemployment benefits in case of unemployment and active search for a job. During the first period of the unemployment (between six and 24 months depending on age and working time) people receive class I unemployment benefit, which is around 60 to 67 percent of the last net pay, depending on the family situation. After this period, people are eligible to class II unemployment benefits if they are in need. Class II unemployment benefit is close to the minimum level of subsistence.

3 This argument does not address the fact that black coal mining, unlike brown coal mining, was primarily discontinued for economic reasons. Due to geological conditions, among other factors, mining black coal is much more complex and expensive in Germany than in other countries.

4 While the respondents' stance towards "dirty" or "noisy" industry was queried directly, the rejection of nuclear power plants was brought up several times without being prompted. When asked what type of industrial companies he would never want to settle nearby, a respondent from Saarland illustrates this perspective: "Anything to do with nuclear power. But apart from that nothing" (Saarland, 31–40, m, not mining industry, CDU).

5 For this question, rejection was somewhat higher in Berlin. 12 percent of respondents from Berlin said they would tend to oppose settling new companies in the region, with another 1 percent saying they would strongly oppose it.

6 A similar pattern is observed when comparing the coal regions, with some deviations. In the Ruhr area, voters for Die Linke were not unemployed for a longer period than average. In the Chemnitz region, voters for Die Linke and the AfD did not deviate from the average. In Lusatia, voters for Die Linke reported longer periods of unemployment in their job history, but not AfD voters.

7 Conclusion

Structural change is first and foremost an economic process that is most visible when considered as a whole. Hindsight makes it more obvious how much specific branches of the economy have changed, whether they have increased or decreased in importance, and the ramifications on the national or regional economy overall. For people, particular aspects of structural change are most visible and noticeable: the restructuring or closure of a company, the discontinuation of certain products and the introduction of others, and unemployment experienced by a friend or oneself. The structural change itself only becomes recognisable when many such particular events are viewed together.

In this study, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung followed the threads of structural change in people's lives. The study was motivated by the withdrawal from coal production in Germany and discourse about structural change in this context. This process does not only concern regions such as Lusatia that are currently being affected by the end of coal production and facing structural change as a result. The study also looks at regions that have already been facing structural change in the aftermath of coal production for quite some time, such as the Ruhr area and Saarland. In some respects, such as in the Chemnitz region, these regions have partly or mostly overcome this task, but they now face new challenges raised by further structural change.

The first surprising result of the study is that disruption in the job history of people in coal regions does not differ substantially from that of people in other regions of Germany. More people have experience of unemployment in eastern Germany than in western Germany, but the Ruhr area and Saarland do not differ substantially from the western German average. Similarly, there are no clear differences between the Chemnitz region or Lusatia and the eastern German average. Concern about job security is just as widespread in these regions as it is throughout the same part of the country, i. e. eastern or western Germany. More people feel that their new job after being unemployed represents a professional advancement in western Germany than in eastern Germany, but once again the coal regions are no different than the national average. Unemployment is often seen as a decisively negative life event and is greatly important to individuals. But this experience is found in many regions across eastern and western Germany.

In addition to how structural change affects individuals professionally, the study shows how people are affected collectively by economic change in their region. People are attached to their region and ascribe to their home region a variety of characteristics that they value and which make them proud. Besides family and friends, the way people interact with one another, and the presence of nature in the region, these characteristics can also relate to the region's economy. Economic structure is one of the many aspects of home. When people believe that the regional economy is strong, they tend to have higher life satisfaction. Structural change therefore amounts in part to a loss of home, which causes people to suffer.

High expectations are placed on politics. People expect politicians to moderate structural change and build economic alternatives. Their ideas about how exactly this might be achieved tend to be vague. People expect jobs to be created and companies to be settled, but it is often not clear to them how these new companies should be encouraged to settle. Their hopes are placed in politicians to develop ideas, concepts, and measures to achieve this goal. The CDU and CSU in particular are seen as political forces that might be capable of promoting the region's economy. However, many people also think that no party is capable of achieving this. In regions of structural change, people often regret the lack of a coherent conception of change, such as a concept or model for structural change. This also seems to be important as an anchor for identification. In the Chemnitz region, many people appear to have taken heart and now feel that economic development is on the right track. In other regions, there is widespread concern. Particularly in Lusatia, which stands at the beginning of another fundamental change, echoing the economic transformation after the reunification of Germany, many people regret the lack of a guiding plan for the future.

