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Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election

MICHAEL A. HANSEN and JONATHAN OLSEN

Using the 2017 post-election German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), this article examines the voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 German federal election. We show that AfD voters in 2017 were truly ‘flesh of the same flesh’ of the mainstream German political parties, with the AfD drawing its voters from across the political party spectrum as well as from previous non-voters in 2013. In contrast to previous scholarship, we find that in most respects AfD voters in 2017 did not differ demographically from voters for all other parties, be that in terms of gender, education, employment status, and union membership. Furthermore, we find that AfD voters were not driven by anxiety about their own economic situation: they are no ‘losers of globalisation.’ Instead, AfD voters in 2017 were driven solely by two factors: their attitudes towards immigrants/refugees and anti-establishment sentiment/satisfaction with democracy in Germany.

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Republic of Germany is no stranger to far right parties but none have enjoyed lasting electoral success. The far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) won entrance into several state parliaments in the mid-1960s before collapsing in the 1969 federal election. In 1989 the *Republikaner*, a right-wing populist party of CSU exiles and far right activists, garnered 7.8 per cent of the vote in the West Berlin election and 7.1 per cent in European elections before it later dwindled in the aftermath of German unification. The German People’s Union (DVU) also had scattered electoral success at the state level, with its best result in the Saxony parliamentary election with 12.9 per cent in 1998. It too has failed miserably at the national level. For other parties of the radical right – Schill Party, BFB/Freedom Party, even a revived NPD in the last decade – spectacular, but isolated, electoral success in second-order state elections were followed up by a downward spiral into oblivion on the national stage.

Whether Germany’s newest radical right party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), will become firmly anchored in Germany’s national party system is an open question. However, it has already broken the pattern of its predecessors. With significant electoral success in state elections from 2014–2016 across almost all the German states and an eye-popping 12.6 per cent of the vote in the 2017 German federal election, the AfD has become the subject of widespread media coverage. It has also become the subject of increasing scholarly scrutiny. Hitherto, most scholarly research on the AfD has

focused on the ‘supply’ side of the party in the electoral marketplace. The literature on the AfD has thus detailed the party’s historical development and place in the German party system (Decker 2016), its election manifestos (Arzheimer 2015; Franzmann 2016), the AfD’s candidates for office (Jankowski, Schneider, and Tepe 2017), its ties to the anti-Islamic ‘Pegida’ movement (Grabow 2016; Patzelt 2016; Schmidt 2017), and its theoretical connections to ‘New Right’ intellectual circles (Salzborn 2016).

With a few exceptions (see Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri 2015; Dilling 2018; Niedermayer and Hofrichter 2016; Schmitt-Beck 2017; Goerres, Spies, and Kumlin forthcoming) the ‘demand’ side of the AfD – its voters – has received little scholarly attention. Moreover, most of those current studies of AfD voters were largely written and published as the party was just starting to undergo its transformation from an anti-EU but fairly conventional conservative party to a party which today closely resembles other parties of the populist radical right in Europe. In this article, we attempt to fill this gap in the literature using the post-Election German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES).¹ The GLES study is an ongoing election study since 2009, which surveys respondents both before and after Germany’s Federal Elections. It provides us the best, most up-to-date data from which to draw conclusions about voters for the AfD in a first-order election, namely the recent 2017 federal election. The main research question here is therefore straightforward: ‘who voted for the AfD in the 2017 federal election and why?’

The article is organised as follows. The first two sections consider the question of whether the AfD today can be classified as a populist radical right party, drawing on the existing literature on the populist radical right in Europe in general and in Germany specifically. In the next sections we set out and test our major hypotheses concerning immigration as a driver of vote choice for the AfD, regardless of demographic characteristics and perception of economic security, using multinomial logistic regression. Finally, in the last section of the article we explore further the relationships we find in the previous section using average effects plots to determine the major determinants of vote choice for the AfD in 2017.

IS THE AFD A POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT PARTY?

Mudde (2007) provides the most comprehensive conceptualisation for defining far right parties across Western Europe and one we follow here. A minimalist definition focuses only on xenophobia and opposition to immigration (i.e. nativism) of far right parties achieving success in Europe (Mudde 2007, 16). However, he argues that far right parties achieving success can also be defined by their authoritarianism and populism. In addition, Mudde (2007, 23) defines populism as a ‘thin-centered ideology,’ which ‘considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the “pure people” versus the “corrupt elite”’ and concludes that the bulk of far right parties across Europe could be more accurately labelled as populist radical right parties.²

The label most commonly applied in part or full to the AfD until very recently has been ‘Eurosceptic party’, albeit one with some right-wing populist elements (see Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri 2015; Grimm 2015; Mader and Schoen 2015;

Franzmann 2014). A Eurosceptic party is defined as a party which achieves votes through a platform sharply critical of the EU while vowing to restore a significant level of economic control back to the member state. Indeed, the AfD's Euroscepticism is believed to have been the major factor behind its unexpectedly good showing in the 2013 German Federal Election. Angela Merkel's handling of the sovereign debt crisis in the EU and her 'bailout' of Greece thus not only led directly to the formation of the AfD but also to the AfD's 2013 election outcome. Arzheimer (2015) meanwhile found that the AfD is a far right party in that the party expresses nationalism, market liberalism, and is against state support for sexual diversity. He based this conclusion on a quantitative and qualitative exploration of the party's 2014 European Parliament (EP) election manifesto. Yet surprisingly, Arzheimer argued that, based on the manifesto, the AfD is not radical and only softly Eurosceptic. In short, his findings revealed that the party did not espouse nativist and populist elements in the 2014 EP election. Therefore, for Arzheimer the party in 2014 was predominantly a far right party focused on neoliberal economic principles.

