

# What Explains the Electoral Success of the AfD?

An Analysis of the March 2016 State Elections in Germany

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## Introduction

- Within less than three years of being founded, the **Alternative for Germany** (AfD) has achieved extraordinary vote share in the General election of 2013 and the European Parliament election of 2014 (Arzheimer 2015)
- March 2016: **15.1%** in Baden-Württemberg, **12.6%** in Rhineland-Palatinate, **24.3%** in Saxony-Anhalt
- “**a landslide**”(Pausch 2016)
- The AfD has “**arrived in German mainstream politics**” (Gathmann and Wittrock 2016)

## Existing Research

- AfD can be described as a “**functional equivalent for a right-wing populist party** in a country where right-wing politics are strongly stigmatised” (Berbair, Lewandowsky, and Siri 2015)
- Successful right-wing populist parties almost always use **anti-immigration rhetorics** (Ivarsflaten 2008)
- **Volume of refugees**, level of **immigration**, domestic **tax burden**, and strong presence of **left-wing parties** positively influences right wing-populist electoral success (Swank and Betz 2003)
- AfD was especially successful in mobilizing former **non-voters** and the **unemployed** (Gathmann and Wittrock 2016)

## Research Question

*“What explains the recent electoral success of the AfD in the different districts of Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saxony-Anhalt?”*

- What structural factors correlate with the success?
- Are those the same characteristics found for other western European countries?

## Election Data

*Source: State Statistical Offices of Baden-Wuerttemberg (2016), Rheinland-Pfalz (2016), and Sachsen-Anhalt (2016)*

Variable	Name in dataset	Description
Dependent Variable (DV)	<b>vote.AfD.prcnt</b>	The vote share of the Alternative for Germany in the current state election
Independent Variable 1 (IV1)	<b>lag.turnout</b>	Overall voter turnout of the previous state election
IV2, IV3, IV4, IV5, IV6	<b>lag.CDU, lag.Greens, lag.SPD, lag.FDP, lag.Linke</b>	The vote share of political parties in the previous state election (CDU, SPD, Greens, FDP, and Linke)

## Structural Data

Source: Federal Statistical Office (Bundesamt 2015)

Variable	Name in dataset	Description
IV7	<b>abitur.ratio</b>	Ratio of school leavers per district with general qualification for university entrance (Abitur)
IV8	<b>nodegree.ratio</b>	Ratio of school leavers per district with no school degree
IV9	<b>GDP.capita</b>	Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita / 1000
IV10	<b>unemp.rate</b>	Unemployment rate in the district
IV11	<b>n.refugees</b>	Number of asylum seekers per district

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Summary statistics of the covariates

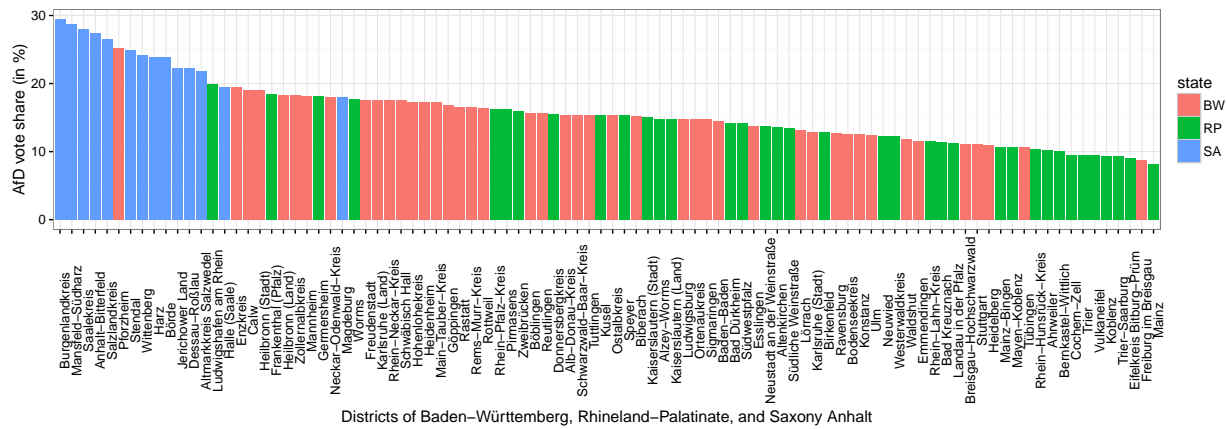
Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Vote share of AfD in 2016	94	0.158	0.049	0.082	0.294
Vote turnout in 2011	94	61.587	6.176	47.060	73.400
Vote share of CDU in 2011	94	36.675	6.350	21.500	51.200
Vote share of Greens in 2011	94	17.303	8.288	2.830	43.000
Vote share of SPD in 2011	94	27.731	7.606	16.600	46.300
Vote share of FDP in 2011	94	4.107	1.987	0.090	8.400
Vote share of Linke in 2011	94	5.986	7.283	2.000	25.180
High school ratio	94	808.262	575.864	42.600	2,423.140
No degree ratio	94	5.884	2.465	1.290	14.450
GDP per capita / 1000	94	29.379	8.755	12.830	56.610
Unemployment rate	94	5.644	2.793	2.600	13.800
Number of refugees	94	32.901	11.746	14.470	72.550

