

More to the People, Less to Brussels! Alternative for Germany and the 2014 European Parliament Elections*

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Abstract /

The aim of the article is to analyse the determinants of electoral support for the Alternative for Germany, which gained 7.04% of the vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections. AfD is considered a right-wing populist protest party of a primarily Eurosceptic orientation. However, there has been no in-depth analysis of its electoral success based on statistical methods. The territories of former East and West Germany have been selected as unit of analysis, since different patterns of electoral behaviour can be expected to play a role in former Eastern Bloc and Western countries. We analyse voters' political preferences and the question whether the success of the AfD could be better explained with reference to protest voting or issue voting. We conclude that while in West Germany both protest voting and issue voting can explain the success of the AfD, the priority of issue voting over protest voting was pronounced in East Germany, as the immigration issue proved to be a very strong and significant predictor of electoral support for the AfD. Thus, we once again confirm that differences in individual voting behaviour between West and East persist even a quarter century after the unification of Germany. It is thus apparent that the so-called Iron Curtain continues to function as a cleavage in contemporary German politics.

Keywords /

Germany, Alternative for Germany, European Parliament elections, second-order elections, protest voting, issue voting

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Introduction

The recent economic crisis and the European Union's rigidity in addressing it, as well as today's refugee problem, which has also unveiled major weaknesses of supranational governance the EU's, have contributed to waves of Euroscepticism of different strengths in different member states. European societies have seen increased criticism, with issues ranging from the Union's alleged low problem-solving capacity to demands for an EU exit. The largest member state and greatest source of momentum for the Union, Germany, has been no exception to that trend. It is due to Germany's geography, political and economic power and the attractiveness of its social welfare system that this country tends to be affected considerably by Europe-wide problems. Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) is the main Eurosceptic party benefiting from these problems.

More importantly, the AfD is a relatively new entity and it remains perhaps a surprise that no political party with Eurosceptic attitudes was successful in Germany until the most recent European Parliament elections of 2014. Germany is the largest EU member state (in demographic, economic and other terms) and its open economy importantly shapes the degree of competitiveness and the quality of industry and trade in a number of European countries. There is a range of issues such Eurosceptic parties might raise, starting with Germany's long-term status as the largest net giver into the EU budget – albeit this is no wonder given the country's actual size, transfers of this magnitude are necessarily targeted by the critics (Leupold, 2016).

Until the most recent EP elections in 2014, no party (except some marginal ones on the extreme right) had explicitly campaigned against Germany's current role in the EU (Decker, 2012). That ceased to be the case when the AfD made it to the European Parliament with 7.04% of the vote (Berbair, Lewandowsky and Siri, 2014), winning seven out of Germany's 96 seats. It was indeed in the context of European elections that the AfD achieved its first nationwide success.¹

It tested how German people respond to criticizing the European Union and, above all, the amount of contributions Germany had to pay to Brussels compared to what the country was getting. The party retained its Euro-critical attitude in the following elections that took place in Germany and re-emphasized it in the state parliament elections of Brandenburg, Thuringia and Saxony, all so-called new *Bundesländer* (Novotný, 2016a; 2016b) (see Table 1). There the AfD obtained a decent number of representatives when it attracted voters not only with its Euro-sceptical worldview but also its relatively radical stances on social or migration policies (Grimm, 2015).

In this article, we are interested in how the AfD's success in the European Parliament elections of 2014 can be explained. We make use the 2014 *European Election Study* (Schmitt et al., 2015) in order to explain why voters chose to cast their votes for this party. Our aim is to test two frequently used competing explanations of the rise of new parties and voter choice. Specifically, we use the theories of protest voting and issue voting, accompanied by

an analysis of the effects of basic socio-economic and demographic factors on individual voting behaviour in Germany.

A remarkable phenomenon in German politics, AfD has been subject to relatively intensive scholarly reflection in recent years. The papers published thus far have studied the party's ascent from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, they have mostly framed the AfD in theoretical debates on Euroscepticism (Grimm, 2015) and especially right-wing populism (Berbair, Lewandowsky and Siri, 2014; Haeusler, 2015; Bebnowski, 2015; Franzmann, 2016; Schmitt-Beck, 2017). Some other texts have focused on the party's protest potential (Schwarzboezl and Fatke, 2016) or classification in party typologies (Schmitt-Beck, 2017).

However, existing studies on AfD do not agree on who the party's typical voters are (Haeusler 2015) – to what extent this is still a new party with an unsettled electorate that votes for it to express its political discontent, to protest. According to a study by *Infratest dimap*, the AfD was most frequently supported by former voters of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU), the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD), or the Left (*Die Linke*), which attests to a highly diverse group of voters that were primarily united under the anti-EU flag (ARD, 2014).