However, Scicluna (2014) argued that while the AfD might have started as single-issue Eurosceptic and conservative economic party, the party has changed by significantly increasing its populist rhetoric. Indeed, recent scholarship has shown that since the 2014 EP election the AfD incorporated more anti-immigrant and populist rhetoric into its political platform (Arzheimer 2017; Decker 2016; Dilling 2018; Niedermayer and Hofrichter 2016; Salzborn 2016; Jankowski, Schneider, and Tepe 2017). In addition, Schmitt-Beck (2017) has shown that xenophobic statements appear to be the AfD's main source of appeal since European debt came under more stable control in 2015. Meanwhile, other authors have suggested that the AfD's deepening ties with the *Pegida* movement since 2015 show the AfD's transition from an anti-EU party to a populist radical right party emphasizing nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment (Druxes and Simpson 2016; Grabow 2016; Patton 2017). Overall, we can conclude that today there is growing scholarly consensus that the AfD fits Mudde's (2007) conceptualisation of the populist radical right.

THEORY: SINGLE ISSUE, ANTI-IMMIGRANT VOTERS

A number of scholars have previously argued that the populist radical right, or far right parties in general, predominantly acquire voters based on the xenophobic attitudes of voters (e.g., Golder 2003; Givens 2004; Norris 2005; Mudde 2007; Rydgren and Ruth 2013; van der Waal, de Koster, and Achterberg 2013). Indeed, some of these scholars even go as far as to re-label the current far right political parties in Europe as 'anti-immigrant parties' (Bos and van der Brug 2010; van der Brug, Fennema, and de Lange 2013). To be sure populist radical right party platforms are more complex than the promotion of a single-issue. Still, studies on vote choice show a strong connection between anti-immigrant sentiment and vote choice (see for example Hainsworth 2008; Rydgren 2013; Bornschieer and Kriesi 2013). There is no doubt that anti-immigrant sentiment plays a substantial role on the far right.

Schmitt-Beck (2017), Dilling (2018), and Goerres, Spies, and Kumlin (forthcoming) have conducted the most comprehensive and up-to-date studies currently available on AfD voters. Schmitt-Beck explores voting for the AfD in the 2013 Federal Election

using the 2013 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 EP election, the party's popularity in terms of the Euro crisis was lost and anti-immigrant attitudes became even more important (Schmitt-Beck 2017, 142).

Dilling (2018) analyzes voters for the AfD using the pre-release of the GLES 2017 Postelection Cross-Section dataset. He challenges a popular narrative that the AfD is primarily a threat to the CDU/CSU, drawing on former Union voters disillusioned by Merkel. As he points out, this narrative is quite patently informing the actions of the CSU as it currently attempts to shift to the right in order to attract voters it believes it lost to the AfD at the last election. However, Dilling finds 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 CDU/CSU. According to him, AfD voters are most strongly identified by their nativism and populism.³

Goerres, Spies, and Kumlin (forthcoming) use an original online survey in order to study the likelihood of voting for the AfD. In their original survey conducted in May of 2016, respondents are asked how likely they are to vote for the AfD on a 0 (not likely at all) to 10 (very likely). The scholars found that anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and fears about the economy are related to the likelihood of voting AfD. Moreover, they found that anti-EU sentiments were less prominent among respondents than anti-immigrant attitudes, indicating that the AfD has come to closely resemble other parties of the populist radical right in Europe. Goerres, Spies, and Kumlin (forthcoming) thus provide a significant comparison with our study because they are exploring the likelihood of voting for the AfD while we explore actual vote choice made in the 2017 election.

The major hypothesis posited in this article is that the AfD in the 2017 German Federal Election can be understood as predominately a one-issue party that was able to obtain voters whose single defining characteristic were anti-immigrant attitudes. In the 2017 election campaign the AfD therefore completed its transformation from an anti-EU (or EU-skeptical) party to a populist radical right party prioritising nativism. Subsequently, the AfD was able to draw voters that had previously supported establishment parties across the ideological spectrum, not just from disaffected Union voters. Based overwhelmingly on the Merkel government's handling of the immigration/refugee issue, voters unsatisfied with the handling of this policy area simply moved their vote from one of the five main parties to the AfD. Moreover, we show that the AfD can also be understood as a protest party for those dissatisfied with the current state of politics in Germany. This confirms initial post-election surveys which demonstrated that almost twice as many AfD voters voted for the party not out of conviction for the AfD itself but rather out of frustration with all the other parties (Infratest dimap, 'Bundestagswahl 2017'). The AfD is now eating into the protest vote (especially in eastern Germany) formerly associated with other parties, among them the Left Party (LP). Indeed, the LP lost proportionally more votes to the AfD than any other party. We also find that while economic considerations played a significant role in voting AfD in the 2013 German Federal Election, they did not play a role in the 2017 election.

Along those same lines, AfD voters did not constitute a distinct group of ‘losers of globalisation.’ Finally, since the AfD pulled voters across the ideological spectrum based on a single issue, AfD voters do not have a particularly specific socio-demographic profile when compared to voters for other parties, be this terms of gender, education, union membership, or employment status.

H1: The dominant attitude related to vote choice for the AfD in the 2017 election was anti-immigrant sentiment.

H2: Economic considerations did not play a role in determining vote choice in 2017 for the AfD.

H3: AfD voters in the 2017 election did not have a specific socio-demographic profile in comparison to other parties.

DATA

As discussed above, the data used for the empirical analysis is the most recent release of the 2017 Post-Election German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). The survey represents the largest collection of individual-level data related to the German Federal Election currently available. Furthermore, even though there is a longitudinal dimension to the study, the survey incorporates questions that touch on measuring attitudes related to current political situations. The survey utilises random sampling and data collection occurred between 25 September 2017 and 30 November 2017.

