

# **The Rise of Right-Wing Sentiment in Germany –**

## **A Historical & Socioeconomic Analysis**

By Emily Colladay

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The perception of loss and identity*

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German identity has been on a tremendous, highly tumultuous journey, from the Nazi era itself to an acknowledged ‘Willkommenskultur’, or welcoming culture. The Germany of the begin of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would not recognize the country it has become today, with its high number of immigrants, refugees and largely liberal politics. However, even if some articles by the Economist<sup>1</sup> and Al Jazeera<sup>2</sup> herald the ‘New Germans’ as a multicultural and progressive state, the re-emergence of right-wing sentiment tells another story. In 2013, a party was born that would become Germany’s first right-wing party to cross the five percent election threshold and enter parliament since the Nazi regime of World War II, the Alternative for Germany (AfD)<sup>3</sup>.

Perhaps history is not something that can be overturned like a blank page – it is much more a continuation of the pages that came before it and the actions of its characters. Where then did these more conservative, right wing ideologies and opinions come from? Has the refugee crisis been the breaker of Germany’s façade of well-meaning progressivism? Or is this simply a part of

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<sup>1</sup> "Germany Is Becoming More Open and Diverse," The Economist, April 14, 2018, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://www.theworldin.com/article/10466/new-germans>.

<sup>2</sup> English, Al Jazeera. "The New Germans - Featured Documentary." YouTube. May 26, 2017. Accessed December 02, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n87ZHRFXXdA>.

<sup>3</sup> Chase, Jefferson. "AfD: What You Need to Know about Germany's Far-right Party | DW | 24.09.2017." DW.COM. September 24, 2017. Accessed December 02, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199>.

the process of developing from a relatively homogenous society to one that is an active participant in a globalizing world? The question that summarizes these succinctly is the following:

*Why has right-wing sentiment re-emerged in German politics?*

There is a multitude of research that has been done to answer this question, and the main theories will be examined in the next section of this paper, but my argument is economic in nature. In light of my own research and compilation of existing secondary sources, I argue that the rise in right-wing sentiment in Germany is due to the continuous regional economic disparity between former East and West Germany. I will illustrate my argument using the most up-to-date data available at the time of my writing, and will evaluate the existing theories from the perspective of my findings, of which there will be three: the ‘losers of modernization’, the ‘cultural threat’, and the ‘protest vote’. I will examine Saxony as a case study that represents many of the issues the former GDR faces, to better understand their dynamics. To gain a more comprehensive picture, as well as further illustrate the disparities between east and west, I will look into the regional prevalence of hate crimes against refugees and foreigners, as well as critique the media’s role in the population.

The AfD will serve as a proxy to understand who is voting for right-wing policies and where they are, i.e. what life they may be living. This will necessitate analysis of election and attitudinal data by state to understand regional differences, and economic analysis of opportunity by region. To put this analysis into context, I will provide a historical frame of German identity and politics that have led up to the point of discussion today.

## MODERN DISCOURSE THUS FAR

### *A Literature Review*

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**The Existing Discussion** | An emergence of right-wing sentiment in Germany - not even a century after the fall of the Nazi regime - is something that has caused great discussion domestically as well as internationally<sup>4</sup>. Why voters in Germany are being pulled to the Alternative for Germany, the current anti-migrant, Eurosceptic party, is often a precursor to a valuable discussion of islamophobia and racism, but these are variations of scapegoating, symptoms that cover the root causes of a growing political right. Rising tensions in Germany have led to protests and unrest, as this new wave baffles some Germans, yet speaks to others' own sentiments. It was exemplified in Berlin in May of 2018, when circa 5,000 marching AfD supporters were met by the protests of around 20,000 anti-AfD demonstrators<sup>5</sup>. These sorts of tensions have of course led to articles and journals trying to explain the AfD's rise, and the most popular theories are based either in a feeling of cultural loss, or an examination of economic upheaval that has caused insecurity. As with anything societal, there is no straightforward, simple answer, yet I see economic causes as the roots that have let this movement grow. In the following paragraphs, I will examine each theory more closely.

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<sup>4</sup> Berbuir, Nicole, Marcel Lewandowsky, and Jasmin Siri. "The AfD and Its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?" *German Politics* 24, no. 2 (2014): 154-78. doi:10.1080/09644008.2014.982546.

<sup>5</sup> Lough, Richard. "Germany's Far-right Supporters Outnumbered by Protesters in Berlin." *Reuters*. May 28, 2018. Accessed December 02, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-protest-afd/germanys-far-right-supporters-outnumbered-by-protesters-in-berlin-idUSKCN1IS0KG>.

**The ‘Protest Vote’ Theory** | For some, the AfD is a party that those who voted for it do not outright support, but vote for because they are discontent with any other party<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the values the AfD stand for, particularly their more divisive and conservative views, may not be as vehemently felt in German society as their election numbers show. This is something that can only be proven by attitudinal data, as pure election data itself would not suffice as evidence, neither would demographic data. A highly unusual report by Hansen and Olsen<sup>7</sup> states that they found no social commonalities between AfD voters and right-wing sympathizers, and base their argument on a single-issue sentiment surrounding the refugee crisis and resulting anti-migrant and anti-establishment opinions. These do go easily hand in hand, as Merkel’s refugee policies and accepting rhetoric were heavily criticized by many, especially as numerous reports of undocumented refugees were published, followed by crimes such as terrorist attacks and mass molestation of women by ‘foreign-looking men’<sup>8</sup>. The resulting culture of fear may have driven some to a protest party, which the AfD represented.

This report uses 2017 GLES post-election data, and thus depicts a more recent development of German politics. However, a complete shift from economic or demographic similarities as reported by most other scholars, such as a report by Tutic and von Hermanni<sup>9</sup> that concludes on

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<sup>6</sup> Giebler, Heiko, and Regel, Sven, “Who Votes Right-Wing Populist? Geographical and Individual Factors in Seven German State Elections.” WISO Diskurs, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2018. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/wiso/14560.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Hansen, Michael, and Olsen, Jonathan. “Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election.” *German Politics*, 22 Aug. 2018, 10.1080/09644008.2018.1509312

<sup>8</sup> Noack, Rick. "Leaked Document Says 2,000 Men Allegedly Assaulted 1,200 German Women on New Year's Eve." *The Washington Post*. July 11, 2016. Accessed December 02, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/10/leaked-document-says-2000-men-allegedly-assaulted-1200-german-women-on-new-years-eve/?utm\\_term=.d13300e14822](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/10/leaked-document-says-2000-men-allegedly-assaulted-1200-german-women-on-new-years-eve/?utm_term=.d13300e14822).