Although the topic of the AfD might seem to be more-or-less sufficiently reflected in scholarly literature and thoroughly elaborated, we see an apparent gap in existing research, one that we would like to fill. We believe that considerable limitations continue to prevail in two areas of research. As for voter base analysis, there have been only two comparative studies thus far – one analysing the electorates of AfD, the Greens and the Republicans (Blumenberg and Blumenberg, 2017) and one focusing primarily on single-issue parties (Schmitt-Beck, 2017).

The following questions regarding AfD voters in Germany arise from the party's unexpected success in the European Parliament election of 2014: 'Did the voters cast their votes for the AfD as they were active and sincere supporters of the party (issue voting)? Or did they cast their votes to express discontent with the government (protest voting)?' Furthermore, while previous research (Arzheimer, 2015) has only described the characteristics of the party's voters in demographic terms for elections to the German *Bundestag* (national parliament), we aim to expand our understanding of voting behaviour and the mechanism behind voting in the so-called second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

The main goal of the present study is to identify the determinants and factors that influence AfD's electoral support and AfD's success in the 2014 European Parliament elections, touching upon both Euroscepticism and electorate issues; and it is in this regard that we intend to contribute to contemporary scholarly debates. We assume that differential patterns of electoral behaviour of German voters in old and new *Bundesländer* play a key role here. Based on the conceptual framework below that describes the development and position of the AfD and reflects scholarly literature, we are going to define the study's theoretical

framework. To answer the research questions formulated above, logistic regression will be applied to analyse the dataset at hand.

1 / Context: Alternative for Germany’s origin and policy

The Alternative for Germany is a relatively new party in German politics. It was first constituted on 15 September 2012, and only a year later it registered and ran in its first Bundestag elections. Emerging from the civic initiative in the land of Hesse, ‘*Wahlalternative 2013*’ (Niedermayer, 2013), it was formally established in Berlin on 6 February 2013. In the same year, it ran in the Bundestag and Hessian parliament elections. In the 2014 EP elections, it first succeeded nationwide, and subsequently it also obtained parliamentary representation in the states of Saxony, Thuringia and Brandenburg. Its electoral support there is relatively strong, at or above ten percent. Last years marked the party’s first electoral success in the old Bundesländer, namely in the city states of Bremen of Hamburg and more recently (2016) the party broke through in Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt as well (for a general overview of the AfD’s election results see Table 1 below).

Initially, the AfD defined itself exclusively as an ‘anti-EU party’, pursuing a single issue and a programmatic orientation to the right of the CDU/CSU (Niedermayer, 2013: 194).² Its politics tend to be labelled as populist. Since its inception, the party’s central goal has been to dismantle the Eurozone or at least to make Germany leave it. According to the AfD, the euro is a failed project that threatens European integration and more generally peace in Europe by undermining some member states’ competitiveness. As noted by German political scientist Oskar Niedermayer: “AfD is not anti-European. They are against the euro-rescue and the way it was managed. But they do not want their country to leave the EU like UKIP does.” (Pop, 2014)

Table 1. Vote for the AfD in the German federal elections (Bundestag) of 2013 and 2017, the European Parliament elections of 2014, and the state elections of 2013–2017

	Date	Turnout	CDU/CSU	SPD	AfD	FDP	Linke	Grüne	Others
Niedersachsen	15.10.2017	63.1	33.6	36.9	6.2	7.5	4.6	8.7	2.4
Bundestag	24.9.2017	76.2	32.9	20.5	12.6	10.7	9.2	8.9	5.0
Nordrhein-Westfalen	14.5.2017	65.2	33.0	31.2	7.4	12.6	4.9	6.4	4.7
Schleswig-Holstein	7.5.2017	64.2	32.0	27.3	5.9	11.5	3.8	12.9	6.7
Saarland	26.3.2017	69.7	40.7	29.6	6.2	3.3	12.8	4.0	3.4