Dependent Variable

The empirical phenomenon under investigation is the ability of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) to emerge out of relative obscurity and obtain a considerable proportion of the overall vote share in the 2017 German Federal Election. The vote share accomplishment is worth investigating because this attainment has historically been relatively difficult for newer, more marginalised political parties. Since the observation under investigation is the ability of the party to draw a substantial number of votes from citizens, the dependent variable of interest here is individual-level vote choice. In particular, the analysis is focused on exploring the explanatory factors that have led voters to cast ballots for the AfD, including attitudinal positions and socio-demographic trends.

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 per cent 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.⁴ In some respects, the decision-making process in the mind of the voter is different depending on the particular vote. For example, empirical research has demonstrated fairly well that first-past-the-post elections, such as the first vote, lead to two-party systems (Riker 1986). Thus, voters tend to rationalise casting their vote for one of the two main parties (in this case SPD and CDU/CSU), which in their mind have the best chance at winning. On the other hand, in proportional representation systems voters tend to be less strategic and simply cast a vote for their most preferred party. Of course this conclusion only holds if the

voter believes the party will achieve the 5 per cent vote threshold Germany sets as minimum requirement for entry into the Bundestag (Cox 1997). Since the mechanisms that explain vote choice for these two votes might be different, our investigation explores both votes in isolation. Therefore, the two votes will operate as separate dependent variables in the analysis.

Independent Variables

There are a number of socio-demographic and attitudinal variables explored in our analysis as independent variables.⁵ First, a number of socio-demographics are included in the analysis in order to determine whether the AfD was able to draw voters with distinct characteristics. Those included represent all of the basic socio-demographics that should be in a study exploring vote choice: age, gender, education, income, employment status, union membership, and political knowledge.⁶ The literature has indicated that we might expect a few trends to emerge. For instance, previous research has confirmed that voters for far right parties, tend to be men, older, less educated, unemployed, union members, and have less political knowledge. In addition, an Eastern Germany variable is included in the analysis because the AfD has performed better in the eastern than in the western states.

The second sets of independent variables included in the analysis are attitudinal variables. First, political ideology is included in the analysis. The expectation for the political ideology variable is that AfD voters will identify further right on the political spectrum than voters for other parties. Second, we included anti-immigrant sentiment here since the refugee crisis and immigration arguably the most important issues before the election. Third, a variable is included that measures the respondent's view of the government's role in reducing income inequality. The expectation is that voters for left-wing parties will be more willing to agree that the government should be taking an active role to reduce income inequality. Fourth, satisfaction with democracy is an attitudinal measure included here. Some analyses of the AfD have suggested that left-wing anti-establishment voters are moving their vote to the far right AfD (Decker 2016; Olsen 2018) One explanation for this phenomenon is that voters traded one anti- democracy/anti-establishment party for another. Fifth, voter volatility in the 2017 election could be explained by the state of the economy and voters' anxieties about their own financial situation. Therefore, a variable is included that attempts to measure prospective respondent attitudes about financial security. Sixth, scholars previously argued that the rise of the far right could possibly be explained by the forces of globalisation (Ignazi 1992). In order to test this assertion, a variable is included that measures the respondents fear of globalisation. Party identification is included as an independent variable since it is traditionally a predictor of vote choice across Western democracies. Finally, a variable is included in the analysis that measures whether the respondent believes European integration should not go further. Since the AfD arrived on the political scene as mainly an anti-EU party, the measure is included in order to verify whether the party stills draws votes based on this issue.

Initial Investigation

We can get an initial snapshot of voting trends for the 2017 German Federal Election by exploring voting in the 2017 election compared to the 2013 election, an election where

the AfD received 4.7 per cent of the overall vote share. This vote share was 6.9 percentage points lower than the 12.6 per cent achieved in 2017, and was just below the vote share threshold for Bundestag representation. [Table 1](#) provides the respondent's 2013 first and second vote choice compared to their 2017 first and second vote choice.

The information in [Table 1](#) provides some initial insights into the 2017 election. First, it is important to point out that in the sample 6.34 per cent of people that voted in the 2013 election did not cast a ballot in the 2013 election. A plurality of the votes cast in 2017 by voters who did not turnout in 2013 was cast for the AfD. In particular, the AfD received 14.04 per cent of its first vote selections, and 15.91 per cent of its second vote selections from non-voters 2013.⁷ Clearly, the AfD was able to encourage people who did not vote in 2013 to turnout in 2017. There is preliminary data to support the conclusion that the AfD drew voters disenchanted with mainstream party choices.

A second narrative that deserves exploration here is that in 2017 the AfD was able to draw a significant number of protest votes from the mainstream centre-right parties. As noted earlier in our discussion of Dilling ([2018](#)), it has been argued that the AfD's

TABLE 1
GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTION VOTING PATTERNS

2017 1st Vote	2013 1st Vote Choice						
	Afd	FDP	CDU/CSU	SPD	Green	The Left	No Turnout
AfD	17 (14.08%)	3 (2.63%)	48 (42.11%)	16 (14.04%)	2 (1.75%)	12 (10.53%)	16 (14.04%)
FDP	0 (0%)	31 (27.43%)	55 (48.67%)	16 (14.16%)	4 (3.54%)	3 (2.65%)	4 (3.54%)
CDU/CSU	1 (0.2%)	8 (1.6%)	458 (91.6%)	40 (0.8%)	7 (1.4%)	6 (1.2%)	16 (3.2%)
SPD	1 (0.27%)	3 (0.82%)	34 (9.32%)	277 (75.89%)	29 (7.95%)	9 (2.47%)	12 (3.29%)
Green	0 (0%)	4 (3%)	16 (12.12%)	27 (20.45%)	79 (59.85%)	5 (3.78%)	1 (0.76%)
The Left	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	9 (6.29%)	25 (17.48%)	18 (12.59%)	79 (55.24%)	11 (7.69%)
2017 2nd Vote	2013 2nd Vote Choice						
	Afd	FDP	CDU/CSU	SPD	Green	The Left	No Turnout
AfD	19 (14.39%)	5 (3.79%)	58 (43.94%)	15 (11.36%)	2 (1.52%)	2 (9.09%)	21 (15.91%)
FDP	0 (0%)	61 (35.67%)	72 (42.11%)	17 (9.94%)	15 (8.77%)	2 (1.17%)	4 (2.34%)
CDU/CSU	1 (0.22%)	17 (3.72%)	378 (82.71%)	33 (7.22%)	9 (1.97%)	3 (0.66%)	16 (3.5%)
SPD	1 (0.35%)	3 (1.04%)	23 (7.99%)	220 (76.39%)	22 (7.64%)	9 (3.13%)	10 (3.47%)
Green	0 (0%)	6 (3.16%)	19 (10%)	33 (17.37%)	121 (63.68%)	9 (4.74%)	2 (1.05%)
The Left	2 (1.2%)	6 (3.59%)	8 (4.79%)	41 (24.55%)	20 (11.98%)	83 (49.7%)	7 (4.19%)