<sup>9</sup> Tutic, Andreas, and Hagen Von Hermanni. "Sozioökonomischer Status, Deprivation Und Die Affinität Zur AfD – Eine Forschungsnotiz (Socioeconomic Status, Deprivation, and Affinity toward the AfD - A Research Note)." *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie* 70, no. 2 (June 2018): 275-94. Accessed December 2, 2018. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.neu.edu/10.1007/s11577-018-0523-0>.

socioeconomic factors driving the right movement, is very curious. On first glance, this must mean that the refugee crisis did affect German opinions on migrants and integration so greatly that a cross-demographic shift towards the right occurred. This general discontent leads to what is often called a protest vote, and is thus dependent on the satisfaction with other, older parties such as the CDU/CSU, SPD, et cetera. It is difficult to differentiate between anti-migrant stance and anti-migrant policy sentiments, as one involves more cultural elements and aligns with the cultural threat theory, whereas criticism towards Merkel's approach is not necessarily rejection of refugees and migrants themselves, but how their arrival is managed. This also raises questions about the AfD's future once the refugee crisis is in decline from its peak, as reported by the media. However, I have found in my own findings that this theory is based on statistics that I cannot confirm, as I have found there to be certain trends in election data that speak for economic disparity and insecurity causing the rise in right-wing conservatism. Thus, the votes the AfD received may have been out of protest, yet the cause of this protest is deep-seated and, if I am correct in that there is a decline in economic well-being, this protest vote will not be alleviated in the coming elections, independent of the refugee crisis.

**The 'Cultural Threat' Theory** | The cultural threat theory describes an emerging division between cosmopolitan and communitarian sections of German society, and the unwillingness of the latter to accept migrants or refugees as they are perceived as an invasion of foreign values and a loss of German homogenous culture. This theory is examined by Lengfeld and Dilger<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lengfeld, Holger, and Clara Dilger. "Cultural and Economic Threats. A Causal Analysis of the Party Identification with the "Alternative for Germany" (AfD) Using the German Socio-Economic Panel 2016." *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie* 47, no. 3 (October 28, 2018): 181-99.  
<https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/zfsoz.2018.47.issue-3/zfsoz-2018-1012/zfsoz-2018-1012.pdf>.

using 2016 Socio-Economic Panel data, and is backed by data used by Giebler and Regel<sup>11</sup> in another report, which looks at a district-level breakdown of voter turnouts from both 2014 and 2016.

A strong connection between unemployment and AfD votes in this report is attributed to the losers of modernization theory, as well as lower income. Level of education does not fit into the narrative, as this report states that many voters do possess higher levels of education. This leads Lengfeld and Dilger to conclude that the losers of modernization theory is therefore incorrect<sup>12</sup>; however, I disagree with this. A person with a high education who is still unemployed certainly feels existential fear and uncertainty toward the future, and this may cause them to become less accepting of others who seek opportunity or refuge. Additionally, my findings do not agree with the statement that many AfD voters possessed a higher education, which I will illustrate later. This second report does find an interesting correlation between rejection of foreigners and a low diversity rate in the region, indicating that those who are most fearful of cultural change perhaps are not exposed to more diverse social interactions as their more cosmopolitan counterparts may be. This is a classic sign of fearing the unknown and finding a faceless scapegoat to blame for personal grievances.

**The ‘Losers of Modernization’ Theory** | A prominent theory, the losers of modernization are those who have little resilience to modernization, globalization, or general economic or societal

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<sup>11</sup> Giebler, Heiko, and Regel, Sven, “Who Votes Right-Wing Populist? Geographical and Individual Factors in Seven German State Elections.” WISO Diskurs, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2018. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/wiso/14560.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Lengfeld; Dilger. "Cultural and Economic Threats. A Causal Analysis of the Party Identification with the “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) Using the German Socio-Economic Panel 2016." *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie* 47, no. 3 (October 28, 2018): 181-99.

shifts<sup>13</sup>. Thus, they feel the most insecurity, which can lead to existential fears and a shift toward more right-wing, conservative thought. The ‘losers’ are often of lower classes or income groups, meaning they have less financial security to weather change.

To support this theory as explanation for AfD affinity, authors Tutic and von Hermann<sup>14</sup> use data from three survey sources that observe attitudinal shifts in German society: GLES, ALLBUS, and ESS, all from 2016. Using regression analysis and adjusting for various factors and indicators that may sway voter opinions, they conclude that socioeconomic status was the deciding statistic that correlated with right-wing thought. Voters were generally from lower income brackets, less educated, and believed they were economically/socially deprived.

Here, occupational status is illustrated as the key to understanding the rise of the AfD, and three categories are composed: engaged (those with authority and larger amounts of responsibility), skilled workers (careers that do require formal education), and ‘leg workers’ (basic service personnel or other jobs that require no formal education). These are occupational levels that decrease in range of responsibility and autonomy respectively, and thus affect the resilience to change in an individual. Job insecurity leads to less acceptance of others, which is reflected in less favorable opinions toward European integration and, once the refugee crisis swept across the media, refugee and migrant acceptance.

This theory I find most probable as the very core of the rise of the right in Germany, as it aligns with the data I have found, which illustrates a historical disparity between the development and wealth of the former east and west states, the east lagging behind consistently with no substantial

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<sup>13</sup> Kiess, Johannes, Brähler, Elmar, Schmutzer, Gabriele, and Decker, Oliver. „Euroscepticism and Right-Wing Extremist Attitudes in Germany: A Result of the ‘Dialectic Nature of Progress?’” *German Politics*, 10 Nov. 2016, 10.1080/09644008.2016.1226810

<sup>14</sup> Tutic; Von Hermann. "Sozioökonomischer Status, Deprivation Und Die Affinität Zur AfD – Eine." *KZfSS* 70, no. 2 (June 2018): 275-94. Accessed December 2, 2018. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.neu.edu/10.1007/s11577-018-0523-0>.

improvement in sight. This is what I will delve into further when conducting my own data analysis on regional voter and attitudinal data, as well as wealth distribution.

To understand the historical significance of the AfD, as well as the development of the German population and politics in modern history, I will now present the framework of German identity since the end of WWII, and how it plays into my argument.

## **THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK**

### *The varying identities of German politics and nationality*

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German identity has seen rapid change throughout modern history. To clearly see this development, a sensible time frame needs to be established, which can be difficult to pinpoint. Yet in the case of Germany, three stages of identity and politics do arise and characterize its behavior: the begin of its regional divergence into East and West Germany, its hasty reunification, and its global voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These sections of history are largely inspired by Ruth Wittlinger's book, "German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century: A Different Republic After All?"<sup>15</sup> Wittlinger provides a comprehensive picture of Germany from post-war to modern day, with a caution toward its rising economic disparities and the fragility of former East German states, giving a historical explanation for their consistently poorer economic standing. Her process of analysis allows her to weave together an understanding of Germany's perception of itself, and I will glean from it a deeper understanding of the separation of east and west.

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<sup>15</sup> Wittlinger, Ruth. German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century: A Different Republic After All? (New Perspectives in German Political Studies) (Kindle Locations 210-211). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Kindle Edition.