	Date	Turnout	CDU/ CSU	SPD	AfD	FDP	Linke	Grüne	Others
Berlin	18.9.2016	66.9	17.6	21.6	14.2	6.7	15.6	15.2	9.2
Mecklenburg- Vorpommern	4.9.2016	61.9	19.0	30.6	20.8	3.0	13.2	4.8	8.6
Sachsen-Anhalt	13.3.2016	61.1	29.8	10.6	24.3	4.9	16.3	5.2	9.0
Rheinland-Pfalz	13.3.2016	70.4	31.8	36.2	12.6	6.2	2.8	5.3	5.0
Baden- Württemberg	13.3.2016	70.4	27.0	12.7	15.1	8.3	2.9	30.3	3.7
Bremen	10.5.2015	50.2	22.4	32.8	5.5	6.6	9.5	15.1	8.0
Hamburg	15.2.2015	56.5	15.9	45.6	6.1	7.4	8.5	12.3	4.2
Brandenburg	14.9.2014	47.9	23.0	31.9	12.2	1.5	18.6	6.2	6.8
Thüringen	14.9.2014	52.7	33.5	12.4	10.6	2.5	28.2	5.7	7.2
Sachsen	31.8.2014	49.1	39.4	12.4	9.7	3.8	18.9	5.7	10.1
EP	25.5.2014	48.1	35.4	27.3	7.1	3.4	7.4	10.7	8.9
Bundestag	22.9.2013	71.5	41.5	25.7	4.7	4.8	8.6	8.4	6.3
Hessen	22.9.2013	73.2	38.3	30.7	4.1	5.0	5.2	11.1	5.6
Bayern	15.9.2013	63.6	47.7	20.6	-	3.3	2.1	8.6	17.7

Source: election.de, 2017.

Noteworthy in this context is AfD's election slogan: *Draghi zockt, Ihr zahlt* (Draghi gambles, you pay). Greece has been presented as another big issue (under the slogan: *Griechen verzweifeln, Deutsche Zahlen, Banken kassieren* – Greeks lose hope, Germans pay, banks make revenue). The party also wants Brussels to return some responsibilities back to the national level (the election slogan: *Mut zu Deutschland* – Courage to Germany). Other important goals include strengthening direct democracy (Berbair, Lewandowsky and Siri, 2014), reforming taxes and introducing restrictive immigration policies to stop Germany from becoming a “country of immigrants” (under the slogan: *Einwanderung ja. Aber nicht in unsere Sozialsysteme* – Yes to immigration, but not into our social welfare systems). According to its 2013 Bundestag election programme, the party does not seek to stop immigration completely, but to restrict it to qualified individuals who are “willing to integrate” (*integrationswillig*). The AfD has consistently proposed changing German immigration policies in line with the example of Canada. An emphasis in its programme has been placed on patriotism and regionalism, as apparent in references to traditional German products: *Die deutsche Brauerei-Branche braucht die AfD, weil sie den Stammtisch mitreden lässt* (The German beer industry needs AfD because it lets the pub regulars join the talk).

With these programme accents, the AfD won 4.70% of the vote in the Bundestag elections of 2013 (Schmitt-Beck 2014). After all, the conditions were favourable for the party

to succeed. The economic crisis had brought forth a number of issues and controversies in German society, giving rise to Euro-critical attitudes. However, these factors were eventually outweighed by Germany's relative stability under crisis (relatively low unemployment, continued economic growth etc.), which bolstered the victory of incumbent Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU). Ever since that election campaign, it has been one of the AfD's central themes to criticize Merkel's European policies. This, along with the populism of AfD leaders, caused both the CDU/CSU and the SPD to clearly distance themselves from the AfD, ruling out any future coalition. Interestingly, in spite of that, AfD chairman Bernd Lucke found a coalition with the CDU/CSU conceivable. This was certainly related to the presence of a number of former members of the CDU/CSU (but also of the Free Democratic Party [*Freie Demokratische Partei*, FDP]) in AfD membership (Bebnowski, 2015).³

Let us now discuss the AfD's approximate position on the left-right scale. Given its programmatic accents, it should be placed in the conservative or national-liberal part of the spectrum. However, its electoral support came from both conservative and leftist voters. In short, what AfD voters had in common were critical attitudes to European integration and disagreement with German political elites' political consensus on the basic ideas behind it. In general, the party enjoys higher support in the new *Bundesländer* – as much as 5.9% in the Bundestag elections of 2013, compared to 4.5% in the West. It obtained the votes of 6% of men and 4% of women (Schmitt-Beck, 2014). In the run-up to those elections, the AfD strongly relied on online social networks: for example, on Facebook, it had approximately the same number of likes as the Pirate Party (Voss, 2013). Thus, one can hypothesize that protest was a sufficient theme for the AfD both in the Bundestag elections and in the EP elections. AfD's protest against Europe was skilfully complemented by its anti-immigrant rhetoric. Last but not least, this sounded credible because it was not articulated by unknown leaders but rather by academics, often with Professor's degrees.

2 / A theoretical framework: protest voting and issue voting and their effects on the rise of new parties

Protest voting and issue voting are two of the most important theories regarding the emergence of new political parties. When discussing protest voting in her analysis of the causes of the rise of populist extreme right in Western Europe, Ivarsflaten (2008) pointed out that most theories of party system change agree, irrespective of the economic or socio-political traditions that exist in different countries, that certain processes of social change may give rise to frustrations or grievances and ultimately transform the party system as well. Similar conclusions were, after all, presented in Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) seminal study of the ways party systems in Western Europe arose and changed over time.