Note: Column Percentages are in parentheses.

success lies in its ability to attract CDU/CSU voters (and perhaps farther right-leaning FDP voters) unhappy with the government's handling of the refugee crisis and Merkel's shift of the CDU towards the political centre. Initially, we receive some confirmatory evidence in [Table 1](#). The largest shares of AfD voters in 2017 previously voted for the CDU/CSU. In particular, only 14.08 per cent of AfD first vote voters in 2017 had previously voted AfD with their first vote in 2013. However, 42.11 per cent of AfD first vote voters in 2017 were CDU/CSU first vote voters in 2013, a difference of 28.03 per cent. This clear trend for the first vote is equally present for the second vote. We can conclude preliminarily that discontent with the CDU/CSU played some role in the success of the AfD in 2017. There is on the other hand little evidence of more right-leaning FDP voters going to the AfD in 2017 with only about 3 per cent of the party's overall vote share coming from previous FDP voters.

A final narrative that deserves exploration here is that the 2017 German Federal Election was an election defined by massive voter volatility. This narrative implies that some voters for all parties who have been historically represented in parliament now disapprove of all the parties of the political establishment and that preexisting party identification broke down in a number of unexpected ways. Indeed, when one compares voters' 2013 vote with their 2017 vote, it is possible to see evidence for this in two critical ways. First, voter loyalty for almost all the parties did not extend from election to election. Calculating row percentages for the 2013 first and second vote choice we can see that each party lost voters. For example, we can calculate the CDU/CSU's second vote row percentages (10.39 per cent AfD; 12.9 per cent FDP; 67.74 per cent CDU/CSU; 4.1 per cent SPD; 3.4 per cent Green; 1.4 per cent The Left). As this shows, the CDU/CSU was only able to retain 67.74 per cent of its second votes from 2013 to 2017. More importantly, there are substantial losses in votes across the political party spectrum. For instance, the CDU/CSU's vote share losses to the SPD and Greens alone amount to 7.5 per cent. If one were to extrapolate the survey data to the population parameters that would be a loss of 3,523,226 votes to left-wing parties ($46,976,341 \cdot 0.075 = 3,523,226$). On the other hand, the share of the second vote lost to parties right of the CDU/CSU is even higher at 23.29 per cent. Similar trends exist for all of the other parties at a relatively lower rate of first and second vote loss.

A second example of evidence for voter volatility can be seen when looking at AfD voters in [Table 1](#). Although the AfD drew a plurality of its voters from previous CDU/CSU voters, it was able to draw votes from all other parties. In particular, the AfD was able to draw previous SPD and Left party supporters for its first and second votes at a rate of about 10 per cent each. Across the board a substantial number of dissatisfied citizens withdrew their support from parties that they had previously supported and cast their ballots for the AfD.

All of these initial observations are important. However, [Table 1](#) cannot indicate the particular explanations for the increase in AfD vote share, the participation of previously absent voters, and the apparent increase in voter volatility. In order to more accurately try to capture possible explanations, more advanced statistical modeling is necessary. In particular, it is necessary to explore the ways in which AfD voters are similar and different when compared to voters for all of the other parties in the 2017 electoral market.

METHOD

The statistical method implemented here is multinomial logistic regression. Since the analysis is about individual-level vote choice, and all of the potential vote choices cannot be ordered continuously in a theoretically meaningful way, the decision to use multinomial logit was an obvious one. Multinomial logit is usual model selected for when you have a dependent variable of choice with more than two categories that cannot be substantively ordered. Multinomial logit regression is the correct method to use when the dependent variable is nominal and there are more than two levels/categories. For a model with this type of nominal level dependent variable with k categories, the multinomial regression model estimates $k - 1$ logit equations. This means that the model estimates coefficients and standard errors for each category in comparison to some reference category of the dependent variable. In this study, the reference category is vote choice for the AfD. Since voting for the AfD is the empirical phenomena of interest, we compare voting for the AfD to voting for all other parties individually.

The regression setup allows us to observe two distinct trends. First, it will be possible to view how voting for the AfD is statistically different than voting for each individual other party in the electoral market. In particular, we will be able to see whether the AfD was able to draw a particular type of voter and whether it was able to draw votes based on particular issues. Second, it will be possible to observe the ways in which AfD voters are similar to voters of each other parties. Since we have shown that the AfD was able to draw voters away from other parties, we are well aware that AfD voters might share features with voters of other parties. For example, we would be able to see whether, for example, AfD voters and voters for The Left party are statistically similar on their satisfaction with democracy in Germany.

