Immigration, Group Conflict, and the Return of the Far Right in Germany:
Evaluating the Impact of Distribution of Foreigners on Electoral support for the Far Right

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List of Abbreviations

- **AfD** – Alternative for Germany (*Alternative fur Deutschland*)
- **GDR** – German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*)
- **FRG** – Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*)
- **GLES** – German Longitudinal Election Study
- **GSOEP** – German Socio-Economic Panel

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Introduction

Waving flags carrying the national colors of Germany, five thousand citizens paraded the streets of Berlin in a rally held in May 2018 demonstrating support for the up and coming political party *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) that had just entered the Parliament for the first time that year prior. This was the same party whose activities drew the attention of the German chief of intelligence who advocated placing the group under surveillance due to signs of extremism (Schultheis 2019), and the same one in which the nationalist rhetoric of one of its political leaders, Bjorn Hocke, was presented to a group of other AfD lawmakers who were then unable to determine whether the presented quotes originated from Mr. Hocke or from Hitler (Bennhold and Eddy 2019). Known to brandish nationalistic, anti-immigrant, and particularly anti-Muslim slogans, the AfD supporters on the march were confronted by an even larger crowd of twenty thousand anti-AfD protestors who carried their own signs proclaiming messages of welcome to immigrants and berating Germany’s newest Far-Right Party as fascists (Escritt 2018). While the dual demonstrations took place, a large police presence was at the scene in order to prevent potential cashes between both groups. The incident was emblematic of the larger political divide pervading throughout the country concerning rising far-right tendencies and the nation’s attitude towards nationalism and its immigrant population.

Increasingly regarded as a far-right and radical, the AfD originally began as a Eurosceptic party in 2013 but transitioned into adopting anti migrant ideology, capitalizing on widespread backlash in the wake of the government’s decision to open its borders to more than a million refugees beginning in 2015. Although it failed to displace the more popular center parties, the AfD managed nonetheless to embed itself in Germany’s political fabric by acquiring over 12% of the votes in the 2017 national elections for parliament, an unprecedented result for a nationalist party since Germany’s post-WWII history. The AfD’s transition to the far-right, as well as its popularity among the population has attracted a plethora of scholarly attention and research. The 2015-2016 migration crisis preceding the election is commonly believed to have pushed many voters to the AfD, due to anti-immigrant backlash. Surprisingly, given the context of a dramatic increase in immigrants into the country in a relatively short time span, the party fared far better in regions with a low number of foreigners as opposed to areas with a larger foreigner presence. The AfD vote share was far more pronounced in Eastern Germany (a region with a low number of foreigners), where it continues to make gains in local state elections, even doubling its vote share in some states (Bennehold and Eddy 2018), than in Western Germany (area with a larger foreigner presence) where its support was more tepid.

Two large and clearly delineated regions with substantial differences in demographics and voting behavior, a recent election amidst the backdrop of an immigration crisis, and a breakthrough on the national level for the radical right makes Germany a compelling case study for insights into immigration and its effect on far-right electoral outcomes. The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of the distribution of foreigners and foreigner growth rates on far right support through a macro level statistical analysis in order to attempt to explain the discrepancy in voting patterns between East and West Germany, the sudden popularity of the AfD, and to help understand the nuance of the impact of immigration on the electoral success of the far-right. This paper is structured as follows. First, this paper examines Germany’s history with the far-right post WWII, and the radicalization of the AfD. Secondly, this paper examines the larger literature surrounding the issue of the rise of drivers behind support for the far right. Third, the paper tests the main hypothesis regarding foreigner presence and its effect on support for the far-
right in Germany by using demographic data provided by Germany’s Statistical Office and by running correlational and regression tests. Next, the paper delves into an empirical and causal analysis of the results and how they fit and intersect with the wider literature. Finally, this paper reviews the possible policy implications of this study. Relying on group contact and group conflict theory as explanatory models, the findings of this paper suggest that there tends to be a lower share of votes for the AfD in states with high foreigner percentages, and at the same time a larger share of votes in regions with greater rates of growth in its immigrant population over a 12-year period.