Protest then can be defined as indication of dissatisfaction with government policies, or more generally as dissatisfaction with established parties in the national parliament

or their policies, although without direct influence on the distribution of political power at the national level. Rather than genuine sympathy for a party, protest voting may express a rational decision, actively signalling dissatisfaction with current government's performance (Reif, 1997: 112; Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004: 287; Erlingsson and Persson, 2011: 123).

For instance, Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004: 301) argue that just in European elections voters may take advantage of the insignificance of those elections to vote sincerely or to express their dissatisfaction through a protest vote.⁴ Furthermore, Ferrara and Weishaupt (2004), as well as Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley (2008), stress another reason to the decline of governing parties in European elections, namely intra-party fractionalization towards their stance on European integration. Political parties experiencing such deep Euro-divisions are strongly damaged in EP elections (Ferrara and Weishaupt 2004). Similarly, as governing parties are generally more pro-European than both the average governing party voter and the opposition parties, they suffer substantial desertions in EP elections, as voters punish their more pro-European stances, primarily in situations of noticeable gaps between voters and governing parties (Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley, 2008).

Finally, Hix and Marsh (2007), who analysed European elections between 1979 and 2004 in all European Union states, argue that albeit EP elections cannot be viewed exclusively as second-order elections, most European issues play at best a secondary role in voters' choice; and it is punishment of national government, rather than protest against the EU, which primarily differentiates EP elections from national-level elections – a factor that largely validates the theory of second-order elections (Hix and Marsh, 2007: 501–508).

Moving on to issue voting as an alternative way to explain the successful rise of new parties, the basic assumption of issue voting is based on so-called “issue ownership”. Voters perceive a political party (or a candidate in the case of single-member districts) as better able to solve certain problems than their rival party (or candidate), giving that party an electoral advantage on the issue when emphasizing that issue in an election (Petrocik, 1996: 826–827; Stubager and Slothus, 2013: 567–568). Stubager and Slothus (2013) then showed that all four sources of issue ownership (partisanship, attitudes, performance evaluations, and party constituencies) have influence (although varying) on voters' issue ownership perceptions, with partisanship as the strongest factor. This reflects that party identification is an important source of issue ownership – when voters identify with a party, they are inclined to perceive the party as more competent to handle a specific issue (cf. Stubager and Slothus, 2013: 576–586). Regarding the rise of new parties, Erlingsson and Persson (2011: 124) argue that the fulfilment of two conditions is crucial. First, a specific issue has to be on the political agenda, and second, the established parties should be unable to deal with it in a way that represents voters' views on the issue.

Regarding the concept of new parties, current debate is often faced with the problem that every recently emerged party is considered “new”, which is not necessarily a taken-for-granted statement (Sikk, 2005). Many such parties are merely rebranded or founded by former members of another party (Hanley, 2012: 133). In short, the term “new party” seems

conceptually ambiguous and somewhat vaguely applied, since there is no consensus on what it refers to. As a result, the term newness tends to be rethought and reconceptualized again and again. The question is, then, whether AfD is a new party or a single-issue party in the true sense of the terms (Schmitt-Beck, 2017), or whether it is even a protest party.

The typologies presented are mostly Weberian ideal-typical constructions, although there are only a few cases of parties that belong to a single category exclusively. At the same time, one can assume that in the context of niche party theories, the AfD can be classified both as a single-issue party (Euroscepticism) and a protest party, based on the typical trait of negating politics (here the EU).

The debate on how to define niche parties, which was initiated by Bonnie Meguid (2005), gave rise to an increasing tendency to dichotomize between mainstream and niche parties. Indeed, many studies have demonstrated actual differences between those two types, not on in their party programmes but also, more importantly, in their behaviour (Wagner, 2012). It is easy to observe that niche parties respond differently to electoral results and moods in the electorate. A niche party's programmatic effort is primarily oriented on the attitudes of its typical voter, whereas mainstream parties primarily seek to appeal to centrist voters in general (Ezrow et al., 2010). Niche party voters are more likely than ordinary ones to punish their parties for making political compromises (grievance theory).

3 / Data and techniques of analysis

Our analysis employs data from the 2014 European Election Study (EES), consisting of approximately 30,000 face-to-face interviews collected via the CAPI method (Schmitt et al., 2015). In the case of Germany, the EES sample consists of 1,107 face-to-face interviews in West Germany and 541 interviews in East Germany. Although there is no completely clear-cut distinction between the two above-mentioned competing explanations of the rise of new parties, or between protest voting and issue voting, the EES includes variables that allow measuring the effects of both factors.