RESULTS

The outputs from the multinomial logit regression models are presented in [Tables 2](#) and [3](#). To begin, [Table 2](#) displays the regression output for the model estimating first vote choice. We first explore socio-demographic trends. In regards to age, voters for the FDP, CDU/CSU, and SPD are statistically older than AfD voters. A similar trend exists for income and political knowledge. In particular, FDP and CDU/CSU voters tend to have a higher income and lower levels of political knowledge than do AfD voters. On the other hand, for all other socio-demographic indicators there are no statistically significant differences between AfD voters and voters for any of the other parties for the first vote choice. In terms of gender, education, employment status, and union membership, no statistically significant trends exist. This is significant, as it has been argued that the AfD has some distinctive demographic characteristics. For example, many have argued that AfD voters have lower levels of education and union membership and are primarily male ([Decker 2016](#); [Dilling 2018](#); [Schmitt-Beck 2017](#)). It appears that the AfD truly did capture discontented voters across most socio-demographic groups.

Similarly, AfD voters do not differ in a couple of attitudinal positions when compared to voters for other parties. As expected, party identification explains some

TABLE 2
2017 GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTION – MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL

Dependent Variable – 1st Vote	FDP	CDU/CSU	SPD	Green	The Left
Constant	-0.442 (0.821)	-1.603 (1.254)	-0.116 (0.847)	-4.139 (5.330)	-5.696 (5.669)
Age	0.215 (0.257)	0.451* (0.221)	0.332 (0.244)	-0.092 (0.285)	-0.131 (0.284)
Woman	0.469* (0.222)	0.387 (0.198)	0.138 (0.211)	0.329 (0.236)	0.111 (0.244)
University Degree	-0.033 (0.270)	0.150 (0.248)	0.022 (0.260)	0.030 (0.270)	0.102 (0.289)
Income	0.748* (0.282)	0.701** (0.246)	0.444 (0.267)	0.427 (0.293)	0.091 (0.303)
Unemployed	0.132 (0.243)	0.212 (0.201)	0.005 (0.237)	0.060 (0.268)	0.242 (0.219)
Union Member	-0.409* (0.201)	-0.296 (0.162)	-0.310 (0.179)	-0.334 (0.204)	-0.350 (0.219)
Eastern Germany	-0.153 (0.199)	0.135 (0.172)	-0.169 (0.188)	0.142 (0.213)	-0.227 (0.225)
Political Knowledge	-0.305 (0.242)	-0.329 (0.211)	0.049 (0.233)	-0.285 (0.272)	0.389 (0.286)
Political Ideology	-0.426 (0.248)	-0.283 (0.213)	-0.995** (0.232)	-1.096** (0.283)	-1.802** (0.298)
Party ID – FDP	3.027** (1.058)	2.722 (1.449)	1.648 (1.170)	3.668 (5.471)	-2.931 (78.217)
Party ID – CDU/CSU	1.163 (1.133)	5.304** (1.370)	-0.094 (1.433)	4.060 (5.459)	5.409 (5.795)
Party ID – SPD	1.730 (1.044)	3.000* (1.403)	4.603* (0.979)	5.904 (5.366)	5.147 (5.730)
Party ID – Green	3.559 (5.874)	6.954 (5.873)	6.109 (5.792)	10.806 (7.825)	8.981 (8.069)
Party ID – The Left	0.959 (1.589)	3.968* (1.650)	2.330 (1.294)	4.940 (5.444)	8.523 (5.725)
Party ID – Other	1.553 (0.819)	4.339** (1.253)	1.456 (0.861)	4.422 (5.339)	6.219 (5.668)
Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	-1.075** (0.303)	-1.135** (0.265)	-1.518** (0.291)	-1.932** (0.339)	-1.426** (0.332)
Gov. Reduce Income Disparity	0.001 (0.206)	-0.137 (0.185)	0.236 (0.206)	-0.030 (0.238)	0.257 (0.237)
Satisfaction w/Democracy	0.582** (0.217)	0.989** (0.183)	0.336 (0.200)	0.250 (0.238)	0.057 (0.237)
Prospective Economic Situation	0.030 (0.213)	0.160 (0.184)	0.135 (0.196)	0.170 (0.224)	-0.016 (0.231)
Fear of Globalisation	0.142 (0.230)	0.120 (0.199)	0.314 (0.219)	0.269 (0.248)	0.462 (0.251)
Anti-European Integration	-0.282 (0.209)	-0.399* (0.175)	-0.375 (0.199)	-0.168 (0.243)	-0.494* (0.252)
<i>N</i>					976
PRE					0.520
ePRE					0.433
Akaike Inf. Crit.					1,920.876

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .001$.

variance in vote choice in the 2017 election. However, AfD voters do not statistically differ when compared to respondents that identify with the SPD, Greens, and LP. Thus, the result indicates a weak party identification for the SPD, Greens, and the

TABLE 3
2017 GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTION: MULTIMONIAL LOGIT MODEL

