Pulling up the Drawbridge

Anti-Immigrant Attitudes and Support for the Alternative for Germany among Russian-Germans

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Abstract: The most recent scholarship on the Alternative for Germany (AfD) indicates that citizens primarily cast a vote for the party based on anti-immigrant or xenophobic attitudes. Nevertheless, prominent figures from the AfD suggest that many Germany citizens with immigrant backgrounds vote for it–an argument that has been picked up by the media. In this article, we investigate the most likely potential constituency of immigrants that might support the AfD: ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union, so-called Russian-Germans. Using the 2017 Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES), we find that these ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union indeed voted for the AfD in relatively large numbers when compared to the overall population. Furthermore, when predicting vote choice, we find that the main predictor of voting for the AfD among Russian-Germans is not political ideology but rather a simple hostility towards new refugees. Crucially, migrants with a Soviet background are more likely to vote for the AfD if they hold the position that there should be no economic or political refugees allowed into the country.

Keywords: Alternative for Germany (AfD), German federal elections, immigration, right-wing populism, Russian-Germans, voting behavior

Introduction

$\mathcal{G}$erman citizens with a Soviet migrant background–often known simply as Russian-Germans, a large subtype of ethnic German migrants (*Spätaussiedler*)–comprise a unique group of German voters. Largely descendants of Germans who emigrated to Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Russian-Germans came to Germany in large numbers in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism in the Soviet Union after 1991. Because of their ethnic German background, these *Spätaussiedler* were given citizenship immediately upon arrival in Germany.[1] Some accounts of voting

behavior of Russian-Germans have suggested that a majority have traditionally supported the Union parties, primarily out of gratitude to Helmut Kohl and CDU policy towards Soviet migrants in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[2] There is also some evidence from polling data that ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union have voted disproportionately for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)/Left Party (Die Linke).[3] That finding could support various scholars' argument that, in general, migrant groups support left-wing parties because of a more welcoming attitude towards ethnic diversity and multiculturalism as well as because of the political left's identification with a more comprehensive welfare state.[4]

Curiously, however, there has been growing speculation on Russian-German support for Germany's newest and most successful right-wing populist party to date, the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Various news outlets, for example, have suggested that there has been a "turn towards the radical right" in the Russian-German community;[5] that the "fiercest devotees" of the AfD are ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union;[6] that Russian-Germans are the "backbone" of AfD support;[7] and that Russian-Germans are helping to "fuel the rise of Germany's far-right."[8] Of course, such speculation is grist to the mill for the AfD. Prominent AfD politicians, such as Anton Friesen from Thuringia, have attempted to claim that the party is not, in fact, anti-immigrant by asserting that many Germany citizens with immigrant backgrounds vote for the AfD.[9] Moreover, the AfD has aggressively courted the Russian-German community.[10]

Empirical scholarship on voting patterns of Russian-Germans has been scant-to-non-existent.[11] Recently, however, a very significant contribution has been made by Achim Goerres, et al.,[12] whose analyses come from the 2017 Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES) conducted from October 2016 until March 2020.[13] IMGES specifically surveys 1,044 German citizens with a Turkish migration background or an origin from countries of the former Soviet Union and took place after the 2017 German federal election. The survey is the first to explicitly include migrants who are German citizens and has at least four important findings. First, the survey data suggests that Russian-Germans turnout to vote in significantly lower numbers than the population at large. Second, the raw data appears to confirm earlier analyses that a plurality of Russian-Germans support the Union parties. Third, the IMGES study shows that, after the Union parties, the Left Party is the preferred vote choice for migrants from the Soviet Union. Finally, the IMGES data suggests that although Russian-Germans vote for the AfD in slightly larger numbers than the population at large, this is not as significant as it might appear to be. Indeed, the lead author of the IMGES study, Goerres, has stated in an

interview in 2018 that the notion that the AfD is the party of Russian-Germans is "classic media hype."[14] Nevertheless, in their 2018 article drawing on the IMGES data, Goerres and his co-authors argue that "xenophobia among immigrant voters appears to be a relevant area for further research" and specifically mention the need for a quantitative study looking at the link between anti-immigrant attitudes and support for the AfD.[15]

In this article, we investigate support from Russian-Germans for the AfD given the evidence for the existence of interesting trends and patterns in this group's voting behavior. That being said, these trends and patterns could disappear when controlling for other variables of interest in a multiple regression analysis. Therefore, we utilize Goerres's groundbreaking work as an important launching off point for conducting a study that empirically tests the substantive impacts of important variables while controlling for additional explanatory variables. It is only when fully controlling for all important variables that we can have a better idea of the reasons that Russian-Germans cast a vote for one party over another.

Our research questions are twofold. First, did German citizens with an immigration background from the former Soviet Union vote in disproportionate numbers for the AfD in the 2017 German federal election? Second, if Russian-Germans did vote disproportionately for the AfD, what are the factors explaining this? To our knowledge, our study is the first rigorous empirical study to attempt an answer to these questions while controlling for other variables of interest, and goes well beyond descriptive statistics found in the survey data.

We structure our article as follows. After an initial exploration of scholarship on who votes for populist radical right parties and for the AfD in particular, we posit some initial hypotheses on the voting behavior of Russian-Germans. The section following this outlines the methodology employed in testing our hypotheses. Finally, we present our findings and then summarize and discuss the main takeaways from our research.

Who Votes for Far-Right Parties? Who Votes for the AfD?

Until around 2015–2016, the scholarly consensus on the AfD was that it was a "Euroskeptic" party–a party defined by a sharply critical attitude towards the EU–rather than a populist radical right party, even though the AfD clearly had some right-wing populist elements.[16] Nicole Scicluna was one of the first to suggest that the AfD had mutated from a Euroskeptic party to a populist radical right party.[17] Kai Arzheimer underscored this emerging new

consensus, arguing that the AfD was a far-right party inasmuch as it took positions on nationalism, market liberalism, and sexual diversity fully consistent with populist radical right parties.[18] Scholarship since 2016 has increasingly come around to this new conceptualization of the AfD as a populist radical right party.[19]

What explains the vote for populist radical right parties? A number of scholars take the position that the populist radical right's appeal springs almost solely out of the xenophobic attitudes of its voters.[20] Consequently, other scholars have argued that populist radical right parties could simply be called "anti-immigrant parties."[21] Indeed, voting behavior scholarship shows a strong connection between anti-immigrant sentiment and vote choice.[22]