## Correlation Matrix

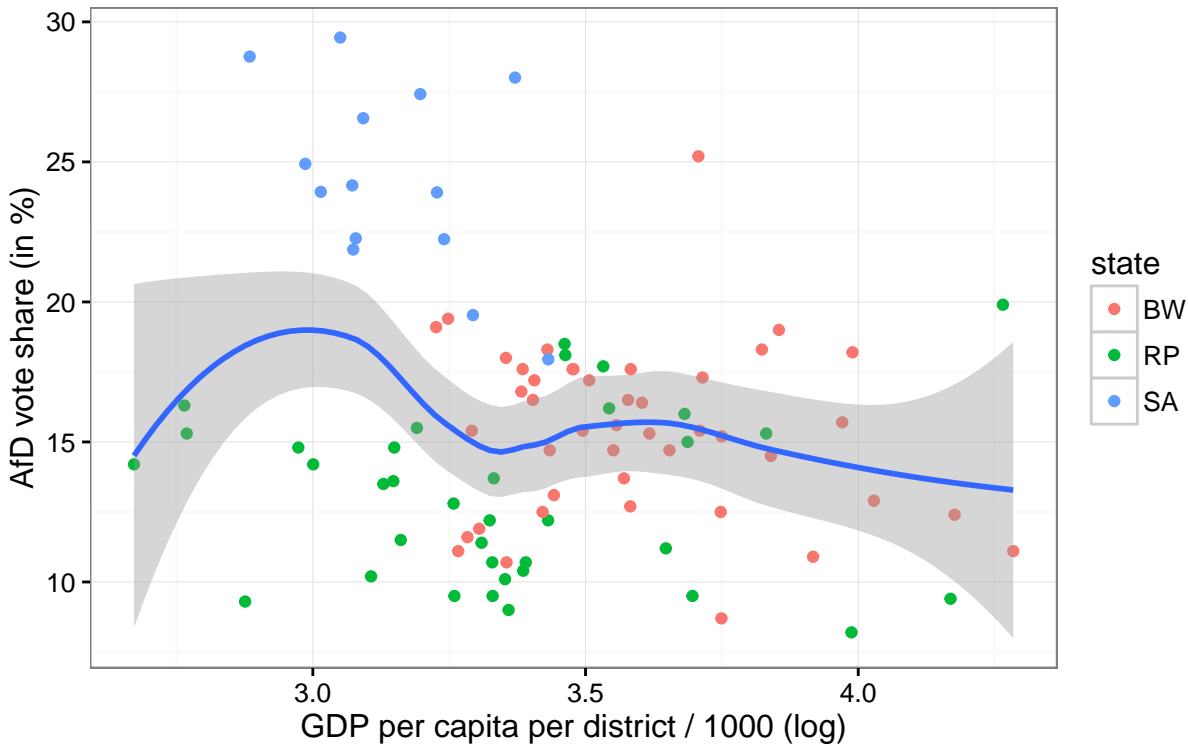
Table 4: Correlation matrix of some variables

	vote.AfD	lag.CDU	lag.SPD	GDP.capita	unempl.rate	abitur.ratio
vote.AfD	1	-0.08	-0.34	-0.24	0.62	-0.29
lag.CDU	-0.08	1	-0.41	-0.07	-0.53	-0.48
lag.SPD	-0.34	-0.41	1	-0.11	0.03	0.17
GDP.capita	-0.24	-0.07	-0.11	1	-0.11	0.49
unempl.rate	0.62	-0.53	0.03	-0.11	1	0.24
abitur.ratio	-0.29	-0.48	0.17	0.49	0.24	1

