

# WHAT EXPLAINS THE ELECTORAL SUCCESS OF THE AfD?

AN ANALYSIS OF THE MARCH 2016 STATE ELECTIONS IN  
GERMANY

Md Mujahedul Islam & Johannes Schulz-Knappe

May 2, 2016  
Hertie School of Governance

- 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)

- 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 rhetoric** (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)

*“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</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,</b> <b>lag.Greens,</b> <b>lag.SPD,</b> <b>lag.FDP,</b> <b>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

TABLE 3: Summary statistics of the covariates

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Vote share of AfD in 2016	94	15.825	4.856	8.200	29.440
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	29.524	8.957	13.900	55.200
No degree ratio	94	5.798	2.594	1.600	15.900
GDP per capita / 1000	94	31.543	10.578	14.998	70.052
Unemployment rate	94	6.246	3.032	2.900	15.100
Number of refugees	94	423.266	283.213	97	1,487

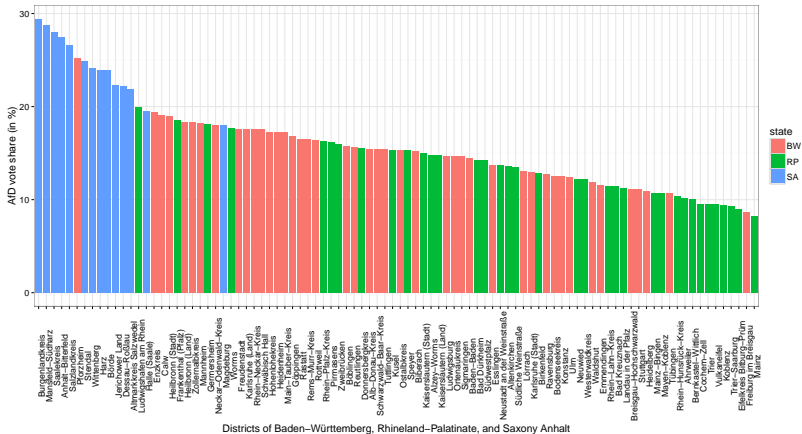
# CORRELATION MATRIX

TABLE 4: Correlation matrix of some variables

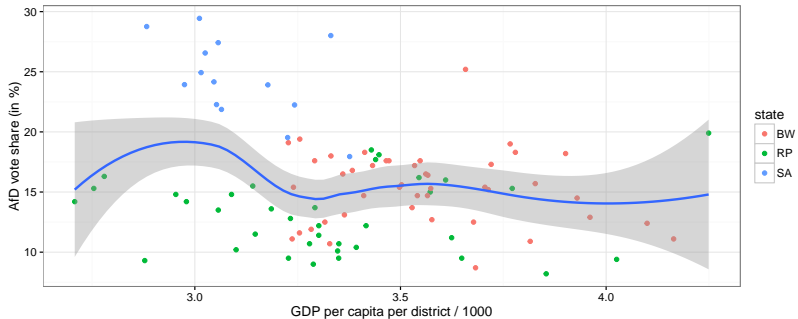
	vote.AfD	lag.CDU	lag.SPD	GDP.capita	unempl.rate	abitur.ratio
vote.AfD	1	-0.08	-0.34	-0.23	0.61	-0.30
lag.CDU	-0.08	1	-0.41	-0.02	-0.53	-0.48
lag.SPD	-0.34	-0.41	1	-0.12	0.04	0.23
GDP.capita	-0.23	-0.02	-0.12	1	-0.12	0.47
unempl.rate	0.61	-0.53	0.04	-0.12	1	0.24
abitur.ratio	-0.30	-0.48	0.23	0.47	0.24	1