**West and East Germany - Evolution and Divergence** | Both regions had their own act of grappling with history, which involved distancing themselves from WWII as well as making it a central part of their identity<sup>16</sup>. West Germany in particular struggled with this for some time, as it was the legal successor of the Nazi regime<sup>17</sup>. In its moments of distancing itself, a convenient identity to hide in was that of the general European identity. West Germany was very in favor of the creation of the EU and a borderless, European unity, especially because this would wash away some of the national guilt that was felt after the war<sup>18</sup>. However, this was also met with instances of acknowledgement, such as former chancellor Willy Brandt falling to his knees to pay respects to the tragedies of the past<sup>19</sup>.

The GDR, on the other hand, went through its own, entirely different process, as it was under Soviet control and thus identified with its communist economic and societal model. The GDR used West Germany's legal succession of the Nazi regime to differentiate and free itself from history, but also to legitimize its own communist government by blaming capitalist values for the rise of Hitler<sup>20</sup>. In this double-act of distancing and legitimizing itself, East German politics turned toward 'Ostorientierung', eastern orientation<sup>21</sup>. By declaring itself anti-capitalist, anti-

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<sup>16</sup> Wittlinger. *German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century*. (Kindle Locations 210-211). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Kindle Edition.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Goshko, John M. "GERMAN STATESMAN WILLY BRANDT DIES." *The Washington Post*. October 09, 1992. Accessed December 02, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/10/09/german-statesman-willy-brandt-dies/217a349e-6ce9-4ff0-9cd7-2dfb94281c6e/?utm\\_term=.e12cde896b8f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/10/09/german-statesman-willy-brandt-dies/217a349e-6ce9-4ff0-9cd7-2dfb94281c6e/?utm_term=.e12cde896b8f).

<sup>20</sup> Wittlinger. *German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century*. (Kindle Locations 210-211). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Kindle Edition.

<sup>21</sup> Lentz, Manfred. "Beginnende Ostorientierung: Wendepunkt Sowjetischer SBZ-Politik 1947/48." *Die Wirtschaftsbeziehungen DDR — Sowjetunion 1945–1961, 1979*, 46-60. doi:10.1007/978-3-322-95465-7\_4.

fascist, and anti-Hitler, it turned itself towards the USSR, even suggesting that Hitler was a West German man and therefore a West German issue<sup>22</sup>. Here the difference in identity can easily be observed, yet the economic disparity truly begins with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

**Post-Berlin Wall Reunification** | Having removed themselves from an identity based on cultural or ethnic belonging, the economic attractiveness of West Germany's 'model' was what swayed East Germans to favor reunification<sup>23</sup>. This is important, because there was no significant "Germanness" that incentivized the two to reunite; rather, East Germany simply saw the economic wealth of the west and wanted to benefit from it as well<sup>24</sup>. This also leans support away from the cultural threat theory, which relies more on a feeling of loss of culture.

The reunification after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was done hastily – Wittlinger believes this could have been used as a chance for reform, yet it was not - and thus former GDR states still suffer economically more than the West, creating a disparity in wealth and well-being<sup>25</sup>. This domestic economic issue would not immediately pose a problem for Germany's emerging soft power image as an economic success, as the legacy of the Bonn republic created a strong image, but the inner economic disparity has only prevailed.

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Germany, Euroscepticism, and the Migrant Crisis** | It would be interesting to hear Wittlinger's thoughts on Germany's actions during the refugee crisis, yet her book was published in 2010. The AfD was born in 2013, and the European migrant crisis began in earnest

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<sup>22</sup> The GDR's Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945-1989. Orlow, Dietrich.  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/27668125?seq=5#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27668125?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents)

<sup>23</sup> Wittlinger. German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century. (Kindle Locations 210-211). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Kindle Edition.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

around 2014/5. What Wittlinger could observe was Germany's development into a state with its own interests, such as its refusal to join the United States in the Iraq war<sup>26</sup>. However, the German public also expressed its own interests during the 2013 elections when the AfD almost entered parliament by using Eurosceptic rhetoric to win over votes, a sign that the waning approval of the Euro was leaving marks on the political stage<sup>27</sup>. This is a regression from the former Eurocentric identity that West Germany harbored in its WWII 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' ('coming to terms with the past'), and a sign that the declining public economy was causing isolationist tendencies to resurface<sup>28</sup>. Almost exclusively economic in nature, Eurosceptic trends caused the very creation of the AfD, which speaks to my argument that the roots of the right-wing party and sentiment are largely economic as well.

The refugee crisis is where the cultural threat theory sounds more plausible at first, as the surge in islamophobia certainly did impact society and politics, to the point where hate crimes against Muslims specifically were added as a federal crime in 2017 and an annual report on crimes against refugees and migrants was first published in 2015<sup>29</sup>. Certainly, the refugee and migrant influx has caused Germany to become more aware of existing discriminatory beliefs within its society; however, some of these resentments may be based on the driver of my theory of economic insecurity.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Officer, The Federal Returning. "Official Provisional Result of the 2013 Bundestag Election." Strukturdaten Berlin-Neukölln - Der Bundeswahlleiter. 2013. Accessed December 02, 2018. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2013/2013-09-23-vorlaeufiges-amtliches-ergebnis-der-bundestagswahl-2013.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Heine, Friederike. "Next Stop, Brussels? German Euroskeptics' Breakthrough Moment - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International." SPIEGEL ONLINE. June 22, 2014. Accessed December 03, 2018. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/euroskeptic-alternative-for-germany-has-german-election-breakthrough-a-923950.html>.

<sup>29</sup>Germany. Bundestag. Bundesregierung. *Islamfeindlichkeit Und Antimuslimische Straftaten Im Vierten Quartal 2016 (Islamophobic Attacks in the Fourth Quarter 2016)*. Drucksache 18/10984.

## LETTING THE DATA SPEAK

### *An examination of the public's voice*

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To prove that socioeconomic factors have led to the rise in right-wing beliefs in Germany, I will present attitudinal data that quantifies the opinions of the population, election data that shows the actions people have taken to create political shifts, and crime data, to show where these beliefs have led to hate crimes. First, I will present an overview on the AfD itself.

**The AfD and the Return to the Right** | The AfD is often used as a proxy for understanding the shift towards the right for a growing part of the German population. Thus, understanding who votes for and thus sympathizes with AfD rhetoric is important to uncover the causes for this political development. The AfD has often been labeled a single-issue party since its creation in April 2013<sup>30</sup>. First, it was a primarily Eurosceptic party, and amid the refugee crisis a few years later it was reawakened as staunchly anti-migrant<sup>31</sup>. Additionally, the AfD has gathered protest votes from the Left and thus been described as a protest party, something that would not last any longer than past right-wing parties post-WWII, yet its success in national elections is unprecedented. There has been great back-and-forth on the demographics of the AfD sympathizers, ranging from generalizations of angry, educated men to lower-income, alienated workers<sup>32</sup>. This is something I will examine through my own research in the following section.