Background and Literature Review

Identity in Germany and the Far Right

Far-right parties have made steady gains in European elections over the past two decades and have gone as far as becoming the ruling party in the case of Poland (Payne 2016). Displayed in Figure 1 are countries in which far-right parties in Europe that have made significant gains in either regional or national elections as of 2015, denoted by red shading. Germany is the latest newcomer in this far-right wave and stands out as a notable case as it was commonly perceived as having more resilience against far-right tendencies among its population than its neighboring countries. This is due to both strong social norms among the population of aversion to far-right ideology and to constitutional mechanisms that serve as political obstacles to far-right parties. Not since 1960 has a nationalist party gained representation in the German Parliament (Henley 2017).

Figure 1

THE GROWTH OF EUROPE’S FAR-RIGHT

[Map of Europe highlighting far-right countries]
Given its past with Nazism, German citizens had ingrained in their national psyche a sense of collective guilt over the atrocities committed by the fascist regime around and during the Second World War (Staab 135, 1998). This collective guilt resulted in a new moral consciousness among the population and a deliberate attempt to suppress public expressions of pride toward the nation (Staab 137, 1998). Germany had developed a “schizophrenic attitude” towards Germanness that as Staab asserted was responsible for the impression of Germany as “the world’s most dialectical nation,” where being anti-German constituted the new form of patriotism (Staab 138, 1998). This idea of Germanness has been reflected in its electoral history post-WWII as nationalist parties have always performed dismally in national elections and continued to underperform despite the success of their counterparts in other European countries well into the early 2000’s (Arzheimer and Berning, 2019). This trend can also be attributed to the significant political changes implemented by the Federal Republic immediately after the war.

Going to significant lengths to prevent the rise of another fascist regime several laws and political bodies were created in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Third Reich, most notably the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution that retains the power to ban any groups it deems antidemocratic, “unconstitutional” or “enemies of the constitution” and Germany’s 5% rule (Chaplin 67, 1997). Germany utilizes a proportional representation system in which voters have two ballots, the first of which is cast for political candidates and the second of which is cast for political parties. To enter the Bundestag (Germany’s parliament), a political party must pass a 5% vote threshold, if they fail to receive more than 5% of the total votes in the second round of voting they are not granted representation in Parliament. If they do pass the threshold then parties receive seats proportional to their share of the overall vote. This threshold was implemented in order to maintain political stability and to avoid political fragmentation, as voters were more likely to vote for parties with a larger chance of winning (say 30% of the vote for example) than to “waste” their votes on a party with a more dismal outlook (say 3%) which made it difficult for small and new parties such as extremist parties to develop a substantial political presence and assisted in relegating them towards the fringes of Germany’s political order (Chapin 68). The effects of this rule can be seen in practice during the 2013 elections where it effectively barred the AfD from parliament in their first election run as they had only acquired 4.7% of the vote, narrowly missing the necessary threshold by .3%.

Given these barriers and hurdles, that the Alternative for Germany broke this trend in 2017 came as a surprise to many in Germany, as well as the larger international community, and stands as a clear disruption of its postwar political order. With just over 12% of the overall electoral vote, the AfD not only managed to surpass the 5% threshold, but it also became the third most popular political party in all the country (Henley 2017).

The AfD, Rise of a New Far-Right in Germany?

Terms such as far-right, radical-right, and extreme right are often used interchangeably. This paper will use Mudde’s (2007) definition of the far-right, which has likewise been used broadly in other studies such as Hansen and Olsen (2018) and Arzheimer and Berning (2019), that of the far right as containing elements of nativism “the lowest common denominator for the party family…that combines that subsumes racism, ethnocentrism, and anti-immigrant sentiment…holds that non-native elements (persons, ideas, or policies) present a threat to the nation state, which should be as homogeneous as possible” populism, 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 lastly authoritarian tendencies, “i.e. an aggressive stance towards political enemies and a preference for a strictly ordered society, strong leadership, and severe punishments for offenders” (Arzheimer 2015). Altogether for a party to be truly considered far right it must display tendencies for nativism, populism, and authoritarianism.

While solely an anti-EU party at its onset, the literature has largely agreed that since 2015 the AfD has radicalized and now neatly fits the criteria for the Far-Right (Hansen and Olsen 2018, Arzheimer and Berding 2018, Ciechanowicz 2017, Muller and Schwarz 2018, Marx and Naumann 2018, and Sola 2018). Since 2015, the AfD has repeatedly expressed disdain for the mainstream parties, multiculturalism, refugees, and have adopted a widely nativist stance that has been incorporated into its manifesto (Anderson 2016). Additionally, AfD leaders have repeatedly stated that immigration leads to more crime, have called for the need of stronger borders, more restrictive immigration policy, have expressed the need to protect and maintain “traditional” German culture and values, and have clearly positioned themselves in opposition of the mainstream parties of the center-left (Anderson 2016).