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck explored voting for the AfD in the 2013 Federal Election using the 2013 German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). He found that the AfD had two main constituencies of voters. First, it had a minority of voters who were single-issue voters choosing the AfD because of the Euro crisis. Second, the AfD had an overwhelming majority of voters that were "late supporters," casting their vote for the party based on xenophobic sentiments. Following the 2013 election and before the 2014 European Parliamentary election, the party's popularity in terms of the Euro crisis diminished and anti-immigrant attitudes became even more important.[23] Matthias Dilling, meanwhile, analyzed voters for the AfD using the GLES 2017 Postelection Cross-Section dataset. He found that although there is some overlap, AfD voters are a wide-ranging group and in no way can be said to be simply composed of disaffected voters from the right flank of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU). Nevertheless, AfD voters are most strongly identified by their nativism and populism.[24] Achim Goerres, Dennis Spies, and Staffan Kumlin found that anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and fears about the economy were related to the likelihood of voting AfD.[25] Moreover, they concluded that anti-EU sentiments were less prominent among respondents than anti-immigrant attitudes, confirming that the AfD's chief appeal—as with other parties of the populist radical right in Europe—was its xenophobia.[26]

Michael Hansen and Jonathan Olsen conducted the first quantitative analysis of voters for the AfD in the 2017 federal election.[27] Contrary to much of the literature on radical right populist parties, the authors found that the AfD drew supporters from across socio-demographic groups. In addition, their analysis showed that anti-EU sentiment was not a main predictor of vote choice for the AfD in the election. The authors also concluded that dissatisfaction with democracy and political ideology played a small but limited role explaining citizens casting votes for the AfD. At the same time, anti-immigrant attitudes

were found to be the most substantively important predictor of voting for the AfD. In fact, the substantive effect that anti-immigrant attitudes have on the probability of voting for the AfD is twice as large as the substantive impact of any other statistically significant predictors. Hansen and Olsen therefore reinforced the argument that the AfD is predominately a single-issue party that draws voters based on concerns about immigration.

As noted above, there has been a serious dearth of rigorous studies analyzing vote choice among immigrants to Germany. Goerres, Spies, and Mayer find group identity among Russian-Germans is still quite strong, although there seems to be a generational split, with younger members of the community having a more complex relationship with their identity.[28] This could partially explain their finding that younger members of the community have less loyalty to the Union parties: even though the CDU/CSU remains the primary party of choice for Russian-Germans, that support has been in decline. The authors' interviews with Russian-Germans also reveal the impact of short term-issue factors on vote choice. Specifically, the interviews show a distaste for the immigration policies of the Merkel government, and the drawing of sharp distinctions along cultural and religious lines between Russian-German and new refugees, as well as some strongly xenophobic attitudes Not surprisingly then, Goerres, et al. in the conclusion to their article hypothesize that the share of the AfD could be higher among Russian-Germans than among native voters.[29]

Given this initial evidence from the Russian-German community and the findings from existing scholarship on who votes for the AfD and why, we therefore test two main hypotheses here:

> *H1*: Ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union voted for the AfD in disproportionately large numbers in the 2017 German federal election compared to voting for all other parties.

> *H2*: Negative sentiment towards refugees, both economic and political, is the main distinguishing variable that predicts voting for the AfD among ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union.

Methodology

Data

The data in our analysis comes from the 2017 Immigrant German Election Study (IMGES), headed by Goerres, and conducted from October 2016 until March 2020.[30] The IMGES took place after the 2017 Bundestag election and

coincided with the 2017 GLES post election survey. The IMGES specifically surveyed 1,044 German citizens with a Turkish migration background or an origin from former Soviet Union countries, and the study is the first to explicitly include migrants that are German citizens. The survey asks about political attitudes and behavior, with the most important political behavior for this analysis being vote choice. For our purposes, we explore only those citizens with an origin from former Soviet Union countries. The criteria for inclusion in the IMGES was that the respondent or at least one parent had emigrated from countries of the former Soviet Union. In the full sample, the number of respondents from a former Soviet country is $N = 514$. In our models, after accounting for non-responses on variables of interest and the large proportion of respondents that did not vote, $N > 245$.

Dependent Variable and Method

As observers of German politics are well aware, voting in Germany is distinctive in that voters are allowed to cast two ballots. The first vote cast is for a particular candidate in single-member districts using plurality electoral rules. The second vote is cast for a party, with the second vote filling the remaining seats through proportional representation if a party meets the 5 percent vote share threshold. While the second vote determines the overall share of seats a party gets in the Bundestag, the first vote (supplemented by party lists) determines who will fill these seats. Therefore, the statistical analysis includes two dependent variables: 1) first vote; and 2) second vote. The political party choices that citizens were offered in the 2017 German federal election include the Left Party, the Greens, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the CDU/CSU, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the AfD, and "other" to represent minor party selections.

The dependent variable represents a nominal level variable that cannot be ordered in any meaningful way. Therefore, we utilize multivariate multinomial logistic regression as the statistical modeling tool for the analysis. An alternative approach for measuring the dependent variable would be to create a binary measure: 0 = voted for any party besides the AfD, 1 = voted for the AfD. Although the dependent variable is sometimes coded in this manner in scholarly quantitative analysis, it has a serious disadvantage in the loss of useful variance and predictability power. While binary choice can only tell us that voting for the AfD is different than voting for all other parties, multinomial logit models in contrast are able to tell us whether voting for the AfD occurs for different reasons than for voting for each and every other party choice. Indeed, binary coding makes the assumption that voting for the AfD differs from voting for each and every other party in the exact same way. As

our empirical analysis demonstrates, this assumption emphatically does not hold: the reason that citizens vote for the AfD over the CDU/CSU is different from the reasons they vote for the AfD over the SPD.

Since the party that we are most interested in predicting vote choice for is the AfD, the empirical models utilized the AfD as the reference category when calculating the models. Therefore, the coefficient for every variable, for every party, offers a direct comparison to voters for the AfD. In the empirical modeling, post stratification survey weights are utilized in order to account for any systematic sampling bias.

Independent Variables

When selecting independent variables for inclusion in the empirical analysis, we had to take into account the fact that IMGES does not have an overly large sample of respondents. Therefore, it is necessary to limit the empirical modeling to only theoretically informed and/or statistically significant predictor variables. In Appendix A, we include coding for all of the independent variables in our statistical analysis, as well as the variables that we ultimately exclude from the analysis. These variables are not in the final analysis because no statistically significant relationships were uncovered between vote choice and the independent variables. For example, we explored whether eastern German residence, being born in Germany, strength of German identity, trust in parliament, or authoritarian attitudes influenced vote choice. We find that they do not. Thus, we do not overcomplicate the analysis by including them. We do, however, provide the list in order to demonstrate due diligence in empirical modeling robustness checks.