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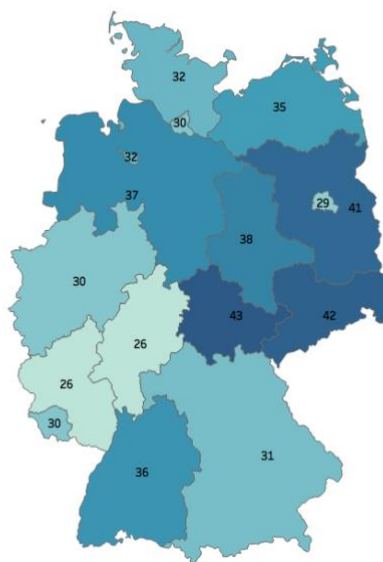
<sup>30</sup> Tutic; Von Hermanni. "Sozioökonomischer Status, Deprivation Und Die Affinität Zur AfD – Eine." *KZfSS* 70, no. 2 (June 2018): 275-94. Accessed December 2, 2018. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.neu.edu/10.1007/s11577-018-0523-0>.

<sup>31</sup> Deutsche Welle. "AfD: What You Need to Know about Germany's Far-right Party | DW | 24.09.2017." DW.COM. September 24, 2017. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199>.

<sup>32</sup> Hambauer, Verena, and Anja Mays. "Who Votes for the Alternative for Germany (AfD?)- a Comparison of the Social Structure, Political Attitudes and Views towards Refugees between AfD

My analysis of the latest 2017 election shows that support for the AfD is larger in the east than in the west, standing at 21.5 percent versus 11 percent in the west<sup>33</sup>. In comparison, Merkel's winning party, the CDU, scored 26 percent in the same region<sup>34</sup>. This is unsurprising when considering the previously mentioned disparities in economic wellbeing between the two former separate entities. Survey data by the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that the former GDR states are less welcoming to migrants or foreigners, with Saxony agreeing to 43 percent, and that they feel the federal state prioritizes refugees over disadvantaged Germans, with participants in Thuringia agreeing at 43 percent<sup>35</sup>. The following question

Federal state supports refugees more than disadvantaged Germans (%)



of positive view on Germany accepting refugees was met with only 31-36 percent in Brandenburg, Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt<sup>36</sup>. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was the only former GDR state to agree to 45 percent.

Voters and the Voters for the Established Parties.” SpringerLink, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 11 Dec. 2017, [link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12286-017-0369-2](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12286-017-0369-2).

<sup>33</sup> Said-Moorhouse, Lauren, and Schams Elwazer. "How a Far-right Party Won Third Place in Germany." CNN. September 25, 2017. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/25/europe/germany-afd-election-graphics/index.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Arant, Regina, Dragolov, Georgi, and Boehnke, Klaus. Joacobs University Bremen. Bertelsmann Stiftung. „Zusammenhalt in Deutschland Bericht 2017“. [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/ST-LW\\_Studie\\_Zusammenhalt\\_in\\_Deutschland\\_2017.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/ST-LW_Studie_Zusammenhalt_in_Deutschland_2017.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

### **Persistent Economic Disparity and Growing Dissatisfaction** | This disparity in opinion

between east and west can be further painted by economic numbers. The German Institute for Economic Research has reported that, while the richest top 10 percent of households have seen their incomes climb by 27 percent from 1991 to 2014, the middle class has only seen a nine percent increase<sup>37</sup>. The bottom percentile has seen income drop by eight percent, many of which live in the east<sup>38</sup>. Though national unemployment is low, 60 percent of the nation's wealth is owned by the top ten percent, with inequalities rising and manufacturing jobs, a historically large part of Germany's economy, disappearing due to increased automation and technology<sup>39</sup>.

What is created in this decline of wellbeing and wealth is a population of dissatisfied, disenfranchised workers who see their paychecks grow smaller while their country changes around them. The surge of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants was surely not reassuring for these individuals, especially with many articles condemning Merkel's handling of the 'refugee crisis' as overwhelmed and too lax<sup>40</sup>. A DeutschlandTrend survey shows that 49 percent of Germans nationally were not satisfied with the government's management of the tremendous rise in migration – however, when split in two, the west agreed to this by 46 percent and the east by 66 percent<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> DIW Berlin. German Institute for Economic Research. "Income Inequality Virtually Unchanged since Steep Rise up until 2005." News release, June 19, 2015. DIW. Accessed December 2, 2018. [https://www.diw.de/en/diw\\_01.c.508553.en/topics\\_news/income\\_inequality\\_virtually\\_unchanged\\_since\\_steep\\_rise\\_up\\_until\\_2005.html](https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.508553.en/topics_news/income_inequality_virtually_unchanged_since_steep_rise_up_until_2005.html).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Blickle, Paul, Andreas Loos, Fabian Mohr, Julia Speckmeier, Julian Stahnke, Sascha Venohr, and Veronika Völlinger. "German Election: The AfD Profits from Non-Voters and Merkel Defectors." ZEIT ONLINE. September 25, 2017. Accessed December 03, 2018.

<https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-09/german-election-alternative-for-germany-angela-merkel>.  
<sup>41</sup> Deutsche Welle. "After Chemnitz, Poll Shows East-west Split on Migration | DW | 06.09.2018." DW.COM. September 6, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/after-chemnitz-poll-shows-east-west-split-on-migration/a-45389402>.

An interesting key point to observe when looking at the election turnout is that the claim that AfD voters are largely highly educated and wealthy is simply false<sup>42</sup>. Only seven percent of voters have a graduate degree; most have an intermediate-level high school diploma, which is typically received at age sixteen, and are of the working class<sup>43</sup>. Thus, these are people who are vulnerable to change and are, as the losers of modernization classifies them, the skilled workers and leg workers who have less autonomy or authority over their lives and opportunities. They are the most likely to resist to change that may upset their economic well-being and look towards more far-right rhetoric to match the insecurity of Germany's changing market from an industrial power to a modernizing, service-oriented market.

## **A POPULATION CRISIS AMONGST A TROUBLED ECONOMY**

### *A perfect economic storm and the losers of modernization*

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The refugee crisis pulls us out of Germany's domestic economic issues and serves as a reminder that no state lives in a vacuum, especially not one that has been branded by some momentarily as the leader of the free world<sup>44</sup> – a title that Angela Merkel was not comfortable with. However, the migrant crisis certainly made Germany's delicate system even more strained, with many highly discontent with their government. This shows most in the eastern states once again, with the survey question, "Do you agree that the federal state is supporting refugees more than disadvantaged Germans?" receiving the highest affirmations in Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg,