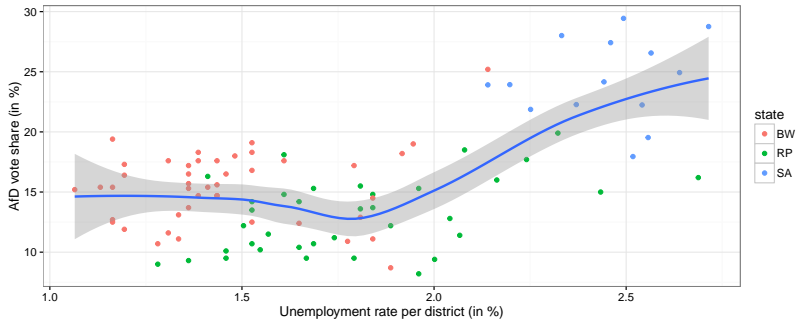
# DISTRIBUTION OF AfD VOTE SHARE



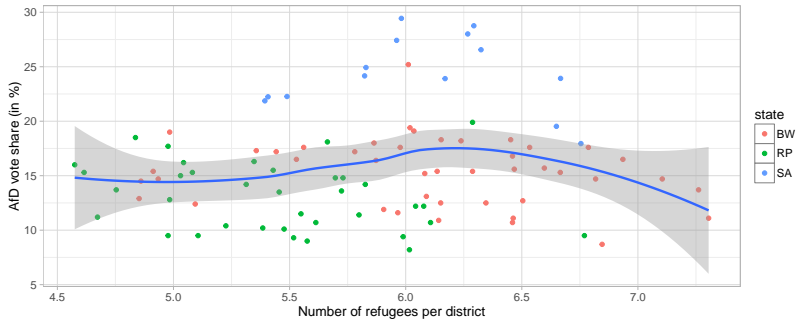
# THE CORRELATION OF GDP PER CAPITA AND AfD VOTE SHARE



# THE CORRELATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND AfD VOTE SHARE



# THE CORRELATION OF NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND AfD VOTE SHARE



# INFERENCEAL STATISTICS

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Vote share of AfD			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
GDP per capita / 1000	-0.08** (0.04)	-0.08** (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Unemployment rate	0.96*** (0.13)	0.68*** (0.22)	1.10*** (0.18)	0.97*** (0.23)
Number of refugees	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.0003 (0.001)
Vote share of CDU in 2011 election		0.09 (0.07)		-0.03 (0.07)
Vote share of SPD in 2011 election		-0.20*** (0.06)		-0.20*** (0.05)
Voter turnout in 2011 election		-0.24** (0.10)		-0.14 (0.10)
Abitur ratio			-0.27*** (0.05)	-0.22*** (0.05)
No degree ratio			0.15 (0.21)	-0.12 (0.20)
Constant	11.68*** (1.62)	30.80*** (8.65)	14.22*** (1.73)	32.18*** (8.28)
District FE	NO	NO	NO	NO
Observations	94	94	94	94
R <sup>2</sup>	0.41	0.59	0.60	0.67
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.39	0.56	0.57	0.64

Note:

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

# 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

**Thank you for your attention!**

# REFERENCES I

Arzheimer, Kai. 2015. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" *West European Politics* 38 (3). Taylor & Francis: 535–56.

Baden-Wuerttemberg, Statistisches Landesamt. 2016. "Wahl zum 16. Landtag von Baden-Wuerttemberg am 13. Maerz 2016." <http://www.statistik.baden-wuerttemberg.de/Wahlen/Landtag/>.

Berbuir, Nicole, Marcel Lewandowsky, and Jasmin Siri. 2015. "The AfD and Its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?" *German Politics* 24 (2). Taylor & Francis: 154–78.

Bundesamt, Statistisches. 2015. "Zahlen & Fakten." <https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/ZahlenFakten.html>.

Gathmann, Florian, and Philipp Wittrock. 2016. "Blitzanalyse Zu Den Landtagswahlen: AfD Triumphiert, Schwarzer Sonntag Fuer Die CDU." Edited by spiegel.de.

<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/>



## REFERENCES II

landtagswahlen-2016-in-der-blitzanalyse-afd-triumph-cdu-de.html.

Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth. 2008. "What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases." *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (1). Sage Publications: 3–23.

Pausch, Robert. 2016. "Partei Der Radikalisierten Mitte." Edited by zeit.de.

<http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-03/afd-analyse-erfolg-landtagswahlen-partei-waehler>.

Rheinland-Pfalz, Statistisches Landesamt. 2016. "Landtagswahl 2016."

<https://www.statistik.rlp.de/gesellschaft-und-staat/wahlen/analysen/landtagswahlen/>.

Sachsen-Anhalt, Statistisches Landesamt. 2016. "Landtagswahl 2016." <http://www.statistik.sachsen-anhalt.de/wahlen/>

lt16/index.html.

Swank, Duane, and Hans-Georg Betz. 2003. "Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe." *Socio-Economic Review* 1 (2). SASE: 215–45.