

# **The electoral breakthrough of Alternative for Germany and the east-west divide in German politics**

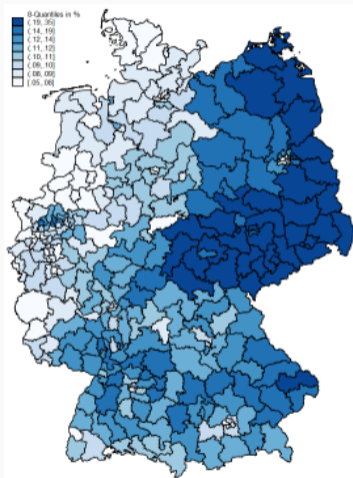
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Kai Arzheimer

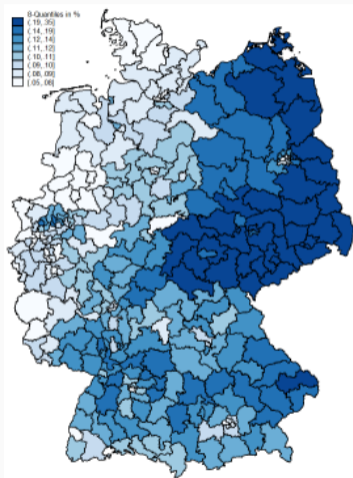
# Introduction

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# The AfD vote (2017)



# The AfD vote (2017): east-west differences



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2. What role did eastern states play for establishing, transforming, & sustaining the party?

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- 30 years after unification, still large economic, social, and cultural/political difference between former GDR and former FRG
  - Disproportionate levels of right wing mobilisation, hate crimes, violence since 1990
  - AfD rapidly radicalising, and eastern chapters amongst the most radical



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So: does this highlight a bigger problem?

Following Mudde (2007, 2019), Far Right consists of

**Radical Right** nativist, authoritarian, opposed to (some) aspects of *liberal democracy*

**Extreme Right** nativist, authoritarian, openly opposed to *democracy as such*

Both may or may not be populist.

**The AfD's breakthrough,  
transformation & rise, & the role of  
the eastern states**

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## The AfD: not a regional/regionalist party

- Founded near Frankfurt by members of Western elite
- Included right-wingers of all stripes from the beginning
- Frontbench almost exclusively male, western, part of establishment (“the professors’ party”)
- (Many prominent eastern leaders born/socialised in western states)

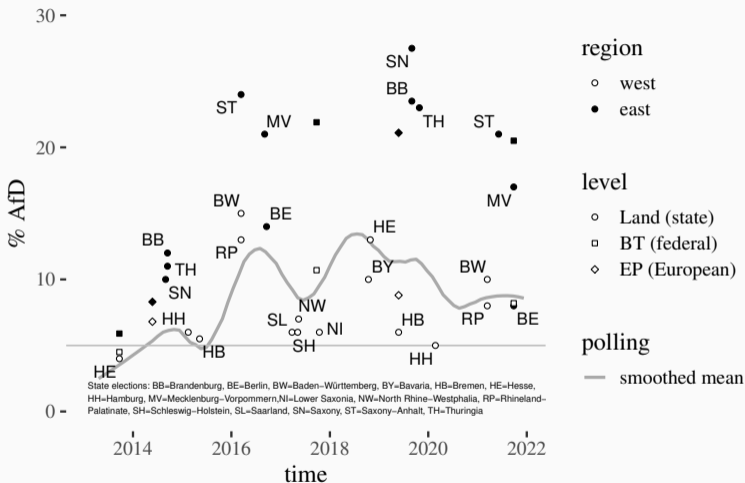
## But an eastern slant

- But eastern states vastly overrepresented amongst office holders → 20% of the population, 25% of the membership, about 50% of the party elite
- Eastern chapters (like Pegida) trying to borrow codes, symbols, practices of GDR opposition/Peaceful Revolution

## The Afd's transformation I (2013-15)

- Started as a “liberal-conservative”, softly eurosceptic project – “reputational shield” (Ivarsflaten)
- Started playing nativist messages in three eastern state elections in 2014 → dominance of eastern office holders
- Internal conflict, decline in the polls, de-facto split in 2015

# Polling and electoral results, 2013-21



## The AfD's transformation II (2015-17)

- Normal radical right party
- But further radicalisation and internal conflict
- Wing gains more influence, *all* recent party leaders attended IfS and wing meetings
- Well-documented ties to extremist organisations, especially (but not just) in the east



## The AfD's transformation III (2017-)

- Much more resources + access
- 2020: formal dissolution of “wing” and some chapters of youth organisation
- But very few expelled & slow exodus of remaining “moderates”
- Alliance with “lateral thinkers”, talk about “violent revolution” in internal chat groups
- Some circles/groups under observation by domestic intelligence services, whole party could follow

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- **Very unusual trajectory for radical right party**

## What is behind the AfD's disproportionate success in the east?

1. Are populist, (authoritarian), nativist, extremist attitudes *more prevalent* in the east?
2. Does their *impact* differ across regions?