Dependent Variable – 2nd Vote	FDP	CDU/CSU	SPD	Green	The Left
Constant	-5.267 (6.958)	-1.095 (1.118)	-1.450 (1.204)	-4.056 (5.228)	-7.428 (7.761)
Age	0.310 (0.247)	0.539* (0.225)	0.291 (0.249)	-0.018 (0.276)	-0.069 (0.273)
Woman	0.490* (0.212)	0.406* (0.196)	0.206 (0.213)	0.312 (0.230)	0.018 (0.234)
University Degree	0.364 (0.293)	0.278 (0.286)	0.172 (0.301)	0.128 (0.304)	0.184 (0.309)
Income	0.356 (0.264)	0.207 (0.240)	-0.168 (0.268)	0.108 (0.286)	-0.183 (0.293)
Unemployed	-0.090 (0.178)	-0.225 (0.171)	-0.019 (0.166)	-1.263 (3.956)	-0.148 (0.182)
Union Member	-0.411* (0.181)	-0.327* (0.156)	-0.267 (0.171)	-0.456* (0.201)	-0.446* (0.202)
Eastern Germany	-0.377* (0.182)	-0.361* (0.165)	-0.486* (0.187)	-0.327 (0.204)	-0.650** (0.213)
Political Knowledge	-0.264 (0.235)	-0.491* (0.211)	-0.194 (0.237)	0.033 (0.278)	0.074 (0.268)
Political Ideology	-0.512* (0.246)	-0.518* (0.220)	-1.110** (0.246)	-1.081** (0.282)	-1.949** (0.289)
Party ID – FDP	8.595 (6.994)	2.440 (1.401)	1.797 (1.741)	3.551 (5.340)	7.915 (7.680)
Party ID – CDU/CSU	6.899 (6.987)	4.796** (1.242)	1.254 (1.678)	4.209 (5.266)	-2.781 (152.493)
Party ID – SPD	6.818 (6.988)	3.023* (1.280)	6.105** (1.309)	5.701 (5.225)	8.907 (7.779)
Party ID – Green	9.742 (9.532)	6.515 (6.596)	7.039 (6.604)	10.749 (8.305)	11.430 (10.122)
Party ID – The Left	4.145 (7.077)	0.701 (1.550)	1.722 (1.442)	3.289 (5.266)	8.932 (7.776)
Party ID – Other	7.022 (6.961)	3.919** (1.135)	2.923* (1.238)	4.558 (5.195)	8.233 (7.764)
Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	-1.149** (0.280)	-1.194** (0.260)	-1.482** (0.287)	-2.162** (0.328)	-1.742** (0.317)
Gov. Reduce Income Disparity	0.048 (0.191)	0.004 (0.177)	0.391 (0.205)	0.339 (0.228)	0.643* (0.253)
Satisfaction w/Democracy	0.669** (0.209)	0.969** (0.188)	0.425* (0.210)	0.594* (0.247)	-0.039 (0.229)
Prospective Economic Situation	0.045 (0.203)	0.064 (0.185)	-0.159 (0.199)	-0.010 (0.223)	-0.138 (0.223)
Fear of Globalisation	0.121 (0.213)	0.043 (0.195)	0.171 (0.218)	0.268 (0.239)	0.412 (0.238)
Anti-European Integration	-0.275 (0.198)	-0.261 (0.176)	-0.566** (0.211)	-0.454 (0.251)	-0.072 (0.235)
<i>N</i>					975
PRE					0.540
ePRE					0.430
Akaike Inf. Crit.					2,027.542

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .001$.

Left party. Further, AfD voters do not hold statistically different views on the government's role of reducing income inequality or their outlook on their future economic situation when compared to people that vote for any of the other parties for the first vote.

However, AfD voters do statistically differ from voters of other parties in unique ways. First, AfD voters tend to identify as further right on the political spectrum than voters for almost every other party. This result conforms to expert coding of the AfD as a populist radical right party. Second, AfD voters statistically hold higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes than do voters for every other party. It is clear that the AfD drew voters with anti-immigrant attitudes away from other parties. Third, a very interesting result arises when exploring respondent satisfaction with democracy. Voters for the FDP, CDU/CSU, SPD, and Green parties are more likely than AfD voters to be satisfied with democracy. However, voters for The Left party hold statistically similar views. The result means that AfD and The Left party voters hold lower satisfaction with democracy than voters for every other party. A very plausible explanation for this finding is that both parties espouse anti-establishment rhetoric. Indeed, the populist, anti-establishment posture of the LP has been noted by scholars (Hough and Koß 2009; Hough and Keith 2018), and Olsen (2018) has argued that the LP's massive losses in 2017 to the AfD in eastern Germany lay in the AfD's ability to collect anti-establishment/protest voters the LP once attracted. On the other hand, the final conclusion we can draw from Table 2 is that voters for the Left party are statistically more likely than AfD voters to fear globalisation. Voters for The Left party are the only voters statistically different on this attitudinal position. This indicates that it is the LP voter, rather than the AfD voter, who could be more statistically characterised as a loser (or at least 'fearer') of globalisation. Finally, negative attitudes towards European integration only explain a difference for CDU/CSU voters and the Left voters. The AfD could have drawn some anti-EU voters from the two parties. Anti-EU sentiment does not appear initially to have been a huge driver of vote choice for the AfD.

The findings from Table 2 and the first vote are also present when exploring the second vote. Table 3 indicates that all of the same trends are present, with only a few expectations that should be highlighted. First, only FDP voters have statistically higher incomes when compared to AfD voters. Second, voters for the CDU/CSU during the second vote are statistically similar to AfD voters in terms of political ideology. The result indicates that some CDU/CSU voters used their second vote as a protest vote for the AfD. In addition, when exploring the second vote the results indicate that voters for The Left party are statistically more likely to think that the government should reduce income inequality. In the second vote, there is only a statistically significant difference in negative attitudes towards European integration when comparing AfD and SPD voters. The result indicates that anti-EU sentiment no longer contains consistent trends for voting AfD. Finally, for the second vote, living in Eastern Germany makes it less likely a respondent would vote for all political parties with the exception of the Green party when compared to voting for the AfD. This conforms with the election results in eastern Germany: there the AfD received 20.5 per cent of the vote, about double what it received in the western states at 10.7 per cent. Indeed, at the state level, the AfD's best result was in the eastern state of Saxony, where it won 27 per cent and was the largest party, edging out the CDU at 26.9 per cent. Moreover, the AfD won three direct mandates in the 2017 election, all of them districts in Saxony.

The multinomial regression output indicates some interesting and clear trends. However, the output does not indicate the precise effect of some of these important attitudinal trends of interest. Therefore, in order to view the effects of some of these

relationships, average effects plots were created.⁸ The substantive effect we explore first is the relationship between political ideology and vote choice. Figure 1 presents this relationship for both the first and second votes. For the first vote, going from the furthest leftist position on political ideology to the furthest right position leads to an increase of about .13 in the probability of voting for the AfD. In comparison, the probability of voting for the AfD based on going from the further leftist position to the furthest rightist position leads to an increase of about .3 in the probability of voting for the AfD for the second vote. For both votes, it is worth noting that respondents identifying in the centre of the spectrum and rightward have a probability of zero for voting of The Left party.