In the face of structural change, politics is called upon to act. New problems present themselves, and there are high expectations for politics to provide solutions. To do this, three intertwined tasks must be solved. Firstly, alternatives need to be attracted, enabled, and supported when economic power declines in a region. People find it very important to be able to stay in their region and find new work there. Some are naturally always prepared to move to other regions for their jobs, but the majority would prefer to stay. Secondly, people want economic prospects for their region, with a guiding model for future development. Even when their personal job histories are no longer affected, they continue to express concern for the economic situation of their region. Ensuring that their children will have prospects and that the region will stay alive represent important issues for many, even when their personal job is not threatened. The third task is to bid a proper farewell to declining industries. Economic structure forms part of people's conception of home, so structural change also means saying goodbye to part of this home. This makes people sad. It might be possible to preserve identification anchors by commemorating the economic characteristics of a region, for example its industrial history. Industrial culture may be able to play an important role in this regard.

All three of these tasks are entrusted to politics. "[Politicians] need to manage to keep some appreciation alive. So that things remain worth living for, so they don't bleed out. So that both young and old people can live here together" (Lusatia, 31–40, f, currently mining industry, SPD). Another respondent from the Ruhr area expressed a very similar idea: "Do something for us too, so we won't be forgotten. Give us other prospects. (…) It's my home, it should remain my home" (Ruhr area, 41–50, f, not mining industry, non-voter).

8 Appendix: On the methodology of the study

The study followed a mixed-methods approach (Small 2011) that combines standardised and non-standardised data to gain as multifaceted a view of structural change as possible.

Four regions were selected for the study: the Ruhr area, Saarland, Lusatia, and the Chemnitz region. The motivation behind this selection is presented in Section 2. For reasons relating to the practical implementation of the study, the boundaries of the regions needed to be defined along districts and urban municipalities (*Kreise* and *Kreisfreie Städte*). These boundaries were therefore established on the basis of existing administrative units and the definitions of the Commission for Growth, Structural Change, and Employment.

The *Ruhr area* is defined as the Ruhr Regional Association [*Regionalverband Ruhr*], consisting of the *districts or urban municipalities of* Duisburg Stadt (statistical code 5112), Essen Stadt (5113), Mülheim an der Ruhr Stadt (5117), Oberhausen Stadt (5119), Wesel (5170), Bottrop Stadt (5512), Gelsenkirchen Stadt (5513), Recklinghausen (5562), Bochum Stadt (5911), Dortmund Stadt (5913), Hagen Stadt (5914), Hamm Stadt (5915), Herne Stadt (5916), Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis (5954), and Unna (5978).

Saarland corresponds to the state of Saarland, whose borders were originally chosen to reflect the mining region when it was first founded (Hellwig 1992: 328). Saarland consists of the districts of Regionalverband Saarbrücken (10041), Merzig-Wadern (10042), Neunkirchen (10043), Saarlouis (10044), Saarpfalz-Kreis (10045), and St. Wendel (10046).

Lusatia does not exist as an administrative entity as such. The definition of the Commission for Growth, Structural Change, and Employment was adopted for its boundaries (RWI 2017: 19). Accordingly, Lusatia consists of the districts of Dahme-Spreewald (12061), Elbe-Elster (12062), Oberspreewald-Lausitz (12066), Spree-Neiße (12071), and Cottbus Stadt (12052) in Brandenburg, as well as Bautzen (14625) and Görlitz (14626) in Saxony. The Polish and Czech parts of Lusatia are not considered in this study.

The *Chemnitz region* is defined as the Chemnitz administrative district [*Direktionsbezirk Chemnitz*] that corresponds to the Planning Association for the Chemnitz Region [*Planungsverband Region Chemnitz*]. To clearly indicate that the considered region extends well beyond the city of Chemnitz itself, the phrasing "Chemnitz region" is used throughout. The Chemnitz region consists of the districts of Erzgebirgskreis (14521), Mittelsachsen (14522), Vogtlandkreis (14523), Zwickau (14524), and Chemnitz Stadt (14511).

In the representative survey, a minimum of 500 standardised telephone interviews were conducted in each of the four regions. The respondents were randomly selected from the landline telephone network to form a representative sample. In addition, 1,803 other interviews were conducted from a nationwide random sample of mobile and landline telephone numbers. These additional respondents also randomly included respondents from the study's four particular regions of focus.