There are several independent variables included in the empirical analysis. For socio-demographic variables, we include age, gender, and income.[31] While Hansen and Olsen[32] found only a few relationships between socio-demographics and vote choice for the AfD, we include these basic control variables when exploring this specific citizen group since previous studies have found that socio-demographic variables predict vote choice for radical right parties.[33] In addition, we include four attitudinal variables in the models. First, a continuous political ideology measure from left (1) to right (11) is included. Second, we include a measure of anti-establishment attitude, which is a measure of satisfaction with democracy. We include this measure because Hansen and Olsen[34] find that dissatisfaction with democracy did have an impact on vote choice for the AfD in the 2017 election.

Since we already know that voting for the AfD in general is primarily a function of holding anti-immigrant/refugee attitudes, we include two measures that specifically ask about refugees. In particular, the respondent is

provided with a prompt that first indicates that there has been a lot of discussion about immigration in Germany. Then, the survey indicates that the next set of questions are about migration and asks respondents to assess whether each group's move to Germany should be possible without restriction, should be limited, or should be completely prevented. In this analysis, we explore responses to two sets of groups. First, we explore responses as to whether refugees who are political persecuted in their home countries should be allowed to move. Second, we explore responses as to whether refugees who come to Germany due to economic hardship in their home countries should be allowed. For the economic refugee variable, we collapse the unlimited and limited responses together into an "allow" category since only a small fraction of respondents said unlimited. It is important to note that the two attitudinal variables correlate at less than 0.3. The inclusion of these two distinct measures in the analysis will allow us to determine if attitudes towards particular types of refugee have differing effects on vote choice.

Results

In the full sample, around 43 percent of migrants from the former Soviet Union indicated that they did not vote at all in the election. The finding points to a sizable, potentially untapped voting constituency in Germany. In Figure 1, percentages are displayed for political party first and second vote choice of ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union in the 2017 election. The political party that received the largest percentage of the vote was the CDU/CSU with around 33 percent of the first vote and 27 percent of the second vote. The vote share is similar to the overall percentage of votes that the CDU/CSU received in the election. The second largest vote-share receiving political party is the AfD with 17.9 percent of the first vote and almost 20 percent of the second vote. It is important to point out that the AfD only received a total vote share of 12.6 percent in the 2017 election. Therefore, the AfD is overperforming in terms of vote share when exploring the vote choice of Russian-Germans. Just behind the AfD, the third largest vote-receiving political party is the Left Party with 17.2 percent of the first vote and 19.2 percent of the second vote. As with the AfD, the Left party is outperforming its overall vote share here: in the federal election of 2017 it received 9.2 percent overall. The fourth largest vote-receiving party is the SPD. Around 16.5 percent of respondents indicate that their first vote went to the SPD with 13.9 percent answering that their second vote went to the Social Democrats. In the 2017 election, the SPD received 20.5 percent of the vote. Clearly, the SPD is underperforming with this particular voter group. The Greens also underperform when comparing their overall vote share with the

Figure 1: Vote Choice for Migrants–Former Soviet Union
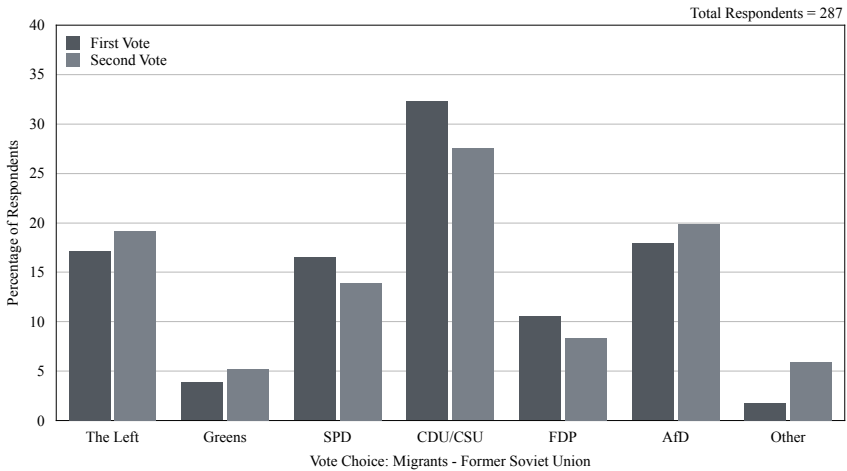
percentage the party received from ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union. Finally, Russian-Germans voted for the FDP in the same percentages as the overall population. The salient finding from Figure 1 is that the Left Party and AfD overachieved in acquiring votes from Russian-Germans. The results provide some initial evidence in support of hypothesis 1.

Figure 2 compares vote choice for ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union and the overall population. The data for the overall population is from the 2017 German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES).[35] By merging the IMGES and GLES datasets, it is possible to statistically test whether the voting behavior of Russian-Germans is statistically different than the overall German population. The results from Figure 2 demonstrate that in both the first and second vote, ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union are less likely to vote for the Greens, SPD, and CDU/CSU than is the overall population. In the second vote, these migrants are less likely to vote for the FDP. In comparison, Russian-Germans are substantially more likely to vote for the Left Party (or an "other" party). Even more importantly for our investigation here, Russian-Germans are more than twice as likely as the overall population to indicate voting for the AfD. The difference in propensity to vote for the AfD is not only substantively large, but statistically significant. In Appendix C, bivariate multinomial logistic regression models are presented that test for the difference in probability of voting for each political party in the 2017 German Federal Election between Russian-Germans and the overall population. The results indicate that ethnic German migrants from the