How does the effect of political ideology on vote choice in the 2017 German Federal Election compare to the effect of anti-immigrant sentiment? Figure 2 plots the effect of anti-immigrant sentiment on vote choice for both the first and second vote. There are two crucial aspects of Figure 2 worth noting. First, the anti-immigrant variable has the largest substantive effect on the probability of voting for the AfD. Second, anti-immigrant sentiment has a much greater effect on the probability of voting for the AfD than does political ideology: In terms of average effects, anti-immigrant sentiment has twice the impact. This is important, because AfD voters appear much less motivated by a coherent ideology than by simple anti-immigrant resentments. Third, as with political ideology, the effect of anti-immigrant sentiment is much larger in the second vote. The results here lead us to the unmistakable conclusion that the AfD pulled voters away from all other parties based on this single issue. In short, voters for other parties in the 2013 election for whom immigration and the refugee crisis were the most important issues moved their vote to the AfD in 2017.

On final substantive effect worth exploring here is the role that satisfaction with democracy played in the election. Figure 3 plots the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and vote choice. As before, the effect is larger for AfD and Green voters for the second vote. The particular effect is that dissatisfaction with democracy

FIGURE 1
EFFECT OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY ON VOTE CHOICE

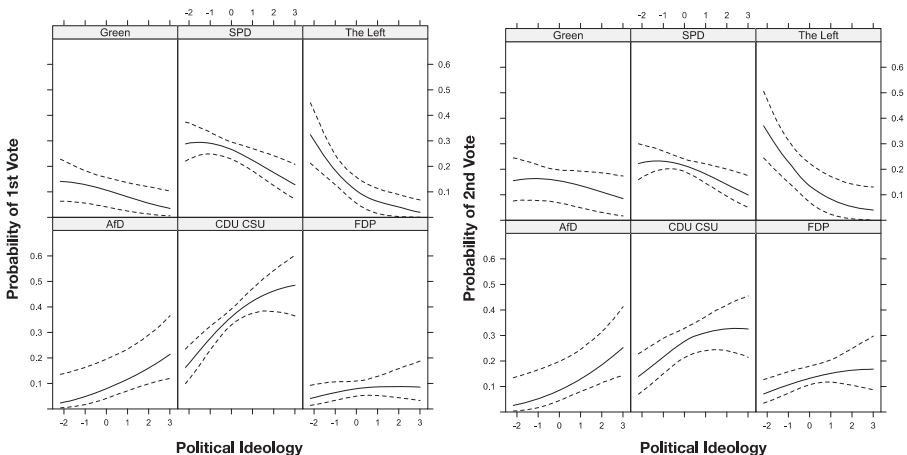
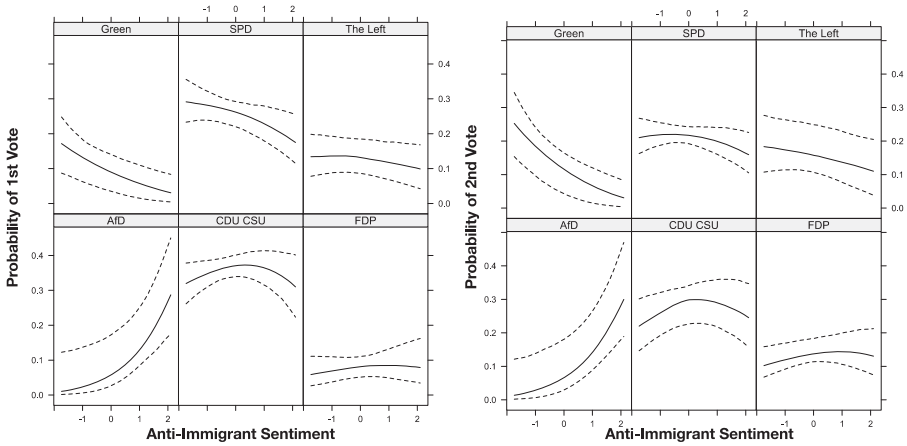
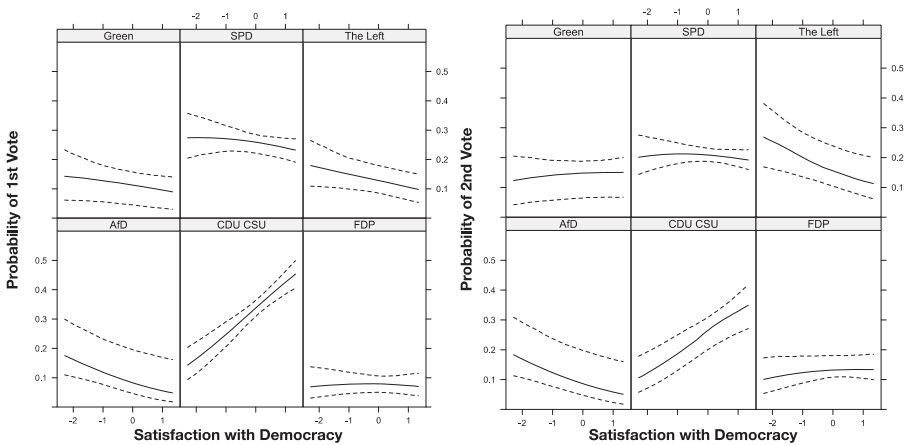


FIGURE 2
EFFECT OF ANTI-IMIGRANT SENTIMENT ON VOTE CHOICE



increases voting for both the AfD and The Left party for both votes. This would appear to confirm the fact that both the LP and AfD are drawing on anti-establishment/protest voters unhappy with democracy in Germany or, to put it another way, unhappy with politics as currently practiced in Germany. While the LP always captured a significant share of such voters it may be losing ground to the AfD, especially in eastern Germany. Further, a massive effect exists when exploring voting for the CDU/CSU. On average, going from total satisfaction with democracy to total dissatisfaction with democracy leads to a decrease of around .3 in the probability of voting for the ruling CDU/CSU party. If we extrapolate these findings, we could hypothesise that previous CDU/CSU