While the former or current coal regions described above were considered separately in the standardised survey and represented with a larger-than-average number of cases, Berlin was not. The number of respondents from Berlin was not very large, at 97, and the results of any differential analysis or differentiation between multiple subgroups risk being unreliable. Consequently, the results for Berlin are shown in the figures and tables but are not interpreted.

A total of 3,817 interviews were therefore evaluated as part of the representative survey. For certain questions, some respondents could not or did not wish to provide information. This typically concerned 1 or 2 percent of the respondents, and occasionally up to 5 percent. These respondents were included in the stated percentages. Thus, the 100-percent totals always include a few percent of respondents who did not give an answer. These respondents are, however, not included in the graphical representations, with a separate bar or otherwise. This percentage is only interpreted in cases where a larger-than-usual proportion of respondents could not or did not wish to give an answer.

For the non-standardised in-depth interviews, 20 people were selected in each of the four regions. In each of the regions currently or until recently characterised by the coal production and mining industry, at least 40 percent of the respondents were deliberately selected to be persons currently or formerly employed in the coal and mining industry. This criterion was applied to the Ruhr area, Saarland, and Lusatia. Since coal production in the Chemnitz region ended in the late 1970s, an analogous criterion was instead applied for employees of the mechanical engineering industry in this region.

In the Chemnitz region, interviews were conducted with ten women and ten men, with two respondents in the 18 to 30 age group, four in the 31 to 40 age group, four in the 41 to 50 age group, eight in the 51 to 60 age group, and two in the 61 to 75 age group. Three of these respondents wished to vote for the CDU in a hypothetical federal election on the following Sunday, two for Die Grünen, three for Die Linke, three for the AfD, one for the FDP, and five respondents did not wish to vote for any party. Twelve of the respondents were not employed in the field of mechanical engineering, four were currently working in this sector, and four had previously worked in this sector.

In Lusatia, interviews were conducted with eight women and twelve men, with three respondents in the 18 to 30 age group, five in the 31 to 40 age group, one in the 41 to 50 age group, seven in the 51 to 60 age group, and four in the 61 to 75 age group. Two of these respondents wished to vote for the CDU in a hypothetical federal election on the following Sunday, six for the SPD, one for Die Grünen, two for Die Linke, five for the AfD, two for the FDP, and two for other parties. Seven of the respondents were not employed in the coal and mining industry, twelve were currently working in this sector, and one had previously worked in this sector.

In the Ruhr area, interviews were conducted with eight women and twelve men, with four respondents in the 18 to 30 age group, five in the 31 to 40 age group, three in the 41 to 50 age group, four in the 51 to 60 age group, and four in the 61 to 75 age group. Eight of these respondents wished to vote for the CDU in a hypothetical federal election on the following Sunday, three for the SPD, one for Die Grünen, two for Die Linke, one for the AfD, and five did not wish to vote. Twelve of the respondents were not employed in the coal and mining industry, two were currently working in this sector, and six had previously worked in this sector.

In Saarland, interviews were conducted with eight women and twelve men, with six respondents in the 18 to 30 age group, three in the 31 to 40 age group, three in the 41 to 50 age group, three in the 51 to 60 age group, and five in the 61 to 75 age group. Three of these respondents wished to vote for the CDU in a hypothetical federal election on the following Sunday, two for the SPD, two for Die Grünen, four for Die Linke, six for the AfD, one for the FDP, one for another party, and one did not wish to vote. Twelve of the respondents were not employed in the coal and mining industry, four were currently working in this sector, and four had previously worked in this sector.

The standardised survey and in-depth interviews were conducted by the market and opinion research institute Ipsos GmbH, Berlin, under the leadership of Dr Hans-Jürgen Frieß and Dr Robert Grimm.

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The phase-out of coal production in Germany marks another step on the long path of structural change unfolding in regions shaped by coal production and the mining industry. In a representative and qualitative study, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung explores how people experience this structural change, what fears and hopes they associate with it, and what role they believe politics should play in this process. The study focuses on regions already in the process of structural change, namely the Ruhr area, Saarland, Lusatia, and the Chemnitz region, which are compared against the other regions of Germany.

Structural change leads to disruption in people's job histories, while people from other regions also have similar experiences. Moreover, structural change erodes economic identity anchors. When people lose an aspect of their home, they suffer.

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