First, to measure the impact of protest voting, we use the question on satisfaction with the performance of current national government: 'Do you approve or disapprove of the German government's record to date?', as we define protest voting as (dis)satisfaction with how the established (especially governing) parties in the German Bundestag have performed. Second, to estimate issue voting (or issue ownership), we use several questions on voters' opinions about issues which are highly salient in AfD's programme and its effort to mobilise voters (as mentioned above). These questions measure attitudes concerning: a) financial transfers across the European Union; b) European Union unification; c) European economic integration; d) immigration. The independent variables measuring protest voting and issue voting were then supplemented with socio-economic and demographic variables: social class, gender, age, municipality size, and left-right self-placement.

The effects of the above-mentioned indicators were analysed using classic logistic regression. As previous studies (Dalton and Bürklin, 1995; Falter and Schoen, 1999) showed that individual voting behaviour in West Germany differs from that in East Germany, we present regression models separately for both parts of the country. Models 1 and 3 test the effects of socio-economic and demographic variables (Model 1 for West Germany and Model 3 for East Germany), while Models 2 and 4 tests the effects of all independent variables (socio-economic and demographic variables as well as political attitudes) (Model 2 for West Germany and Model 4 for East Germany).

4 / Results

Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regression models estimating effects on voting for the AfD. To begin with estimating the effects of four socio-economic and demographic factors (Model 1) in West Germany, there is only one variable with significant effects. As we expected, there is a significantly higher probability of voting for the AfD among men than among women. The reasons of AfD's higher support among men would require a separate research study; one can only suggest that men are generally more interested in politics than women. Higher interest is also associated with being more concerned. This, however, is merely a hypothesis, considering the fact that a woman (Frauke Petry) is currently head of AfD, which should attract more women to getting involved and supporting the party.⁵ The other variables run in the expected direction, but do not reach significance at the 95% confidence level. The likelihood of voting for the party was higher among higher social classes, younger voters, and inhabitants of large cities, who were more severely affected by globalization, including increased migration etc., and thus more motivated to mobilize. However, it should be noted that in terms of the Nagelkerke R2 the regression model based on the effects of socio-economic and demographic factors was generally not too successful, as it explained little variance of the dependent variable.

In Model 2, we introduce certain political attitudes as independent variables. Most importantly, we find a strong positive and significant relationship with attitudes towards European Union unification and government. As we expected, the more the respondents disagree with the opinion that European unification should be pushed further, the more likely they will vote for the AfD. Similarly, the results reveal that dissatisfaction with the performance of the government strengthens support for the AfD, thus lending support to the protest voting hypothesis. Furthermore, respondents placed on the right side of the left-right scale also have a significantly higher probability of voting for the AfD. Therefore, one can hypothesize that just these categories of voters found themselves likely to suffer the most severe decline of standard of living due to the opening of Germany to migrants, gradual Europeanisation and the financial bailout of Europe's poor south. Their vote can be seen as an ultra-conservative response to the current developments in German politics.

The expected positive, but non-significant, effects are also exhibited by positive attitudes to more restrictive immigration policies and disagreement with the view that in time of crisis, it is desirable to give financial aid to another European Union member state facing severe economic and financial difficulties.

Contrarily, the results regarding the issue of European economic integration are unexpected and ambiguous. We find that individuals who are more supportive of the idea that the European Union should have more authority over member states' economic and fiscal policies are also (unexpectedly) more likely to vote for the AfD, although the relationship is not significant, and the effect of the variable is very low. Finally, in Model 2 as well as in Model 1, all socio-economic and demographic factors work in the same expected direction, with not only higher social class, but also large cities showing significant (and much stronger) effects on voting for the AfD. Overall, the Nagelkerke R^2 shows that the explained variability in Model 2 more than doubles compared to Model 1, signalling that political attitudes may be more important in explaining voting for the AfD.