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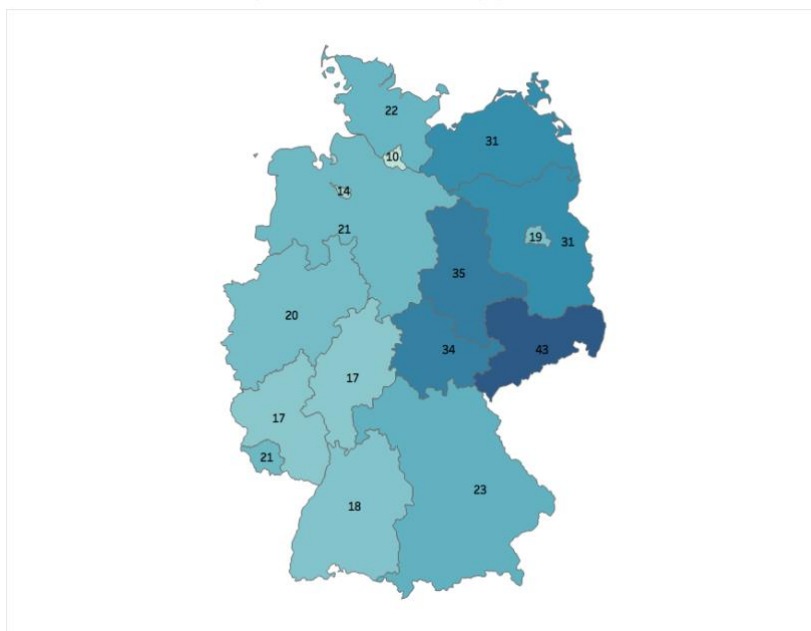
<sup>42</sup> Niedermayer, Oskar, and Jürgen Hofrichter. "Die Wählerschaft Der AfD: Wer Ist Sie, Woher Kommt Sie Und Wie Weit Rechts Steht Sie?" ZParl Zeitschrift Für Parlamentsfragen, 2016, 267-85. Accessed December 5, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hundal, Sunny. "Angela Merkel Is Now the Leader of the Free World, Not Donald Trump." The Independent. March 19, 2017. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/angela-merkel-donald-trump-democracy-freedom-of-press-a7556986.html>.

and Saxony-Anhalt, all of which scored at around 37 – 43 percent<sup>45</sup>. In a similar vein, the question, “Would you prefer to not have refugee neighbors?” was also more agreed to in the same regions<sup>46</sup>. Interestingly enough, these tend to be the states with the least diversity, recording lower numbers of inhabitants with a foreign or migrant background<sup>47</sup>. Clearly, there is a disconnect here, as no correlation between actual presence of foreigners or Germans with foreign background in demographic data and AfD affinity can be found. Thus, the isolationist tendencies and the dissatisfaction with Merkel’s

Prefers to not have refugees/foreigners as neighbors (%)



policies in these regions speak for an insecurity that has little to do with immigration and refugees themselves – the AfD’s main topic du jour – and more with a deep-seated economic worry in a globalizing world that is leaving industrial cities behind.

**The Economic Losers of the East** | This theory that supports my argument of economic disparity is based on economic observation, particularly the prevalence of ‘losers’ in the eastern states. As examined in the historical snapshots of German post-war development, the east and

<sup>45</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Arant, Dragolov, and Boehnke. Bertelsmann Stiftung. „Zusammenhalt in Deutschland Bericht 2017“.

<sup>47</sup> "Migration.Integration.Regionen." Digital interactive image/map. Destatis. December 31, 2017.

Accessed December 2, 2018.

[https://service.destatis.de/DE/karten/migration\\_integration\\_regionen.html#ANT\\_AI](https://service.destatis.de/DE/karten/migration_integration_regionen.html#ANT_AI).



west were brought together hastily, with disparities already written into their reunification. For instance, at the time of reunification, chancellor Helmut Kohl proposed wages and savings be translated from East Mark to West Mark one to one, to make sure no devaluation occurred, yet savings were translated to a rate of two East Marks to each West Mark<sup>48</sup>. Additionally, the east was not culturally used to the concept of owning land, as they had been living in a socialist system for two generations – a seemingly short time, yet significant nonetheless especially after WWII and its devastation<sup>49</sup>.

In 2015, the average net wealth of a west German was about 153,200 Euros, whereas that of the easterner did not reach even half that amount; as a result, an east German is 25 percent more likely to fall into poverty<sup>50</sup>. This undoubtedly makes the survey data much more understandable – eastern states would be more responsive to the idea of the state providing more for refugees than for them and feeling neglected. Even if this belief is factually incorrect, it signals a feeling of being left out of Germany's overall wealth that is largely congregated in the west. In 2018, the economic gap is narrowing slightly, but it is at such an incremental rate that is it barely significant and locals certainly are not feeling much difference, causing the strain to continue<sup>51</sup>. The annual Unity Report published by the German Bundestag describes the economic catch-up of the east as “only very slowly” progressing; the gap has only decreased by 4.2 percentage points in 2017, which is almost the same amount as the year before<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Connolly, Kate. "German Reunification 25 Years On: How Different Are East and West Really." The Guardian. October 02, 2015. Accessed December 03, 2018.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/02/german-reunification-25-years-on-how-different-are-east-and-west-really>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Schmid, Sandra. "Blickwinkel Der Fraktionen Auf Den Stand Der Deutschen Einheit." Deutscher Bundestag. September 27, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018.  
<https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2018/kw39-de-stand-der-deutschen-einheit/568852>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

The numbers paint a picture that allows a divergence of east and west to appear, based on their history and the results of their economic development and prosperity. To further illustrate the difference in history and political mentality, Saxony can serve as a good example.

**Saxony & the NPD** | The AfD was most favored in Saxony, where it managed to receive 27 percent of the second vote<sup>53</sup>, trumping the former winner, the CDU, by 0.1 percent<sup>54</sup>. The Left party came in third at 16.1 percent<sup>55</sup>.

Though the AfD is the first right-wing party to cross the five percent threshold in a national election, regional elections are another story. Saxony in particular housed another right-wing party in the early 2000's, The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). The NPD was able to garner 9.2 percent of the vote in the 2004 regional Saxony elections<sup>56</sup>, which sparked debate over national potential of a right-wing emergence, a conversation that would repeat itself in 2017. In response, former president Joachim Gauck referred to Saxony as "Dunkeldeutschland" – a term that literally means "dark Germany" and historically has served as a negative description of East Germany's 'backwards' state after reunification<sup>57</sup>. Gauck used this rhetoric to distinguish between the Germany that is welcoming and the Germany that is not, but use of such

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<sup>53</sup> The second vote is significant because it determines the distribution of seats in parliament. If a party manages to cross the five percent threshold of the second vote, it will qualify.

<sup>54</sup> Deutsche Welle. "How Does the German General Election Work? | DW | 24.09.2017." DW.COM. September 24, 2017. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/how-does-the-german-general-election-work/a-37805756>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Backes, Uwe. "The Electoral Victory of the NPD in Saxony and the Prospects for Future Extreme-right Success in German Elections." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 2 (August 05, 2006): 129-41. Accessed December 4, 2018. doi:10.1080/00313220600634303.