Altogether, the AfD demonstrates signs of all three elements of nativism, authoritarian tendencies, and populism put forward in Muddes definition of the far-right. To be sure, these right-wing overtones do not encompass the entirety of the party, as there are more moderate factions within the AfD that are much less extreme than its radical wings. Yet despite the controversial nature and statements of its more extreme faction, the party overall has not gone to any measure to disavow or expel this part of the AfD. This is a clearly distinct and oppositional conception of Germanness than the identity of confronting the past as described by Staab. Indeed AfD party leaders have largely denounced this conception of German identity proclaiming the need for “a 180-degree shift in its perspective” (Bennehold and Eddy 2019). The AfD is not the first iteration of a right-wing party in Germany following post-war history but it is certainly the most successful and prominent right-wing party in Germany to date. The right wing Republikaaner party in the 1980’s made inroads in local state elections but ultimately faded into obscurity at the national level (Staab 1998). Therefore, the existence of far-right parties in Germany is not a new phenomenon, rather only its recent electoral performance is.

East and West Germany, Federally Unified but Demographically Divided

Considered their electoral stronghold, Eastern Germany currently holds the greater bulk of voter support for Germany’s right-wing party the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The AfD’s popularity in the region continues to increase as recent state elections in Brandenburg and Saxony of this year yielded higher vote shares for the party. Meanwhile the AfD has performed less remarkably throughout the rest of the country where the traditional center parties receive the most votes, with the Green Party being their greatest rising contender.

When speaking of Eastern Germany this paper refers to the states formerly under the rule of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) which consist of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Thuringia, Saxony, and Lower Saxony. Following their defeat at the hands of the allied powers in World War II Germany was divided among the victors into distinct occupational zones that comprised two blocs, the western zone divided among the Western Allies and the eastern zone divided among Poland and the Soviet Union. In 1949, both blocs drafted their respective constitutions and the states of the Federal German Republic in the West and the German Democratic Republic in the East came into existence and operated under very distinct forms of government and societies. West and East Germany remained divided until the fall of the
Berlin Wall in 1998, and surveys earlier that year revealed that 80% of Germans had not visited the other German State (Staab 15, 1998). Unification of both Germanys formally occurred in 1990 when the former GDR states were absorbed into the federal system of the FGR and into its political, economic, and social structures (Staab 1, 1998). This was far from a seamless transition, as inefficiencies inherent in the economic model under the communist dictatorship did not transfer well to the more modernized economy of the FRG leading to short term economic upheaval in the East. The gap in economic performance has since narrowed substantially over the years due in part to a concerted effort by the government to remedy the effect (Annual Report on the State of German Unity 2018) but the economic hardships suffered in the past may have left residual feelings of frustration in the East that may take longer to heal.

Due to the prior historical divide and past differences in governance, former GDR states have longstanding and substantial differences in socio-demographic and economic factors than their western counterparts. The legacy of the GDR and its relationship with the FRG has manifested itself in East Germany containing more rural districts, a declining demographic, lesser economic performance, an aging population, and higher rates of unemployment (Annual Report of the State of German Unity 2018). Eastern Germany is also predominantly rural and contains a much smaller percentage of immigrant populations than the more urbanized districts of Germany. It also contains a history of violence against foreigners (Staab 1998) and the highest incidents of crimes against migrant’s post-unification (Benceck and Strasheim 2016). Accordingly, surveys on voting behavior and political ideology often include a separate category to distinguish East German respondents due to these differences. This leaves two large and clearly distinguished regions with great differences in both demographics and voting behavior and renders Germany an attractive case for which to investigate factors that lead to far-right support