Table 2. Effects on voting for the AfD, the 2014 European Parliament elections

	West Germany		East Germany	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Socio-economic and demographic variables</i>	B	B	B	B
Social class (0 = higher class, 0.5 = middle class, 1 = working class)	-0.100 (0.703)	-0.936 (0.869)	-3.896* (1.371)	-6.083* (2.122)
Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	2.419* (0.607)	2.791* (0.750)	0.547 (0.624)	1.104 (0.864)
Age	-0.002 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.017)	-0.017 (0.022)
Municipality size (0 = large city, 0.5 = small or medium-sized town, 1 = rural area or village)	-0.300 (0.482)	-1.351* (0.576)	0.594 (0.783)	-0.171 (0.879)
<i>Political attitudes</i>				
Left-right self-placement (from 0 = left to 1 = right)		2.051* (1.061)		0.500 (2.040)
Financial redistribution (0 = approval, 1 = disapproval)		0.366 (0.443)		1.056 (0.963)

	West Germany		East Germany	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
EU unification (0 = approval, 1 = disapproval)		2.386* (0.802)		0.882 (1.575)
European economic integration (0 = more, 1 = less)		-0.101 (0.783)		2.481 (1.776)
Immigration (0 = approval, 1 = disapproval)		0.800 (0.703)		3.346 (1.607)
Government (0 = approval, 1 = disapproval)		0.873* (0.438)		0.037 (0.801)
Constant	-4.807* (0.881)	-7.268* (1.287)	-1.083 (1.114)	-4.904 (2.089)
N	1,107	1,107	541	541
-2 Log likelihood	276.638	197.997	94.360	57.954
Nagelkerke R^2	0.109	0.249	0.121	0.349

Source: election.de (2017), authors' own calculations.

Note: Logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; significant at .05 level; significant values in bold.

However, in East Germany, the results of the logistic regression coefficients estimating the effects on voting for the AfD are very different from West Germany. Here, of all the socio-economic and demographic variables (Model 3), only social class has a significant effect, with a considerably higher probability of voting for the AfD among respondents from higher classes than among those from the working class. Other socio-economic and demographic variables do not reach significance at the 95% confidence level, but like social class, two of them (gender and age) run in the same expected direction as in West Germany (males and younger voters are more likely to vote for the party); municipality size, although also non-significant, runs in the opposite direction, with voters in rural areas or villages more likely to vote for the AfD.

Similarly, we find some important differences between East and West Germany after political attitude variables are added to the model (Model 4). While in West Germany we find a positive correlation between voter support for the AfD and left-right self-placement, the European Union unification variable and the government variable, in East German *Länder* all these variables work in the same direction but with much weaker (and non-significant) effects, close to zero in the case of the government variable. The same direction (positive and non-significant) is found in the case of the redistribution variable, indicating rejection of financial transfers across the European Union in times of economic crisis.

However, the most striking differences are found in political attitudes concerning European economic integration and immigration. While West German AfD voters approve (albeit the effect of the variable was weak) that the European Union should have more authority over member states' economic and fiscal policies, their Eastern counterparts strongly oppose that view; nevertheless, the relationship does not reach significance in either case. Immigration is thus the only political attitude variable with significant effects in East Germany. We find a very strong positive correlation between being in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration and voting for the AfD, suggesting that the immigration issue is more important to East German voters when deciding whether or not to vote for a party. Finally, as socio-economic and demographic factors (Models 1 and 3) explain about equally little variance in East Germany as in West Germany, the variance explained by the logistic regression model in the case of political attitudes (Models 2 and 4) in East Germany is approximately half that of West Germany, again supporting the assumption that in East Germany voting for the AfD is motivated by issue voting more than by disagreement with current government.

Concluding remarks and discussion

The aim of the article was to analyse the determinants of voting for the AfD. The text focused on the analysis of voters' political preferences and the question whether the success of the AfD (as a new and non-parliamentary party) in the European Parliament elections of 2014 could be explained more by protest voting (i.e. with reference to second-order elections theory), or by voters' opinions regarding the party's main political issues (i.e. the concept of issue ownership).

The results demonstrated considerable differences of voting behaviour between East and West Germany. Different factors proved statistically significant and some of them worked in opposite directions. First, the analysis of socio-economic and demographic factors showed that AfD was primarily supported by men in the West and by higher social classes in the East; here it needs to be emphasized that the power of these regression models was relatively weak in general, namely in both parts of Germany. In both East and West Germany, too, men were more likely to support the AfD (more so in the West). The support of social conservatives from higher social strata (especially in the East), then, speaks for the assumption that AfD has successfully attracted votes away from right-wing parties, and especially the FDP (in the EP elections) and partly also the CDU/CSU. Both these cases related to segments of voters rejecting the furthering of European integration and the strengthening of Germany's role in that process, especially with regard to financial commitments and bailing out of the economically weak South.

Moving on to political attitudes, the results show that in West Germany both protest voting and issue voting are able to explain the success of the AfD, or new parties more

generally. West German voters support the AfD to express a general protest against the performance of the German government. At the same time, preferences concerning certain specific issues had a strong effect on voting for the AfD. Its electoral support was very strong especially among those who believed that the process of European Union unification had already gone too far. Moreover, one must consider the fact that the EP elections took place in the year following the Bundestag elections, which resulted in somewhat worse results of government parties; in the German context, their decline was even more pronounced given the CDU/CSU-SPD grand coalition and AfD's lone deviation from a kind of pro-European consensus. Similarly, the AfD had a much stronger support among voters who placed themselves on the right side of the left-right scale.