<sup>57</sup> BedeutungOnline, Pierre Von. "Was Bedeutet Dunkeldeutschland? Wo Kommt Der Begriff Her? Wortherkunft Und Bedeutung Erklärt." Bedeutung Online. October 13, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.bedeutungonline.de/was-bedeutet-dunkeldeutschland-wo-kommt-der-begriff-her-wortherkunft-und-bedeutung-erklart/>.

terms does not incentivize former eastern states to listen, Saxons included. Rather than using othering terms, examining the story of Saxony offers more insight and clarity into the dynamics that seem to lead to a higher surge of right-wing ideology.

Saxony, together with all other former GDR states, differs most from West Germany by the fact that it went through two dictatorships, both very fond of media propaganda and invasive surveillance<sup>58</sup>. While West Germany enjoyed relative freedoms during their period of separation, citizens of the GDR became less trusting of their government, and increasingly disillusioned with the realities of their communist regime<sup>59</sup>.

This has led to a population that is less enamored with the moral philosophies of a democracy, and more interested in the actual economic results of the capitalist system they entered, which were not seen as unemployment in Saxony hit a 17.8 percent average in 2004<sup>60</sup>. Many young professionals, particularly women, left Saxony, resulting in a population decline of around one million from 1990 to 2017<sup>61</sup> and the highest average age in Germany at an average of over 46 years old<sup>62</sup>. It is important to remember that east Germans of this age group are the ones who remember life in the GDR, with its extensive and stifling propaganda and surveillance, and who have become disappointed by the lack of promised prosperity and growth in the east<sup>63</sup>. Seeing

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<sup>58</sup> Backes. "The Electoral Victory of the NPD in Saxony and the Prospects for Future Extreme-right Success in German Elections." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 2 (August 05, 2006): 129-41.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Oscar W. Gabriel, 'Demokratische Einstellungen in einem Land ohne demokratische Traditionen? Die Unterstützung der Demokratie in den neuen Bundesländern im Ost-West-Vergleich', in Jürgen Falter, Oscar W. Gabriel and Hans Rattinger (eds), *Wirklich ein Volk? Die politischen Orientierungen von Ost- und Westdeutschen im Vergleich* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich 2000), 41–77.

<sup>61</sup> "Bevölkerungsstand des Freistaates Sachsen Nach Kreisfreien Städten Und Landkreisen (Population Data of Saxony)." *Statistischer Bericht*. September 30, 2017.

[https://www.statistik.sachsen.de/download/100\\_Berichte-A/A\\_I\\_1\\_vj3\\_17\\_SN.pdf](https://www.statistik.sachsen.de/download/100_Berichte-A/A_I_1_vj3_17_SN.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Germany. Saxony. *Demographische Entwicklung (Demographic Development)*. [https://www.sachsen.de/en/download/Faktenblatt\\_Neu\\_6.pdf](https://www.sachsen.de/en/download/Faktenblatt_Neu_6.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Funck, Nadine. "Abgehängt Und Vergessen." *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, September 27, 2017. doi:10.5771/9783845266220-1.

the Saxons' discontent as opportunity, the NPD strengthened its efforts in Saxony by choosing the small town Riesa as the home of its editorial paper and playing on anti-capitalist ideology through its candidate Michael Nier<sup>64</sup>.

In the NPD's case, its fall into unpopularity despite eastern grievances came from its veer toward national socialism, which was seen as deeply troubling throughout Germany at the time, including the east<sup>65</sup>. Yet it still displayed an instance when discontent ran so deep through Saxon society that a right-wing party could set foot into its state government. Now, a similar picture arises, and the answering invalidation of Saxons' concerns by politicians such as Gauck, no matter how unrealistic they are, does not seem to garner positive reactions from the population. Rather, Saxony has also become the birth place of PEGIDA, the home-grown anti-Muslim, anti-refugee organization that originated in 2014 in Dresden<sup>66</sup>. Merkel herself was ill received during a visit in Dresden by PEGIDA followers who called her a "Volksverräterin" ("betrayers of the people") in August 2015<sup>67</sup>. It is clear that this portion of the population has given up on the Merkel administration entirely, considering themselves betrayed. Thus, history repeats itself in Saxony, yet it has reached new heights, the AfD outshining any other right-wing party since WWII with its best results in the Saxon state.

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<sup>64</sup> Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1999* (Dresden: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2000), 124.

[http://www.verfassungsschutz.sachsen.de/download/VSB2017\\_Vorabfassung.pdf](http://www.verfassungsschutz.sachsen.de/download/VSB2017_Vorabfassung.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Backes. "The Electoral Victory of the NPD in Saxony and the Prospects for Future Extreme-right Success in German Elections." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 2 (August 05, 2006): 129-41.

<sup>66</sup> Deutsche Welle. "German Issues in a Nutshell: PEGIDA | DW | 06.06.2017." DW.COM. June 6, 2017. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-issues-in-a-nutshell-pegida/a-39124630>.

<sup>67</sup> "Kanzlerin in Dresden: Warum Es Merkel in Sachsen so Schwer Hat." ZDF. August 16, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute/warum-es-merkel-in-sachsen-so-schwer-hat-100.html>.

**A Media with Bias** | It is important to note that east Germans also have a particular history with their government's media that the west does not. In the GDR, censoring and control of media was not overtly written into legislation, but was realized indirectly in such a way that citizens had no other formal information source other than government-controlled publications<sup>68</sup>. In addition, media from West Germany was outright illegal<sup>69</sup>. This created a population that became highly suspicious of their news outlets, which is a phenomenon that continues today as it is still very much in peoples' memory. This can be seen in a survey by DeutschlandTrend, in which 52 percent of West Germans reported that they trust the media, whereas only 29 percent stated the same in the east<sup>70</sup>. When it became apparent that the current media outlets were hesitant to report on certain events that could cast refugees or foreigners in a negative light, the reaction of distrust was promptly exploited by right-wing groups such as PEGIDA and the AfD<sup>71</sup>. One such incidence was the infamous 2016 Cologne attack, in which dozens of women were sexually assaulted during New Year's celebrations; a number of the perpetrators proved to be asylum seekers<sup>72</sup>. The magnitude of the assault and the delayed reaction by news outlets led to

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<sup>68</sup>Wdr. "ARD-DeutschlandTrend." ARD-DeutschlandTrend - Vertrauen in Institutionen: Große Unterschiede Zwischen Ost Und West - Presselounge - WDR. September 6, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. [https://presse.wdr.de/plounge/tv/das\\_erste/2018/09/20180906\\_ard\\_deutschlandtrend\\_4.html](https://presse.wdr.de/plounge/tv/das_erste/2018/09/20180906_ard_deutschlandtrend_4.html).

<sup>69</sup>"DDR - Mythos Und Wirklichkeit. Medien." Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.kas.de/web/ddr-mythos-und-wirklichkeit/medien>.

<sup>70</sup>"Vertrauen in Institutionen: Große Unterschiede Zwischen Ost Und West." ARD-DeutschlandTrend - Vertrauen in Institutionen: Große Unterschiede Zwischen Ost Und West - Presselounge - WDR. September 6, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. [https://presse.wdr.de/plounge/tv/das\\_erste/2018/09/20180906\\_ard\\_deutschlandtrend\\_4.html](https://presse.wdr.de/plounge/tv/das_erste/2018/09/20180906_ard_deutschlandtrend_4.html).