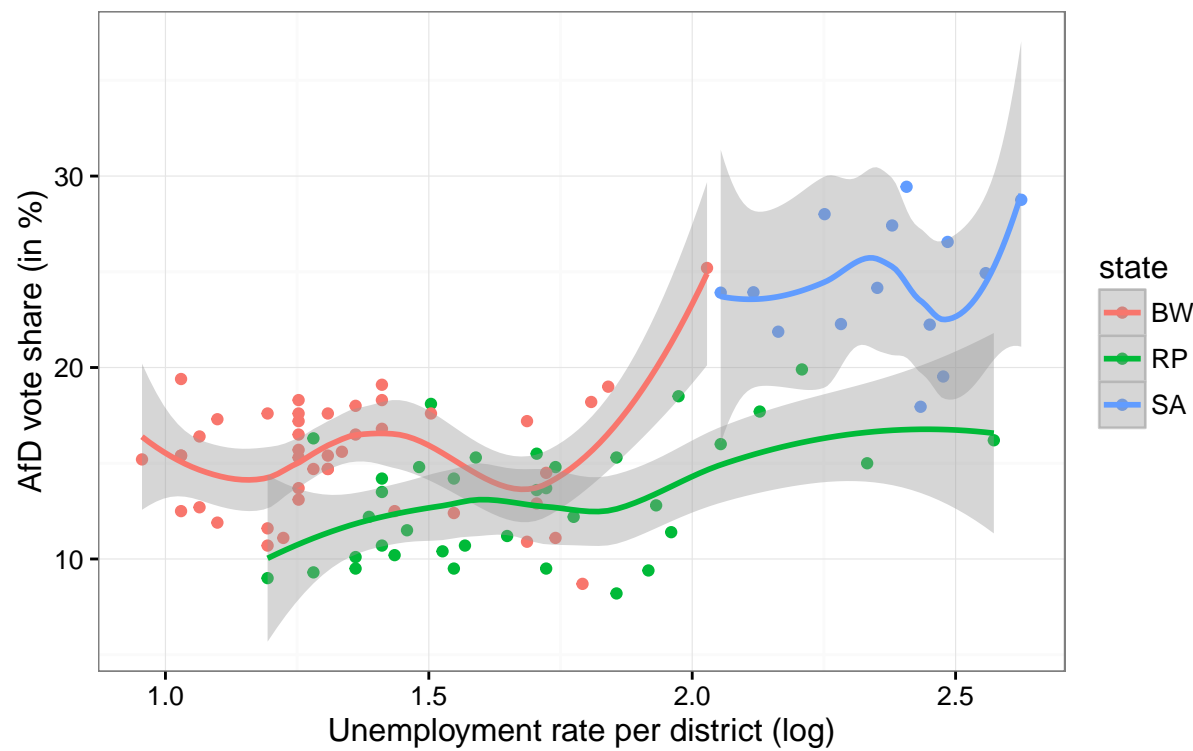
Distribution of AfD Vote Share



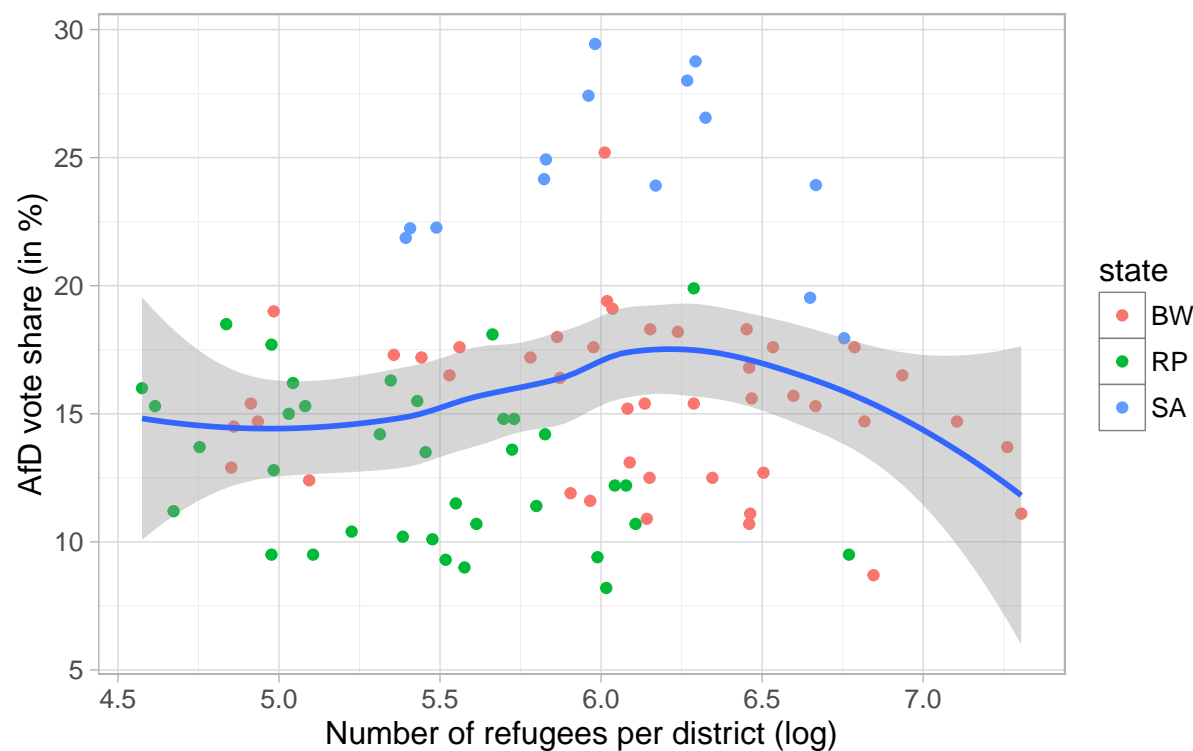
The Correlation of GDP per Capita and AfD Vote Share



The Correlation of Unemployment and AfD Vote Share