Thus, we conclude that the fact that the AfD succeeded among West German voters in EP elections can be explained both by issue voting and by protest voting. These findings are somewhat contradictory to those of a number of prior studies, which found protest voting (punishing government), rather than anti-EU protest, to be the main determinant of the success of non-parliamentary parties. On the other hand, similarly to our results, Erlingsson and Persson (2011) showed that the success of the Swedish Pirate Party in the 2009 European elections should be explained rather by issue voting (the importance that individuals ascribed to the party's main political issues) than by protest voting.

The precedence of issue voting over protest voting is even more pronounced in East Germany. Here, the question of whether voters approve or disapprove of the German government's performance was not significant for their decisions. Contrarily, political attitudes, and more specifically those to the immigration issue, proved as a very strong and significant predictor of voting for the AfD. Regarding the immigration issue, thus, calls for the most restrictive policy clearly prevailed among AfD voters. Hence, although the AfD was the only relevant party of the political mainstream representing this view (sharing the anti-immigrant issue only with some marginal extreme right parties), it expressed itself boldly, but without reckless vulgarities and, above all, in a way that was interesting for media coverage.

Thus, a segment of the population came to see the AfD as a defender of German national interest and nationalism – once again a theme that German political parties had traditionally addressed with utter political correctness. The AfD broke the taboo and started talking about German national interest, criticising the EU, and questioning the further prospects of Europeanisation. All in all, the EP elections boosted AfD's political presence and its success in the subsequent state elections, while bringing the party to the centre of attention. Internally, this resulted in a struggle between a conservative faction in West Germany and a populist right faction in East Germany, which was won by the East. Former leader, Frauke Petry, has brought the AfD to regional victories, on one hand, but also strengthened cooperation with extreme right groups, which might eventually further radicalize the party. Thus, in future, it is the level of radicalization that should lie in the focus of scholarly attention paid to the AfD.

The above text makes it clear that the post-communist region continues to face us with important issues, and more than a quarter century after reunification, Germany's politics

is still divided by a west-east cleavage. This is attested by the results of the analysis, namely that both issue and protest voting motivated West German voters' support for the AfD, while support in the eastern part of the country was solely motivated by issue voting, specifically at a time when the migration crisis strongly resonated throughout the European continent.

It is in this regard that a vast potential for further research opens. This paper presented the results of analysis based on logistic regression, which is limited by its inability to identify specific combinations of determinants that may lead to electoral success or failure. By utilizing configurative methods and, above all, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) (Rihoux and Ragin, 2009), future researchers may be able to focus precisely on such combinations of influences leading to a result that cannot be illuminated by statistical analysis. In our opinion, it is by using configurative methods and comparing the results with those of standard statistical analysis that we should be able to achieve a more in-depth and complex understanding of the phenomenon of Alternative for Germany.

Another important issue for future research of voting behaviour would be to apply more strongly, in spatial terms, the simple distinction between East Germany and West Germany. Other perspectives may emerge if, for example, western rural areas are compared with rural areas in the eastern part of the country. Clearer spatial differentiation, using for instance spatial-econometric methods (spatial regression, spatial autocorrelation, geographically weighted regression and so on), might prevent the possibly too rough stereotypical distinction between East and West Germany from being questioned more critically. Indeed, this approach would have the ambition to produce a more accurate socio-political map of current Germany after the breakthrough of the AfD at all levels of governance.

Notes /

- 1 To complete the picture, let us add that the party obtained 4.70% of the vote in the Bundestag elections of 2013. This, too, was considered a good result, although not good enough to guarantee any seats (Mader, 2014). In the Bundestag election in the autumn of 2017, the AfD received 12.6% of the votes and became the third strongest German party (Novotný and Šárovec, 2018).
- 2 Since the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*, CSU) has been a coalition partner to the CDU. It runs exclusively in Bavaria, while the CDU never runs in that state. The lasting connection that exists between both parties has no analogy elsewhere in Europe.
- 3 The text was written before the Bundestag elections of 2017 and for that reason it does not deal with this elections in depth.
- 4 Reif (1997: 122) exemplifies a protest party on the *Republikaner* in Germany, which won a number of votes and seats, for some years, in various second-order political arenas only.
- 5 On 4 July 2015 Frauke Petry, a member of the right-wing faction of the AfD, was elected as a new party leader instead of Bernd Lucke. However, after the Bundestag elections of 2017, Petry broke apart, even though its result in this election in Saxony was the best in all the Länder. Currently, Jörg Meuthen is the leader of the AfD.