Figure 2: Comparing Vote Choice for Ethnic German Migrants from the Former Soviet Union and the Overall Population
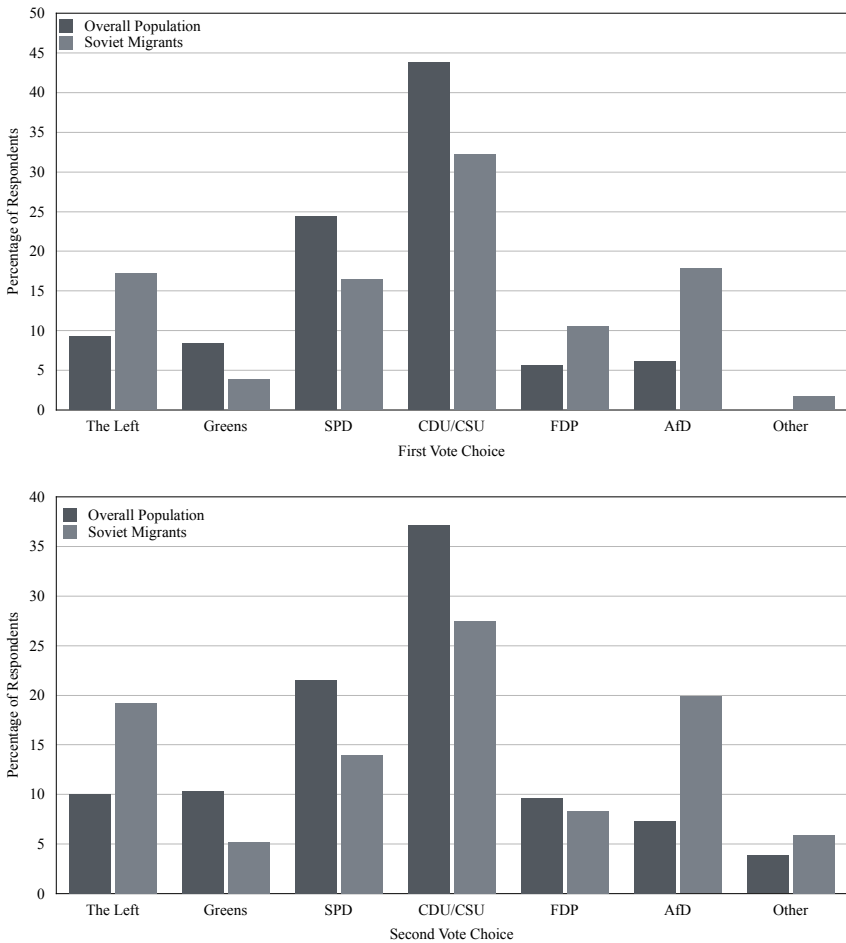
former Soviet Union are statistically less likely than the overall population to vote for every other party in the election when compared to voting for the AfD. The results provide convincing evidence that, on average, the AfD draws a sufficiently large proportion of Russian-German voters when compared to the overall population.[36] Therefore, we cannot reject hypothesis 1.

In Table 1, model output from the multinomial logistic regression models predicting first vote choice for ethnic German migrants from former Soviet Union is displayed. In comparison, Table 2 presents multinomial logit model output for the same subset of the population for predicting second vote choice.

The model output confirms the findings of Hansen and Olsen that there are no clear socio-demographic patterns when predicting vote choice for the AfD.[37] AfD voters from the former Soviet Union are not distinguishable by age, gender, or income in any meaningful way, an important point that we will highlight further in our discussion below. The only statistically significant differences for first vote choice are that women are less likely to vote for the SPD, and that voters for the FDP are more likely to have higher incomes when compared to AfD voters. For the second vote, Green, SPD, and "other" party voters have a statistically lower income level than do AfD voters.

Table 1: First Vote Choice for Migrants–Former Soviet Union (AfD as Reference Party)

	The Left	Green	SPD	CDU/CSU	FDP	Other
Intercept	6.20*	8.17*	6.77*	4.64*	-2.82	5.35
	(2.06)	(2.39)	(1.97)	(1.87)	(2.50)	(3.07)
Age	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	-0.01	0.01	-0.11
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.07)
Gender	-0.16	0.09	-1.34*	0.30	-0.53	2.85
	(0.56)	(0.79)	(0.57)	(0.49)	(0.61)	(1.99)
Income	0.14	-0.21	-0.18	-0.08	0.48*	-0.19
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.16)	(0.25)
Political Ideology	-0.88*	-0.73*	-0.31*	-0.11	0.14	-0.13
	(0.17)	(0.25)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.34)
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.09	0.21	0.18	0.24	-0.68*	-0.20
	(0.26)	(0.39)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.69)
Economic Refugees–None	-2.86*	-0.84	-0.93	-2.02*	-2.25*	-16.54*
	(0.76)	(0.90)	(0.57)	(0.50)	(0.63)	(0.00)
Political Refugees–Limited	-0.79	-2.14*	-0.96	-2.02*	-1.03	-2.60
	(0.69)	(0.96)	(0.76)	(0.67)	(0.83)	(1.41)
Political Refugees–None	-3.42*	-17.27*	-1.92*	-2.50*	-2.53*	-13.22*
	(1.07)	(0.00)	(0.94)	(0.83)	(1.28)	(0.00)
Putin Feeling Thermometer	-0.16	0.02	0.09	0.08	0.13	0.30
	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.22)
N						242
AIC						758.87
PRE						0.211
ePRE						0.147

* Indicates statistical significance at $p<0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized.

Table 2: Second Vote Choice for Migrants–Former Soviet Union (AfD as Reference Party)

	The Left	Green	SPD	CDU/CSU	FDP	Other
Intercept	8.69*	7.91*	4.67*	4.79*	-0.76	9.42*
	(2.03)	(2.27)	(2.08)	(1.98)	(2.21)	(2.50)
Age	-0.42	-0.04	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.05
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Gender	-0.11	0.88	-0.72	0.49	0.74	-0.79
	(0.53)	(0.74)	(0.56)	(0.50)	(0.58)	(0.86)
Income	-0.18	-0.42*	-0.25*	-0.23	0.01	-0.35*
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.17)
Political Ideology	-0.71*	-0.51*	-0.18	-0.20	0.39*	-0.73*
	(0.16)	(0.21)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.24)
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.19	0.59	0.26	0.52*	0.08	-0.43
	(0.24)	(0.36)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.27)	(0.36)
Economic Refugees–None	-1.73*	-0.88	-0.78	-1.77*	-1.28*	-2.56
	(0.58)	(0.78)	(0.53)	(0.52)	(0.58)	(1.36)
Political Refugees–Limited	-0.45	-1.86*	0.06	-1.08	-0.29	-0.66
	(0.66)	(0.83)	(0.71)	(0.62)	(0.70)	(0.97)
Political Refugees–None	-1.95*	-15.24*	-0.49	-1.75*	-3.03*	-5.31
	(0.88)	(0.00)	(0.83)	(0.79)	(1.51)	(3.28)
Putin Feeling Thermometer	0.19	0.51*	0.21*	0.34*	0.15	0.22
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.15)
N						245
AIC						839.33
PRE						0.213
ePRE						0.139

* Indicates statistical significance at $p<0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized.