<sup>71</sup>Karnitschnig, Matthew. "Cologne Puts Germany's 'lying Press' on Defensive." POLITICO. January 25, 2016. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.politico.eu/article/cologne-puts-germany-lying-media-press-on-defensive-migration-refugees-attacks-sex-assault-nye/>.

<sup>72</sup>Stoldt, Till-Reimer. "Übergriffe in Köln: Polizisten Kontrollierten Vor Allem Syrer." DIE WELT. January 08, 2016. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article150735341/Die-meisten-waren-frisch-eingereiste-Asylbewerber.html>.

accusations of a re-emerged “Lügenpresse”, or lying press<sup>73</sup>, which was a term popularized during the Nazi era and used in the GDR as propaganda against democracy<sup>74</sup>.

An expansive report<sup>75</sup> by the Otto Brenner Stiftung in Frankfurt detailed evidence that the media did, in fact, largely reflect a one-sided view of the refugee crisis and served not as a neutral source of information, but rather a moral compass towards *Willkommenskultur* for its readers.

This only caused another instance for east Germans with reservations or worries to feel left out and unheard, and together with the persistent economic strain, it is unsurprising that some would turn to alternatives, such as the aptly named Alternative for Germany. The media’s intention was clearly to avoid anti-immigration sentiment, but by intentionally staying vague and hesitant to report anything negative about refugees or migrants, the outcome was the opposite in those that felt neglected.

**The Results of a Neglected Economy in the East** | It is thus not hard to believe that this is where most of Germany’s hate crimes – actions of extreme prejudice and hatred – occur. Only 20 percent of Germany’s population live in the east, yet 50 percent of its hate crimes are recorded there<sup>76</sup>. Tensions run high as PEGIDA followers march and protest immigration and

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<sup>73</sup> It is interesting how reminiscent this is of the American conservative’s “fake news”, which may be an indication that distrust is a growing phenomenon not only in Germany. With the spread of internet news and increased interconnectivity, a link between these two terms is not unlikely.

<sup>74</sup> Noack, Rick. "The Ugly History of 'Lügenpresse,' a Nazi Slur Shouted at a Trump Rally." The Washington Post. October 24, 2016. Accessed December 03, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/24/the-ugly-history-of-luegenpresse-a-nazi-slur-shouted-at-a-trump-rally/?utm\\_term=.111ac5ac4e90](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/24/the-ugly-history-of-luegenpresse-a-nazi-slur-shouted-at-a-trump-rally/?utm_term=.111ac5ac4e90).

<sup>75</sup> Haller, Michael. Otto Brenner Stiftung. "Die „Flüchtlingskrise“ in Den Medien." Arbeitsheft 93, June 9, 2017. [https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user\\_data/stiftung/02\\_Wissenschaftsportal/03\\_Publikationen/AH93\\_Fluechtingskris\\_e\\_Haller\\_2017\\_07\\_20.pdf](https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/02_Wissenschaftsportal/03_Publikationen/AH93_Fluechtingskris_e_Haller_2017_07_20.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Deutsche Welle. "Germany: The Gap between East and West Is Narrowing, but Not Fast Enough | DW | 26.09.2018." DW.COM. September 26, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-the-gap-between-east-and-west-is-narrowing-but-not-fast-enough/a-45643757>.

refugees in answer to violent incidences such as the murder of a German national, allegedly stabbed by two foreigners,<sup>77</sup> in the Saxon city Chemnitz.

This worrying trend of criminal attacks and tensions amongst the population in terms of opinions on migrants shows a decline in social cohesion. A Bertelsmann Stiftung report dedicated to this topic concludes that the east has lower levels of social cohesion because of the failure of the federal state to create a more equal economic standing for both regions, and thus the east needs better economic support to be able to grow the civil society that would promote cultural diversity and wellbeing<sup>78</sup>. This is something that the strained regions of Germany yearn for – better wealth distribution – and something they don't see happening under the current administration. In this sense, they are not wrong, as the gap has barely changed. Thus, the AfD represents a change that may come from nowhere else in the opinions of deeply dissatisfied Germans.

## **SEEKING SOLACE IN THE ARMS OF THE RIGHT**

*Who to blame for the failures of history?*

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AfD voters are the most expressly dissatisfied with their government. While CDU/CSU voters are dissatisfied at 47 percent, AfD voters agree to 98 percent <sup>79</sup>. This makes the AfD appear like a protest vote, which I believe it partially is, but discontent with the administration is only a symptom of the deeper, historical disadvantages east Germans have faced since WWII in comparison to their western counterparts. In addition, the protest vote implies that voters do not believe in the rhetoric of the AfD and only vote for them because it represents the opposition to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Arant, Dragolov, and Boehnke. Bertelsmann Stiftung. „Zusammenhalt in Deutschland Bericht 2017“.

<sup>79</sup> Deutsche Welle. "After Chemnitz, Poll Shows East-west Split on Migration | DW | 06.09.2018."

DW.COM. September 6, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/after-chemnitz-poll-shows-east-west-split-on-migration/a-45389402>.

Merkel's administration, yet all the previously mentioned survey data shows responsiveness to the AfD's Euroscepticism and anti-migrant/anti-refugee stances. Thus, getting to the underlying issues can help alleviate the reluctance and discrimination towards immigration and the refugee crisis.

**Prioritizing the Right Issue** | The refugee/migrant crisis has taken the forefront of political discussion, and it has become so prominent a topic for the AfD that it in practice does look like a single-issue party. There does seem to be a large portion of society that does not welcome migrants or foreigners, as my earlier analysis has shown. As I have also stated before, Lengfeld and Dilger<sup>80</sup> did show that areas with lower diversity rates were the most unreceptive in surveys, and this has been remarked in other reports as well<sup>81</sup>. Therefore, the discontent with the 'waves of migrants' is not based on the reality of these Germans, it is based on their own economic insecurity that leads them to believe in these highly negative perceptions. This act of scapegoating has created a cover for the true issues within German society that do not necessarily have so much to do with the refugee crisis itself, but are certainly not helped by it when not addressed. The Interior Minister Horst Seehofer himself named the refugee crisis the "mother of all problems", which reduces all discourse to one topic while simultaneously suggesting that this one current phenomenon is the heart of all other grievances Germans feel –a damaging statement that only fuels resentment toward refugees and migrants, and thus a serious

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<sup>80</sup> Lengfeld; Dilger. "Cultural and Economic Threats. A Causal Analysis of the Party Identification with the "Alternative for Germany" (AfD) Using the German Socio-Economic Panel 2016." *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie* 47, no. 3 (October 28, 2018): 181-99.