FIGURE 3
EFFECT OF SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY ON VOTE CHOICE



voters on the right flank of the Union who are dissatisfied with politics as usual cast their ballot in 2017 for the anti-system AfD.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From 2014 to the fall of 2017 the AfD evolved from an anti-EU but still mainstream conservative party to a populist radical right party. Although it did not abandon its positions regarding the EU, it prioritised anti-immigrant/nativist themes in its campaigns, manifestos, and public statements. Furthermore, our analysis shows that anti-EU sentiment was not a dominant factor in vote choice for the AfD in the 2017 federal election, certainly not when compared to anti-immigrant attitudes. The AfD therefore closely resembles other European populist radical right parties, which combine some anti-EU sentiment with a strong anti-immigrant, nativist core. How hard or soft voter support for the AfD remains in question, however, given the fact that much of its vote appears to be one of protest. Still, the offer on bid by the AfD in 2017 found resonance in the 2017 electoral marketplace. This study has found that the dominant factor by far impacting vote choice for the AfD in 2017 was anti-immigrant sentiment. This factor had the largest substantive effect on the probability of voting for the AfD, about twice the impact of another variable, political ideology. Furthermore, the AfD drew voters from across demographic groups regardless of gender, education, employment status, and union membership. Our findings thus contradict some previous scholarship, which has suggested that AfD voters have lower levels of union membership and education and are primarily male. AfD voters came from the ranks of previous non-voters and previous voters for all other parties across the demographic spectrum but upset with one issue – the Merkel government’s handling of the refugee issue. Indeed, our analysis suggests that some Union voters in 2017 – these could be called ‘Union protest voters’ – used their second vote to cast a ballot for the AfD. Our results, however, also demonstrate that AfD voters in 2017 were not motivated by anxieties about globalisation and were not particularly concerned about their own financial situation: these voters were therefore not a unique group of losers of globalisation as was sometimes portrayed in the media. Additionally, AfD voters were in the mainstream – i.e., did not differ statistically from all other voters – in terms of their attitude towards efforts to reduce inequality and the role of the welfare state. Finally, AfD and Left Party voters in 2017 were statistically similar in their (dis)satisfaction with democracy. In all of the eastern states in the 2017 election the Left Party lost 5.1 per cent compared to 2013, with the AfD taking some 430,000 of its voters – the largest proportional losses of any party. It appears that the AfD and Left Party are now populist, welfare-state friendly, anti-establishment competitors, at least in eastern Germany.

The newest iteration of a Grand Coalition government of the SPD and the Union may drive more former CDU/CSU and SPD voters who see little difference between the mainstream parties further to the populist AfD. And yet the implications for other parties, especially the Left Party, are also significant, as they can no longer expect to be the beneficiary of an anti-Grand Coalition vote. For the Union and other parties who hope to win back support from AfD voters it might seem that taking a hard line on refugees and immigration could be a winning formula. However, it is not clear how far in this direction these parties can go without alienating their own core

supporters. In other words, since the vote for the AfD was overwhelmingly a reaction to immigration policy, it is not unreasonable to think that voters many voters may desert the AfD if the Merkel government can find substantive (but not extreme) solutions concerning refugee and immigration policy. Chancellor Merkel's recent meeting with Emmanuel Macron to seek a European solution for the refugee issue appears designed precisely to navigate between hardliners in the CDU and CSU and those voters who simply want to see some positive steps in coming to grips with the ongoing crisis (or at least their perception that there is a crisis). If she is successful – and this remains a big 'if' – the AfD may still yet revert to the historical pattern of radical right parties in Germany.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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NOTES

1. The Post-Election, Cross-Sectional German Longitudinal Study used here is version 1.0.0, which was released on 12/21/17.
2. It should be noted that the literature on conceptualising far right parties or populist radical right parties in Europe contains substantial debate: throughout different periods a lack of conceptual agreement is striking (Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995; Canovan 1999; Givens 2005; Mudde 2007; Hainsworth 2008; Copsy 2008). Since the level of analysis in this research agenda solely explores vote choice for AfD, it is outside the bounds of this article to fully engage in this debate. However, the debate in the literature on how to define the AfD and whether it can be classified as a populist radical right party is summarised here.
3. In contrast to the studies by Schmitt-Beck (2017) and Dilling (2018), we do not test how AfD voters are different from all other voters cumulatively in the electoral market. Instead, we test how AfD voters differ from voters for each and every party. We do not make the same methodological assumption as these scholars, which is that voters for all other parties are statistically the same. For example, when these scholars have coded AfD vote a 1 and votes for all other parties a 0, they are arguing that voters for the CDU/CSU are statistically the same as voters for the SPD, Greens, and the Left Party when compared to AfD voters. Our analysis demonstrates that the assumption does not hold under statistical testing.
4. In the German electoral system parties may earn more seats than they are entitled to by the second vote (PR) if their number of first vote seats won in a state exceeds the number of seats determined through the second vote. This is the so-called 'overhang mandate.'
5. Variable coding, descriptive statistics, and any statistical tests performed for creating the independent variables (i.e. Cronbach's Alpha scores, factor analysis, and binary correlation tests) can be accessed online from the corresponding author.
6. Political participation was included in the original analysis. However, there was little variation on the variables used.

7. The second largest 2017 vote share for voters that did not vote in the 2013 election was for the CDU/CSU, which may be surprising.
8. The average effects plots were created using the DAMisc R package (Armstrong 2016). The command to create the plots produces a plot of average effects for one variable while holding the others constant at observed values.

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