One noteworthy finding from Tables 1 and 2 is that, for ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union, voters for the AfD are not further to the right on the political ideological spectrum than are voters for every other party. For the first vote, Table 1 indicates that while AfD voters are further right than are voters for the Left Party, Greens, and the SPD, there is no statistically significant difference in ideology between AfD voters and voters for the CDU/CSU, FDP, or "other" minor parties. A similar result is observed for the second vote. Here, AfD voters are statistically more ideologically rightist than are voters for the Left Party or Greens or "other" minor parties. Interestingly, for the second vote, FDP voters are statistically more rightist than

are AfD voters. There is no statistical difference in ideology between AfD voters and SPD or CDU/CSU voters in the second vote. The results indicate that predicting vote choice for Russian-Germans is much more complex than a simple ideological model of voting.

In fact, in Appendix E we provide a figure that plots the predicted probabilities of voting for each political party based on far left and far right ideological placement. Interestingly, the results indicate that extreme ideological placement has no substantive effect on voting for the Greens, SPD, or CDU/CSU. In comparison, for the first vote, extreme political ideological placement does have a substantive effect on vote choice for the AfD and the Left Party. For the Left Party, the substantive effect of the political ideology variable is large. A respondent on the far left of the political spectrum, holding all other variables at their median, is 75 percent more likely to vote for the Left party when compared to a person on the far right. On the other hand, a respondent on the far right of the ideological spectrum is only about 5 percent more likely to vote for the AfD than someone on the far left. These results indicate that the Left Party attracts Russian-German voters with a strong ideological profile on the far left of the political spectrum. In contrast, political ideology only plays a small role in determining the vote for the AfD. In short, Russian-German voters for the AfD do not have a strong ideological commitment. Consequently, we can look for other more substantively important predictors of AfD vote choice among ethnic German voters with a Soviet migrant background.

There are two surprising findings from Tables 1 and 2. The first is that satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, with democracy is not a statistically significant predictor of vote choice. Hansen and Olsen find that among the overall population AfD voters are more dissatisfied with democracy than voters for every other political party.[38] Here, the results indicate that no trend exists for Russian-Germans. The finding provides some evidence that anti-establishment attitudes are not as important for this subset of German citizens in determining their vote choice.

A second surprising finding from Tables 1 and 2 is the impact that feelings towards Russian President Vladimir Putin have on vote choice. For the first vote, feeling towards Putin has no statistically significant impact on vote choice for AfD voters when compared to voters for all other parties. In comparison, for the second vote, a positive feeling towards Putin is associated with a statistically significant increase in voting for the Greens, SPD, and CDU/CSU over voting for the AfD. This finding would appear to contradict an assumption in the media and in some scholarly literature that the AfD—and the Left Party—win support from voters by a pro-Russia or pro-Putin stance,

at least for this narrow group of voters.[39] One potential explanation for the finding is that there is a lack of variance in respondent's attitudes towards Putin in the analysis. In all, 19 percent of respondents rated their feeling towards Putin as the most negative selection offered, and 60.33 percent of respondents indicate a negative feeling. On the other hand, only 9 percent of respondents selected the most positive selection and only 21.07 percent of respondents provided a positive response at all. Finally, 14.88 percent of respondents were neutral when asked about their feeling towards Putin. The data indicates that, overall, ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union do not hold positive views of Putin.

The finding that most attracts attention from Tables 1 and 2 is that attitudes towards refugees are statistically and substantively important predictors of vote choice for the AfD among Russian-Germans. Even more striking, the results indicate that the way that AfD voters are different from voters for other parties depends on the type of refugee that the survey question is asking the respondent to express an attitude towards. First-vote AfD voters are significantly more likely to think that no economic refugees should be allowed into the country when compared to voters for the Left Party, CDU/CSU, FDP, and "other" minor parties. In contrast, there is no difference between first-vote AfD voters and Green or SPD voters. For the second vote, an almost identical pattern emerges. AfD voters are more likely to think that the level of economic refugees allowed into Germany should be none when compared to the Left Party, CDU/CSU, and FDP voters. There is no difference between AfD voters and voters for the Greens, SPD, or "other" minor parties when asked about economic refugees. Although this finding concerning Green and SPD voters among Russian-Germans could be a statistical anomaly, it is possible that these voters either reject immigration on purely economic grounds because they focus more on political refugees or, at least in the case of the SPD, are working-class voters who have concerns about possible labor market competition.

On the other hand, AfD voters are more likely than voters for every other party to reject immigration on political grounds. For the first vote, AfD voters are statistically more likely than Green and CDU/CSU voters to say they want the number of political refugees limited rather than unlimited and, in addition, are also more likely than voters for every other party to say none at all. For the second vote, there is a similar pattern. AfD voters are more likely than Green party voters to prefer a sharply limited number of refugees rather than an unlimited number. AfD voters among Russian-Germans are also more likely than Russian-German voters for the Left Party, Greens, CDU/CSU, and FDP to select none when asked about the number of political

refugees that should be allowed into Germany. The results indicate that negative sentiment towards political refugees is clearly a defining characteristic of Russian-German AfD voters. The finding aligns with the emerging scholarly consensus that anti-immigrant sentiment is the predominant predictor of voting for the AfD.

How substantively important are negative attitudes towards refugees in predicting AfD vote choice among ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union? In Figure 3, we plot the predicted probabilities of voting for the AfD by vote for the two refugee variables. Since the variables are coded slightly differently, the comparison categories are different. The economic refugee effect compares the probability of voting for the AfD between respondents that indicated that economic refugees should be allowed and those that said none should be allowed. The political refugee effect compares the probability of voting for the AfD between respondents that indicated that unlimited political refugees should be allowed and those that said none should be allowed. As Figure 3 displays, the variables have a substantive impact on both first and second vote.

Respondents that indicate that they do not want any economic refugees allowed in the country are almost 10 percent more likely to vote for the AfD for their first vote and 3 percent more likely for their second vote than are respondents that want to allow economic refugees. Similarly, respondents are about 10 percent more likely to cast a vote for the AfD if they indicate that they do not want any political refugees in the country compared to respondents that said unlimited political refugees should be allowed in. In

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Figure 3: The Effect of Sentiment toward Accepting Refugees on First and Second Vote for the AfD
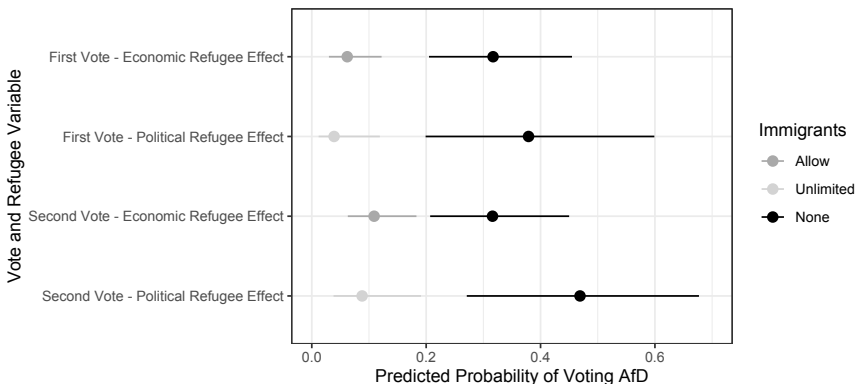
terms of vote choice modeling, the substantive impact of the two variables is very large. The findings here are therefore quite clear: AfD vote choice, even among ethnic German voters with a Soviet migrant background, is primarily driven by negative attitudes towards immigrants or refugees. The results provide convincing support for Hypothesis 2.