The Correlation of Number of Refugees and AfD Vote Share



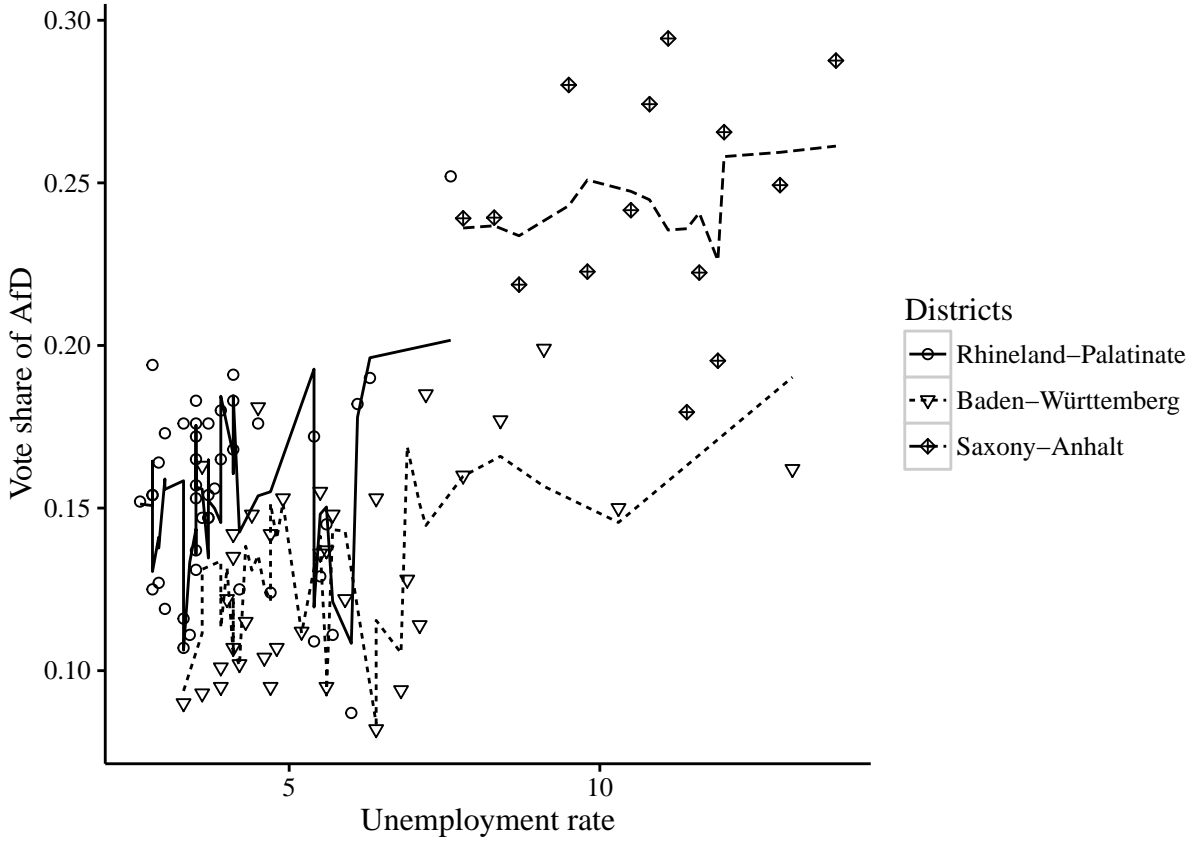
## Inferential Statistics: normal multivariate OLS regression analysis