<sup>81</sup> Hambauer; Mays. "Who Votes for the Alternative for Germany (AfD?)." SpringerLink, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 11 Dec. 2017, [link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12286-017-0369-2](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12286-017-0369-2).



misstep<sup>82</sup>. This was thankfully rebutted by FDP chair Christian Lindner, who claimed that speaking only about the refugee crisis neglected other vital topics such as education, poverty, and modernization<sup>83</sup>.

I am not arguing that discourse over the refugee crisis should be neglected. The label “crisis” may sound dramatic and sensationalist, but it is not entirely inaccurate, as around 1.7 million refugees were recorded in Germany in 2017, not counting the undocumented numbers. However, it is also important to note that arrivals have significantly lessened, from the peak in 2015 at about 890,000 to 186,644 in 2017<sup>84</sup>. Another important note is that, while 1.7 million people are a large amount, Germany has the highest population in the EU and ranks 17<sup>th</sup> globally at a projected 82.36 million in 2018<sup>85</sup>. Therefore, the percentage of refugees is in actuality not very large, even with a generous approximate for the undocumented arrivals. The arrival numbers in 2017 are almost as low as the initial numbers in 2013, meaning that the ‘wave’ is very much waning<sup>86</sup>. The economic disparity, on the other hand, has barely lessened at all. This is not projected to change nearly as much as the arrival numbers have, and it will likely continue to cause strain on German society unless it is properly addressed.

**A Need for Economic and Social Reform** | The previously mentioned Bertelsmann Stiftung report titled *Zusammenhalt in Deutschland* (Social Cohesion in Germany) conducts analysis to

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<sup>82</sup> Deutsche Welle. "Angela Merkel Hits out at AfD on Far-right Violence | DW | 12.09.2018." DW.COM. September 12, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-hits-out-at-afd-on-far-right-violence/a-45453193>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Colladay, Emily. "Refugees and Germany: The Discrepancy in Data and Opinion – Vision of Humanity." Vision of Humanity. June 21, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <http://visionofhumanity.org/refugees/refugees-germany-discrepancy-data-opinion/>.

<sup>85</sup> "Germany Population 2018." Total Population by Country 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/germany-population/>.

<sup>86</sup> Colladay. "Refugees and Germany." Vision of Humanity.

understand the level of diversity in each state and region, and its acceptance if diversity<sup>87</sup>. Its conclusion, with which I agree, is that higher numbers of younger people and better job opportunities lead to a society that is more open and welcoming to diversity and globalism, and less prone to right-wing ideology<sup>88</sup>. These are factors that are missing in many of the states where higher numbers of AfD support prevail. Efforts to address poverty rates, which are higher in the east, and better local engagement are also mentioned as important steps towards better cohesion and wellbeing.

What needs to be broadly considered is what was neglected in 1989/1990 – the vastly different systems of the capitalist West Germany and the communist GDR. The disadvantages stem from the east being added into an existing system without much reformation or consideration toward its own economic and social frame<sup>89</sup>. The prosperity of the west was never felt in the east, before or after the fall of the Berlin wall, and thus the ‘losers of modernization’ continue to see their states become more desolate, with poverty rates at a peak<sup>90</sup>.

The unique yet basic challenges that the east therefore faces need to be addressed, rather than focusing almost solely on the refugee crisis. The effects of the refugee crisis itself will be better dealt with and overcome if the basics of society are prioritized, such as rebuilding civil society. Civil society in particular addresses the social need for more cohesion and engagement, as well as better economic opportunities with stronger unions and better tax distributions<sup>91</sup>. This is easier

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<sup>87</sup> Arant Dragolov, and Boehnke. Bertelsmann Stiftung. „Zusammenhalt in Deutschland Bericht 2017“.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Wittlinger. German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century. (Kindle Locations 210-211). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Kindle Edition.

<sup>90</sup> Deutsche Welle. "Risk of Poverty at New High in Germany: Report | DW | 10.08.2018." DW.COM. August 10, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/risk-of-poverty-at-new-high-in-germany-report/a-45032053>.

<sup>91</sup> Deutsche Welle. "East Germany: It's Not Just the Economy, Stupid! | DW | 13.09.2018." DW.COM. September 13, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/east-germany-its-not-just-the-economy-stupid/a-45454241>.

said than done, but moving political discussion onto a path other than the refugee crisis is a step in the right direction.

## CONCLUSION

### *The historic significance of the AfD & its European fellows*

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The AfD is the first far-right party that has attained a measure of power beyond the five percent election threshold in German parliament since the Nazi regime, and this should not be downplayed. However, it is easy for the media to sensationalize the influx of foreigners, as well as the answering marches and protests by PEGIDA and AfD followers; it is also easy for those on the opposite side of the political spectrum to brand these individuals as ‘other’ and reject their arguments automatically. In my eyes, AfD sympathizers and voters are members of German society who are expressing their misgivings with the current government and/or economy. The conclusions they arrive to – isolationist, conservative, even xenophobic in some instances – are misplaced, however. Though I myself disagree with the rhetoric and ideology of the AfD, I see in it a following of those who perceive themselves to be economically vulnerable, and who are fearful of change because of this insecurity.

This economic vulnerability needs to be addressed, as well as the historical legacy of inequality between east and west. The refugee crisis will bring with it integration issues to a degree that Germany has not yet faced, as well as the usual conflicts that come with a newly and rapidly diversifying population, yet it will be able to better overcome these hurdles with a more equitable distribution of wealth across states, a neutral media, and a strengthened civil society that encourages community engagement and solidarity. Only in this way can the root cause of

Germany's shift to the right be understood and potentially resolved – a phenomenon that is not unique to Germany in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**The Crux of the Matter** | Understanding why Germans are shifting toward the right is important because it has become a European phenomenon, together with the UK's Brexit, France's Front National, and Italy's Five Star Movement<sup>92</sup>. Germany has established its image as capable yet neutral, hesitant to command yet leading in liberal values, as seen in the Economist's series, *Cool Germany*<sup>93</sup>. A right-wing emergence is thus a signal of political and social shift, and with Merkel's declaration of resignation for the next election, a vacuum could occur in which the AfD may rise into more influence and popularity<sup>94</sup>. Merkel's successor will be a determining factor for the path this shift will continue on, but I also believe that German domestic policies need to be re-examined, with particular consideration towards the eastern states, to control any further radicalization or spike in hate crimes. If Germany can find its path to a true *Willkommenskultur*, rather than one that is force-fed by the media, it may possibly serve as an example of successful integration and modernization.

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<sup>92</sup> "Europe and Nationalism: A Country-by-country Guide." BBC News. September 10, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>.

<sup>93</sup> "Germany Is Becoming More Open and Diverse." The Economist. April 14, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/04/14/germany-is-becoming-more-open-and-diverse>.

<sup>94</sup> Petzinger, Jill. "Angela Merkel Begins Her Exit from the World Stage." Quartz. October 29, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://qz.com/1441480/merkel-resigns-as-cdu-leader-confirms-last-term-as-chancellor/>.