Summary and Discussion

In this article we examined two main research questions. First, we asked whether German citizens with a migrant background from the former Soviet Union (Russian-Germans) voted in disproportionate numbers for the AfD in the 2017 German federal election. Secondly, we wanted to know whether, if they did vote disproportionately for the AfD, what the important drivers of their vote choice were. Accordingly, we posited two hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that Russian-Germans did indeed vote for the AfD in disproportionately large numbers in the 2017 German federal election compared to voting for all other parties. We believe we have demonstrated this hypothesis: our evidence shows that the AfD performs better among this segment of the population when compared to their overall performance. Second, we hypothesized that negative sentiment towards refugees, both economic and political, is the main distinguishing variable that predicts voting for the AfD among ethnic German migrants from the former Soviet Union. The evidence presented here confirms our second hypothesis as well: the main predictor of AfD vote choice among this group of migrants is negative attitudes towards refugees. Some of the other interesting outcomes of our study—for example, our finding that the Left Party attracts Russian-German voters with a strong ideological profile on the far left of the political spectrum, even while political ideology plays virtually no role in determining the vote for the AfD among Russian-Germans—indicates a need for further research, given conclusions from previous literature that there is a small, but nevertheless significant subset of voters shared between the Left Party and AfD.[40]

So why would Russian-Germans have negative attitudes towards recent immigrants/refugees and therefore vote for the AfD in disproportionate numbers? Although we can only speculate here based on some initial evidence from the scholarly literature, some discussion is warranted. Existing social science research on attitudes towards immigrants provides a few possible clues. Although there are many studies on native-born citizens' attitudes towards immigrants, there are just a handful that specifically examine immigrant communities' reactions.[41] These studies, however, suggest that while a much larger

percentage of native-born citizens hold negative attitudes towards immigration and new immigrants, the percentage of individuals within established immigrant communities who also hold such attitudes is surprisingly high. In effect, these more established immigrants exhibit a "pull up the drawbridge" mentality, taking the position that while they are themselves immigrants and have benefited from immigration policy, new migrants should be excluded for a variety of reasons. These reasons in the scholarly literature include concerns about economic/material resources competition but more often are centered on questions of national identity and cohesion (including cultural/civilizational issues, religion, or other factors, which might impede the ability to effectively integrate). In addition, the literature suggests that attitudes differ between immigrant generations and length of time spent in the host country. Generally, immigrants who have lived in the country longer are attitudinally more similar to "natives." As Oriane Sarrasin, et al. have summarized: "the longer the history or the stronger the ties between individuals with an immigrant background and their country of residence, the closer their social and political attitudes are to those expressed by natives."[42]

The structured interviews from Goerres, et al.[43] also demonstrate precisely this "pull up the drawbridge" mentality, as a number of their respondents invoke national identity or deep cultural/religious reasons for their negative attitudes towards recent migrants, as well as the fact that Russian-Germans were specifically "invited" to come to Germany. Russian-Germans therefore believe they had a much more legitimate immigration claim than, say, Syrians or North Africans.[44] In addition, a number of Russian-German interview subjects in their study argue that recent arrivals get more state resources than older immigrant groups received, indicating that economic conflict/conflict over material resources is at play here as well.[45] Interestingly, however, the effect of a longer history in the country–at least in terms of age demographics–does not appear at first glance to be relevant for Russian-German voters for the AfD. Goerres, et al. find that it is younger Germans, rather than older ones, who are less attached to the Union parties and therefore more willing to vote for other parties, and specifically the AfD.[46] Meanwhile, our study here has shown that age is not at all a factor in determining the Russian-German vote for the AfD. Future qualitative research could explore in much more comprehensive detail the reasons as to why Russian-Germans vote for the AfD and why they might hold anti-immigrant attitudes. Future quantitative research, meanwhile, would need a larger sample size to more concretely understand vote choice among subsets of the population. Specifically, in order to precisely calculate the substantive effect of negative sentiment towards refugees more data will be needed.

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Appendix A: Variable Coding

Modeling Variables

Age – respondent's age at the time of the survey.

Gender – 0 = man; 1 = woman; *Income* – net monthly income, 13 categories from 1 = under 500 Euros to 13 = 10,000 Euros or more.

Political Ideology – continuous measure, 1 = left to 11 = right.

Satisfaction w/ Democracy – -2 = not at all satisfied; -1 = not very satisfied; 1 = pretty satisfied; 2 = very satisfied.

Economic Refugees – almost no one selected "unlimited", unlimited = allow; limited = allow; none = none.

Political Refugees – categorical - unlimited; limited; none.

Putin Feeling Thermometer – continuous measure, attitude towards Vladimir Putin, -5 = think nothing of this politician to 5 = think very much of this politician.

Additional Variables–Included in Previous Analyses (Robustness Checks)

These variables are not included in the final analysis because no statistically significant relationships were uncovered between vote choice and the variables. In order to keep the models parsimonious, we choose to leave out these variables. However, we provide a list of them here in order to demonstrate due diligence in empirical modeling robustness checks.

East German Residence – 0 = west German residence; 1 = east German residence.

Education – 1.3rd of the sample missing, continuous variable of educational year.

Union Membership – 0 = not a union member; 1 = union member.

Born in Germany – 0 = not born in Germany; 1 = born in Germany;

Political Interest – 0 = not at all; 1 = less interested; 2 = neither interested nor disinterested; 3 = interested; 4 = very interested.

Strength of Identity as a German – 0 = not at all; 1 = hardly; 2 = in some respects; 3 = predominately; 4 = fully.

Politicians Only Care About Rich and Powerful – 1 = does not apply at all; 2 = rather does not apply; 3 = partly; 4 = rather applies; 5 = fully applies.

Trust in Government – continuous, 1 = absolutely no trust to 11 = complete trust.

Important to have strong leader even if they do not follow law – 1 = does not apply at all; 2 = rather does not apply; 3 = partly; 4 = rather applies; 5 = fully applies.