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Summary /

The recent economic crisis has contributed to new waves of criticism and Euroscepticism of different strengths in different member states. In case of Germany, there was no political party that succeed with Eurosceptic attitudes and/or explicitly campaigning against Germany’s current role in the European Union until the 2014 European Parliament elections. That ceased to be the case in 2014 when the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Alternative for Germany) made it to the European Parliament with 7.04% of the vote and winning seven out of 96 seats. Alternative für Deutschland is considered a right-wing populist protest party of a primarily Eurosceptic orientation. Despite the fact AfD has been subject to relatively intensive scholarly reflection in recent years, there has been no in-depth analysis of its electoral success based on statistical methods. Moreover, existing scholarly studies on the case of AfD do not agree on who the party’s typical voters are and/or to what extent this is still a new party with an unsettled electorate that votes for it to express its political discontent, to protest. It seems to be an apparent gap in existing research, one that the paper would like to fill. Thus, the paper is interested in how the success of AfD in the 2014 European Parliament elections can be explained. Using the 2014 European Election Study data, the aim of the article is to analyse the determinants and factors that influence electoral support of AfD in the 2014 European Parliament elections, touching upon both Euroscepticism and electorate issues. A logistic regression is applied to analyse the dataset at hand to test two frequently used competing explanations of the rise of new parties and voter choice, the theories of protest voting and issue voting, accompanied by an analysis of the effects of basic socio-economic and demographic factors on individual voting

behaviour in Germany. The territories of former East and West Germany have been selected as unit of analysis, since different patterns of electoral behaviour can be expected to play a role in former Eastern Bloc and Western countries.

The results demonstrated considerable differences of voting behaviour between East and West Germany. Different factors proved statistically significant and some of them worked in opposite directions. First, the analysis of socio-economic and demographic factors showed that AfD was primarily supported by men in the West and by higher social classes in the East; here it needs to be emphasized that the power of these regression models was relatively weak in general, namely in both parts of Germany. In both East and West Germany, too, men were more likely to support AfD (more so in the West). The support of social conservatives from higher social strata (especially in the East), then, speaks for the assumption that AfD has successfully attracted votes away from right-wing parties, and especially FDP (in the European Parliament elections) and partly also CDU/CSU. Both these cases related to segments of voters rejecting the furthering of European integration and the strengthening of Germany's role in that process, especially regarding financial commitments and bailing out of the economically weak South. Moving on to political attitudes, the results show that in West Germany both protest and issue voting are able to explain the success of AfD, or new parties more generally. West German voters support AfD to express a general protest against the performance of the German government. At the same time, preferences concerning certain specific issues had a strong effect on voting for AfD. Its electoral support was very strong especially among those who believed that the process of European Union unification had already gone too far. Moreover, one must consider the fact that the European Parliament elections took place in the year following the Bundestag elections, which resulted in somewhat worse results of government parties; in the German context, their decline was even more pronounced given the CDU/CSU-SPD grand coalition and AfD's lone deviation from a kind of pro-European consensus. Similarly, AfD had a much stronger support among voters who placed themselves on the right side of the left-right scale. Thus, we conclude that the fact that AfD succeeded among West German voters in the European Parliament elections can be explained both by issue voting and by protest voting. The precedence of issue voting over protest voting is even more pronounced in East Germany. Here, the question of whether voters approve or disapprove of the German government's performance was not significant for their decisions. Contrarily, political attitudes, and more specifically those to the immigration issue, proved as a very strong and significant predictor of voting for AfD. Regarding the immigration issue, thus, calls for the most restrictive policy clearly prevailed among AfD voters. Hence, although AfD was the only relevant party of the political mainstream representing this view (sharing the anti-immigrant issue only with some marginal extreme right parties), it expressed itself boldly, but without reckless vulgarities and, above all, in a way that was interesting for media coverage.

The paper concludes that while in West Germany both protest and issue voting can explain the success of the AfD, the priority of issue voting over protest voting was pronounced in East Germany, as the immigration issue proved to be a very strong and significant predictor

of electoral support for the AfD. It is thus apparent that the so-called Iron Curtain continues to function as a cleavage in contemporary German politics. However, this paper presented the results of analysis based on logistic regression, which is limited by its inability to identify specific combinations of determinants that may lead to electoral success or failure. By utilizing configurative methods and, above all, qualitative comparative analysis, future researchers may be able to focus precisely on such combinations of influences leading to a result that cannot be illuminated by statistical analysis.