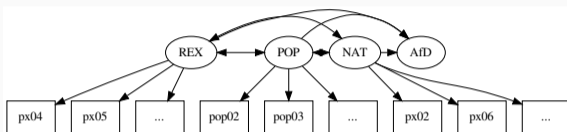
Can some combination of 1+2 explain the gap in party support?

## **A micro-level model of AfD voting in east-west perspective**

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# A multi-group structural equation model of AfD voting

- General Social Survey (ALLBUS) 2018
- $\approx 3,500$  face-to-face interviews with oversampling of eastern states



- Fix mean/variance of latent variables at 0/1
- Probit link for latent vars  $\rightarrow$  AfD voting
- Strict invariance for measurement: equal loadings, intercepts, error variances  $\rightarrow$  RMSEA 0.033

## Correlations between latent variables

	West	East
Right-wing extremism with Nativism	0.63 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	0.62 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Right-wing extremism with Populism	0.45 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	0.52 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
Nativism with Populism	0.60 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	0.67 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)

## Attitudinal east-west differences

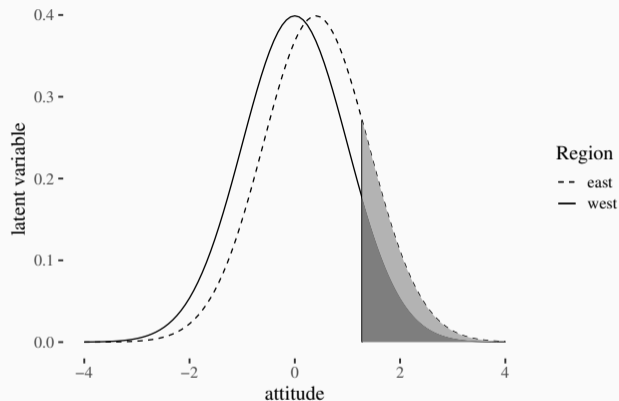
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	East-West differences
Nativism	0.41 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Populism	0.38 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Right-wing extremism	0.16 <sup>*</sup> (0.07)

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*What does that even mean?* → Latent variables have standard-normal distribution

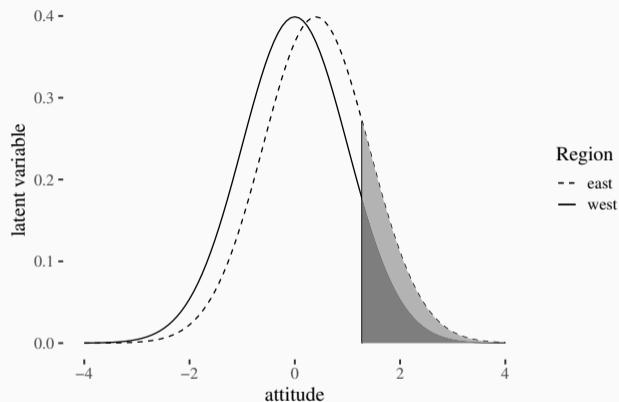
## East/West differences: nativism



- Only  $\approx 10$  per cent of westerners  $\geq 1.28$  (standard deviations)
- But  $\approx 20$  per cent of easterners