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics

Table B1: Descriptive Statistics–Socio-Demographics

Variable	Min.	Median	Mean	Max.	SD
Age	16	39	39.9	97	15.34
Income	1	7	7.13	13	2.53
Variable	**0**	**1**			
Gender	53.73%	46.27%			

Table B2: Descriptive Statistics–Political Attitudes

Variable	Min.	Median	Mean	Max.	SD
Political Ideology	1	5	4.96	11	1.9
Satisfaction with Democracy	-2	1	0.49	2	1.1
Putin Feeling Thermometer	-5	-2	-1.43	5	3.2
	Unlimited	**Limited**	**None**		
Political Refugees	42.45%	48.79%	8.75%		
	Allow	**None**			
Economic Refugees	73.12%	26.88%			

Table B1: Descriptive Statistics–Additional Unused Variables

Variable	Min.	Median	Mean	Max.	SD
Education (358 missing)	1	3	3.44	5	1.19
Strength of German Identity	0	3	2.85	4	0.99
Political Interest	0	2	2.06	4	1.04
Politicians–Care about Rich	1	3	3.32	5	1.09
Trust in Government	1	6	6.30	11	2.42
Strong Leadership	1	2	2.40	5	1.31
Variable	**0**	**1**			
East German Residence	97.16%	2.84%			
Union Membership	90.37%	9.63%			
Born in Germany	70.26%	29.74%			

Appendix C: Bivariate Models Predicting Vote Choice

Table C1: First Vote Choice–Comparing Soviet Migrants and German Population

	The Left	Green	SPD	CDU/ CSU	FDP	Other
Intercept	0.42*	0.35*	1.41*	2.00*	-1.43*	-0.93
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.19)
Soviet Migrant	-0.48*	-1.88*	-1.49*	-1.43*	-0.52*	-1.39*
	(0.24)	(0.36)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.28)	(0.51)
N						1,854
AIC						5,867.35
PRE						0.00
ePRE						0.01

* Indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized.

Table C2: Second Vote Choice–Comparing Soviet Migrants and German Population

	The Left	Green	SPD	CDU/ CSU	FDP	Other
Intercept	0.32*	0.36*	1.09*	1.63*	0.28*	-0.61*
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.16)
Soviet Migrant	-0.39*	-1.77*	-1.44*	-1.31*	-1.15*	-0.73*
	(0.23)	(0.32)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.22)
N						1,874
AIC						5,867.35
PRE						0.00
ePRE						0.01

* Indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized.

Appendix D: Multinomial Logistic Regression Models with "No Vote" Option

Table D1: First Vote Choice for Migrants–Soviet Union

	The Left	**Green**	**SPD**	**CDU/ CSU**	**FDP**	**Other**	**No Vote**
Intercept	4.81*	6.62*	5.58*	3.56*	-3.16	4.41	4.94*
	(1.69)	(2.06)	(1.68)	(1.56)	(2.14)	(2.81)	(1.46)
Age	-0.00	-0.03	-0.03	0.00	0.02	-0.09	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.01)
Gender	0.07	0.27	-1.16*	0.34	-0.50	2.74	0.01
	(0.49)	(0.76)	(0.53)	(0.44)	(0.56)	(1.92)	(0.40)
Income	0.05	-0.24	-0.18	-0.08	0.41*	-0.28	-0.12
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.24)	(0.09)
Political Ideology	-0.61*	-0.59*	-0.23	-0.04	0.18	-0.16	-0.09
	(0.14)	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.35)	(0.11)
Satisfaction with Democracy	-0.09	0.13	0.11	0.17	-0.72*	-0.05	-0.08
	(0.23)	(0.37)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.26)	(0.58)	(0.19)
Economic Refugees–None	-2.76*	-0.66	-0.83	-1.74*	-1.92*	-13.42*	-1.55*
	(0.66)	(0.86)	(0.55)	(0.47)	(0.60)	(0.00)	(0.42)
Political Refugees–Limited	-0.95	-2.05*	-1.03	-1.95*	-1.00	-1.92	-0.72
	(0.71)	(0.93)	(0.74)	(0.65)	(0.81)	(1.29)	(0.64)
Political Refugees–None	-2.27*	-19.59*	-1.66	-2.32*	-2.26*	-18.25*	-1.70*
	(0.93)	(0.00)	(0.93)	(0.81)	(1.19)	(0.00)	(0.76)
Putin Feeling Thermometer	-0.12	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.11	0.32	-0.04
	(0.08)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.23)	(0.06)
N							404
AIC							1,296.31
PRE							0.070
ePRE							0.084

* Indicates statistical significance at $p<0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized.

## Appendix D: Multinomial Logistic Regression Models with "No Vote" Option (*continued*)

Table D2: Second Vote Choice for Migrants–Soviet Union

	The Left	Green	SPD	CDU/ CSU	FDP	Other	No Vote
Intercept	6.85*	6.71*	3.34	3.34	3.53	-0.98	7.40*
	(1.66)	(1.92)	(1.80)	(1.65)	(1.90)	(2.13)	(1.49)
Age	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Gender	0.24	1.14	-0.33	0.74	1.07*	-0.34	0.58
	(0.48)	(0.69)	(0.52)	(0.46)	(0.54)	(0.83)	(0.41)
Income	-0.17	-0.40*	-0.21	-0.18	-0.02	-0.37*	-0.26
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.10)
Political Ideology	-0.60*	-0.50*	-0.13	-0.18	0.39*	-0.60*	-0.02
	(0.14)	(0.20)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.22)	(0.11)
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.14	0.38	0.19	0.33	-0.00	-0.44	0.11
	(0.22)	(0.33)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.34)	(0.18)
Economic Refugees–None	-1.49*	-0.39	-0.57	-1.29*	-0.98	-2.41	-1.04*
	(0.56)	(0.74)	(0.53)	(0.49)	(0.56)	(1.35)	(0.41)
Political Refugees–Limited	-0.69	-1.86*	0.00	-1.05	-0.12	-0.82	0.19
	(0.62)	(0.79)	(0.70)	(0.59)	(0.68)	(0.93)	(0.56)
Political Refugees–None	-1.72*	-15.07*	-0.38	-1.68*	-2.92*	-4.96	-0.81
	(0.82)	(0.00)	(0.84)	(0.77)	(1.42)	(3.25)	(0.69)
Putin Feeling Thermometer	0.12	0.46*	0.15	0.27*	0.13	0.17	0.16
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.08)

N	404
AIC	1,346.57
PRE	0.222
ePRE	0.080

* Indicates statistical significance at $p<0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights utilized.