	Dependent variable:				
	Vote share of AfD				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GDP per capita / 1000	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.005 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
Unemployment rate	1.05*** (0.14)	0.73*** (0.25)	1.29*** (0.19)	1.06*** (0.25)	0.61** (0.24)
Number of refugees	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.0002 (0.001)	-0.0005 (0.001)
Vote share of CDU in 2011 election		0.08 (0.08)		-0.04 (0.07)	0.22*** (0.08)
Vote share of SPD in 2011 election		-0.20*** (0.06)		-0.21*** (0.05)	0.40*** (0.11)
Voter turnout in 2011 election		-0.24** (0.11)		-0.15 (0.10)	-0.12 (0.09)
Abitur ratio			-0.28*** (0.05)	-0.24*** (0.05)	-0.09* (0.05)
No degree ratio			0.02 (0.21)	-0.17 (0.19)	-0.17 (0.17)
state					-7.54*** (1.30)
stateSA					6.84*** (2.28)
Constant	11.80*** (1.52)	31.03*** (8.85)	15.13*** (1.68)	34.01*** (8.35)	5.59 (9.29)
District FE	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Observations	94	94	94	94	94
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.59	0.59	0.68	0.77
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.40	0.56	0.57	0.65	0.75

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

```
##
## Call:
## lm(formula = vote.AfD.prcnt ~ GDP.capita + state * unempl.rate +
##      state + unempl.rate + n.refugees + lag.CDU + lag.SPD + lag.turnout +
##      abitur.ratio + nodegree.ratio, data = Data)
##
## Residuals:
##      Min      1Q   Median      3Q      Max
## -0.056408 -0.014326 -0.001672  0.013238  0.058907
##
## Coefficients:
##              Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
## (Intercept)    4.153e-02  9.481e-02   0.438  0.662550
## GDP.capita      2.093e-04  3.326e-04   0.629  0.530970
## stateRP       -5.736e-02  2.215e-02  -2.590  0.011373 *
## stateSA        7.343e-02  4.898e-02   1.499  0.137746
## unempl.rate     9.072e-03  4.219e-03   2.150  0.034516 *
## n.refugees     -3.914e-06  1.177e-05  -0.333  0.740361
## lag.CDU         2.371e-03  8.097e-04   2.928  0.004431 **
## lag.SPD         4.115e-03  1.198e-03   3.434  0.000939 ***
## lag.turnout    -1.275e-03  9.276e-04  -1.374  0.173116
## abitur.ratio    -9.400e-04  4.955e-04  -1.897  0.061388 .
## nodegree.ratio  -1.879e-03  1.771e-03  -1.061  0.291992
## stateRP:unempl.rate -4.143e-03  4.015e-03  -1.032  0.305246
## stateSA:unempl.rate -2.217e-03  5.842e-03  -0.379  0.705334
## ---
## Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1