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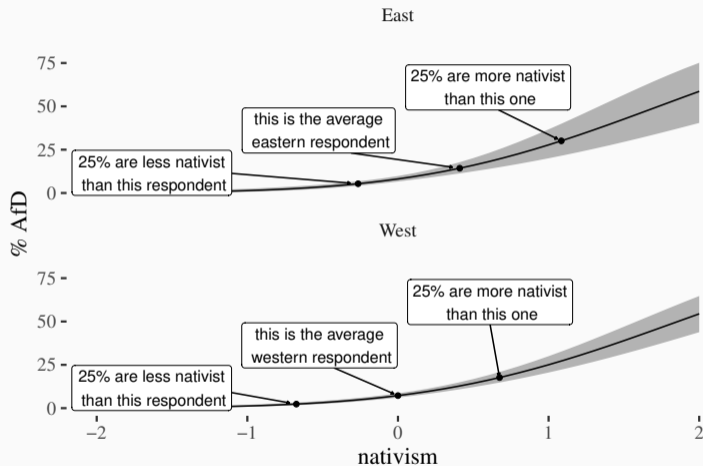
- Only  $\approx 10$  per cent of westerners  $\geq 1.28$  (standard deviations)
- But  $\approx 20$  per cent of easterners
- If one compares two randomly selected persons from east/west ...

- 6/10 times, the easterner has more extreme views; 5/10 times, the difference is  $\geq 0.5$  points, 4/10 times the difference  $\geq 1$  point

## Regression of AfD vote on extremism, nativism, & populism

	West	East
Nativism	0.78 <sup>***</sup> (0.07)	0.81 <sup>***</sup> (0.11)
Populism	0.20 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)	0.04 (0.09)
Right-wing extremism	-0.15 <sup>*</sup> (0.06)	-0.04 (0.08)
Constant	-1.46 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)	-1.40 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)

# Nativism and predicted AfD support in both regions



## Conclusion

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## What about my research questions?

- Eastern states were crucial for AfD to get where they are now
- AfD much stronger in the east because ...
  - Nativism, populism, (and rw-extremism) are more prevalent in the east
  - Nativism has the same impact in both regions
  - Attitudinal differences sufficient to explain the gap in AfD support

## What does that mean for the future of Germany and the AfD?

- Almost all explanations for nativism and for how/why the east is different are structural – no changes in the medium-to-long term expected
- AfD likely to retain support in eastern states even if radicalisation goes on and pressure on party rises further
- But might become a regional party

## Can I get the slides?

sure: <https://www.kai-arzheimer.com/afd-east-west.pdf>

## References

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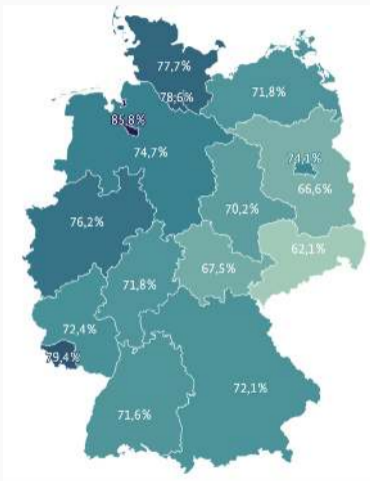


## References

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-  Mudde, Cas (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-  – (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

## Vax rate (at least 1st dose), January 21, 2022



# Operationalisation: populism

Variable	Text
(pop01/pa29)	(The Members of the Bundestag must only be bound to the will of the people.)
pop02/pa30	Politicians talk too much and do too little.
pop03/pa31	An ordinary citizen would represent my interests better than a professional politician.
pop04/pa32	What they call compromise in politics is in reality just a betrayal of principles.
pop05/pa33	The people and not politicians should make the important political decisions.
pop06/pa34	The people basically agree what needs to happen politically.
pop07/pa35	Politicians only care about the interests of the rich and powerful.

# Operationalisation: right-wing extremism

Variable	Text
(px03)	(In some circumstances a dictatorship is a better form of government. )
px04	National Socialism also had its good sides.
px05	If it hadn't been for the holocaust Hitler would be regarded as a great statesman today.
px08	The Jews still have too much influence.
px09	There is something peculiarly different about the Jews which stops them from fitting in with us.
px10	I can understand that people carry out attacks on homes for asylum seekers.

# Operationalisation: nativism

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Variable	
(px01)	(I am proud to be German)
px02	It's about time we found the courage to have strong national feelings again
px06	Because of its many resident foreigners, Germany is dominated by foreign influences to a dangerous degree
px07	Foreigners should always marry people from their own ethnic group
mig1/pa09	Immigrants should be required to adapt to German customs and traditions
mig2/pa17	Immigrants are good for Germany's economy (rev)
mig3/pa19	The influx of refugees to Germany should be stopped
mig4/mp16	Refugees: a risk for the welfare state
mig5/mp17	Refugees: a security risk
mig6/mp18	Refugees: a risk for social cohesion
mig7/mp19	Refugees a risk for the economy

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