Appendix E: Political Ideology Effect for First and Second Vote
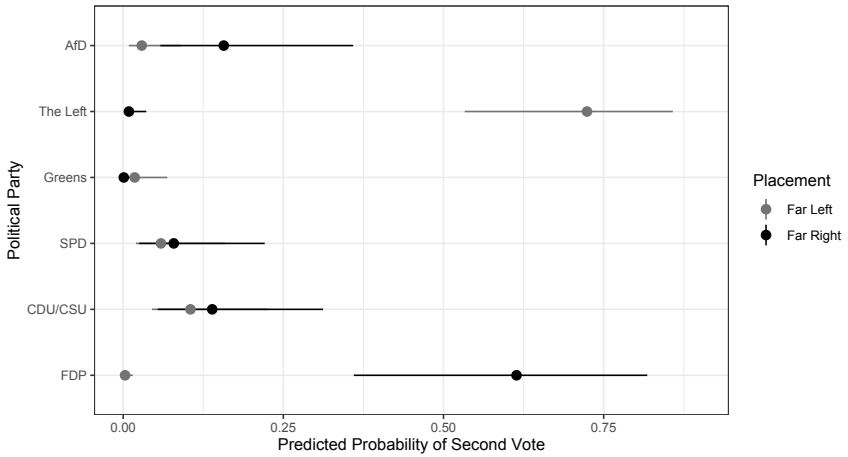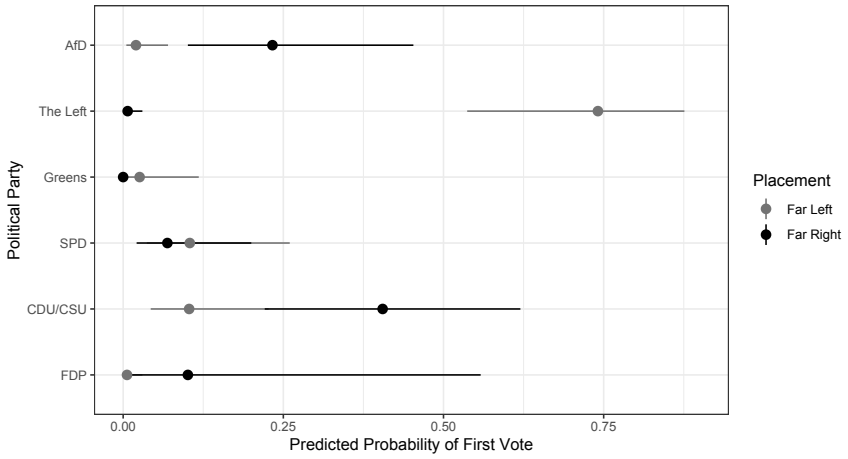
Notes

1. Before reforms to the citizenship law in the early 2000s, Germany granted automatic citizenship to ethnic Germans based on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, citizenship by ethnic German identity (literally, citizenship by "blood"). Ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union were thought of less as immigrants per se but rather as Germans returning to their historical homeland.

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21. Linda Bos and Wouter van der Brug, "Public Images of Leaders of Anti-Immigration Parties: Perceptions of Legitimacy and Effectiveness," *Party Politics* 16, no. 6 (2010): 777–799; Wouter van der Brug, Meindert Fennema, Sarah de Lange, and Inger Baller, "Radical Right Parties: Their Voters and Their Electoral Competitors" in *Class Politics and the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (London, 2013), 52–74; Michael A. Hansen and Jennifer L. Clemens, "What to expect when you're electing: the relationship between far-right strength and citizenship policy in Europe," *Comparative European Politics* 17, no. 5 (2019): 673–695.

22. See for example Paul Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Making of the Contemporary World* (New York, 2008); Rydgren (see note 22); Simon Bornschier and Hanspeter Kriesi, "The Populist Right, the Working Class, and the Changing Face of Class Politics" in Rydgren (see note 22), 10–30.

23. Schmitt-Beck (see note 20).

24. Dilling (see note 20).

25. Goerres, et al. (see note 20).

26. Ibid.

27. Michael A. Hansen and Jonathan Olsen, "Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election," *German Politics* 28, no. 1 (2019): 1–19.

28. Goerres, et al. (see note 10), 12.

29. Ibid., 16.

30. Goerres, et al. (see note 13). The survey was translated from German to English by the authors for this study.

31. Ideally, we would like to include education in the analysis. Unfortunately, the education measure in the dataset was missing one-third of the responses. Nevertheless, we did estimate a model with education included and found no trends or important findings.

32. Hansen and Olsen (see note 28).

33. Michael A. Hansen, "Voting Radical Right in Europe: A Comprehensive Explanation for Vote Choice," University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Theses and Dissertations, Paper 1148 (2016); Michael A. Hansen, "The Women of the Radical Right: Exploring Gendered Differences in Vote Choice for Radical Right Parties in Europe," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 48, no. 2 (2019): 1–21

34. Hansen and Olsen (see note 28).

35. See https://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/gles, last accessed 19 June 2020.

36. Unfortunately, estimating a full model is not possible since the two datasets contain different measurements for the independent variables and not all variables of interest and contained in both surveys.

37. Hansen and Olsen (see note 28).

38. Ibid.

39. On the claim that the AfD and Left Party win votes in eastern Germany through pro-Russia or pro-Putin issue positioning, see Jonathan Olsen, "The Left Party and the AfD: Populist Competitors in Eastern Germany," *German Politics and Society* 36, no. 1 (2018): 70–83.

40. Hansen and Olsen (see note 28); Olsen (see note 39).

41. See for example Nils Braakmann, Muhammad Waqas, and John Wildman, "Are Immigrants in Favour of Immigration? Evidence from England and Wales," *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 7, no. 1 (2017): 3–24; Oriane Sarrasin, Eva G. T. Green, Claudio Bolzman, and Emilio Paolo Visintin, "Competition- and Identity-based Roots of Anti-Immigration Prejudice among Individuals with and without an Immigrant Background," *International Review of Social Psychology* 31, no. 1, (2018): 1–12. "Ethnic Competition theory," while not specifically focused on migrant groups' reactions to immigration, may also be of some relevance in explaining Russian-German support for the AfD. See Marcel Lubbers and Peer Scheepers, "Explaining the Trend in Extreme Right-Wing Voting: Germany 1989–1998," *European Sociological Review* 17, no. 4 (2001): 431–449.

42. Sarrasin, et al. (see note 42), 2.

43. Goerres, et al. (see note 10).

44. Ibid., 14.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 16.