##
## Residual standard error: 0.02455 on 81 degrees of freedom
## Multiple R-squared:  0.7773, Adjusted R-squared:  0.7444
## F-statistic: 23.57 on 12 and 81 DF,  p-value: < 2.2e-16
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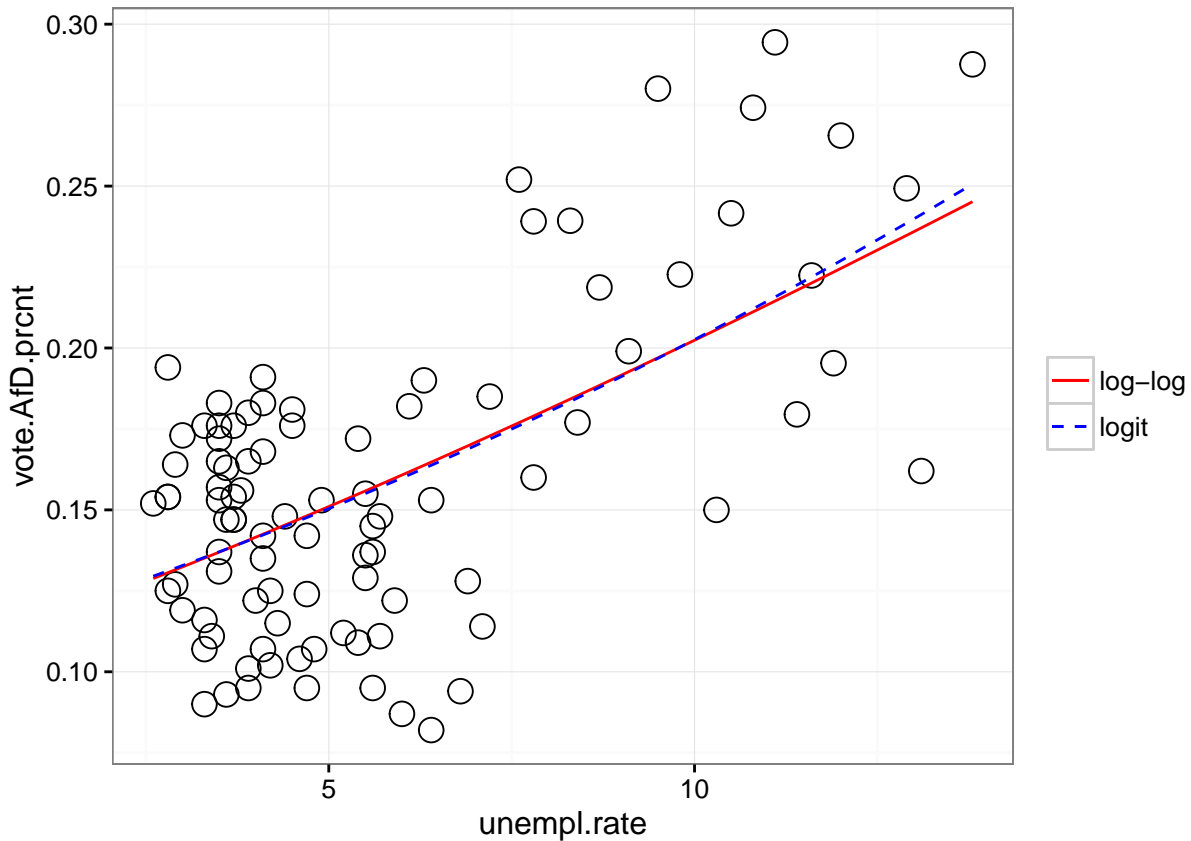
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## Inferential Statistics: Beta regression analysis

Dependent variable: Vote share of AfD					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GDP per capita / 1000	-0.01** (0.003)	-0.005** (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Unemployment rate	0.07*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)
Number of refugees	0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)	-0.0000 (0.0001)	-0.0000 (0.0001)
Vote share of CDU in 2011 election		0.01 (0.01)		-0.003 (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
Vote share of SPD in 2011 election		-0.01*** (0.004)		-0.01*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.01)
Voter turnout in 2011 election		-0.02** (0.01)		-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Abitur ratio			-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.01** (0.004)
No degree ratio			-0.003 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
state					-0.63*** (0.09)
stateSA					0.45*** (0.15)
Constant	-1.94*** (0.11)	-0.67 (0.63)	-1.67*** (0.12)	-0.29 (0.59)	-2.47*** (0.65)
District FE	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Observations	94	94	94	94	94
R <sup>2</sup>	0.35	0.51	0.55	0.61	0.76
Log Likelihood	179.34	193.78	195.98	205.45	225.17

Note:

\* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01



View("Data")

## Limitations and Future Research

- Extend analysis on all state elections in Germany where the AfD has participated in order to increase observations
- Access more recent data on refugee numbers
- Include additional variables, like "immigration"
- Create interaction models
- Use beta regression as dependent variable is  $[0, 1]$  bounded

## Q&A

Thank you for your attention!

## References

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