Figure 2
Who votes for the Far Right? Economic Insecurity and Immigration

Given the rising prominence of the far-right in European affairs, several studies have been made examining the causal factors behind right-wing support and what prompts voters to swing to the right. Two common narratives perpetuate the literature in this regard, one being that the increase of the Far-Right is a response to increased immigration, and the other that it is a reaction to economic insecurity and dissatisfaction with globalization. Despite popular beliefs that poor economic conditions push voters to the extreme right, empirical findings by Kim, Boomgaarden, and Vleugenthal quickly dismiss economic factors as the major drivers of right-wing support in Germany. Instead, scholars have isolated immigration attitudes and social norms as the more prominent, if not primary, indicators of voting support towards the AfD (Hansen et al. 2019, Arzheimer et al. 2019). Analysis of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLEs) paint a picture of AfD voters encompassing a wide demographic spectrum cutting across gender, education, age, and employment (Hansen et al. 2018). Data from the European Social Survey also corroborates the claim that educational level is not a good indicator for far-right polarization (Henning 2019). One commonality present amongst AfD voters however, are higher anti-immigrant attitudes than every other party in Germany (Hansen et al. 2018). The same study also found that east Germans in particular were less likely to vote for any other party than the AfD (with the exception of the Leftist Green Party). Study of past far-right parties and immigration also indicated a strong association between foreigners and far-right support (Chapin 1997).

Although more than two decades ago, regression tests conducted in a study by Chapin concerning immigration and electoral support for the far-right in Germany prior to 1997, examined data including the foreign population, crime, unemployment, and the electoral results of the far right. The results indicated that the far-right made more gains in areas with fewer foreigners than in areas with more foreigners, and unemployment was once again deemed not relevant, clearly highlighting a significant relationship between immigration and support for the far-right (Chapin 1997). Past frictions between immigration and radical right groups in Germany also suggest a link between the two. The predecessor for the AfD in the 1980’s-90’s was the Republikaner party. In a similar fashion to the AfD, the Republikaner tapped into anti-immigrant sentiments and themes of law and order to increase its electoral support (Chapin 77).

Violence Against Foreigners, Right-Wing Extremism in the 1990’s

Just a year after unification in 1990, right wing extremism rose dramatically in Germany as membership increased and the number of xenophobic acts as well (Staab 143, 1998). Before 1988, about one hundred acts of violence were committed against foreigners on an annual basis (crimes that were recorded, may not represent the total amount), but in 1991 over one thousand cases of crimes violence associated with right-wing extremism and xenophobia were recorded, and in 1992, this number grew to 2,277 racist attacks and 7,684 far-right extremist crimes (Chapin 102-103, 1997). Of these violent acts, over a third were committed in the territories of East Germany, a share which is made far more significant when one considers that the Eastern states contained only a fifth of the population of Germany (Staab 143, 1998). This trend of rising violence against foreigners decreased after a series of changes in asylum policy in 1993 that restricted and reduced the number of asylum applications to Germany. Within two years of the
changes violence against foreigners fell by about 62% and overall right-wing extremist crime fell by 25% within a year (Chapin 113, 1997). These declines suggest that the more restrictive immigration policy reduced these trends, however the decline has also been associated with Germany’s state mechanisms meant to reduce these kinds of incidents, such as decision by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution to change the far-right party’s status to an “enemy of the constitution, and the larger public’s aversion and dislike of extreme-right and xenophobic ideology (Chapin 103, 1997). The increasing visibility of violent acts prompted widespread counterdemonstrations by the German public in which three million people participated and violent xenophobia was increasingly paralleled to the xenophobia witnessed during the Third Reich (Staab 145, 1998).

The decrease in these violent acts after the asylum changes also coincided with decreased electoral support for the Republikaner party. The vote share in European parliamentary elections of the Republikaner dropped below the threshold to 3.9% in 1994, as opposed to its higher share of 7.1% in the 1989 election, a result that Chapin argues can be attributed to the restrictive immigration policy pursued by mainstream parties that undermined its anti-immigrant platform, increasing associations between the violence against foreigners and the party by the general public (despite proclamations by the party this they are not inciting or the cause of the violence), and lastly, the change in the Republikaner’s status as an anti-constitutional party (Chapin 118, 1997). Coupled with disagreements between the Republikaner and other smaller right-wing groups, these events led to the poor national results from the far-right parties in the years before the 2017 election.

**Group Contact and Conflict**

A popular theory advanced in the literature regarding the relationship between immigration and the far right is the role of intergroup contact in influencing attitudes towards migrants which stipulates that exposure and contact with minority groups under certain conditions lowers prejudice among the majority, therefore lowering votes for anti-immigrant parties (Wagner et al. 2003). The flip side of this theory is group conflict, in which the larger the minority ratio to a population, the larger the threat and prejudice to the majority (Wagner et al 2003). The conditions under which intergroup contact reduce prejudice vary among the literature. William’s and Allport outline four conditions necessary for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice: (1) equal status between the groups in the situation, (2) common goals, (3) no competition between groups, and (4) authority sanction for the contact (Pettigrew 1997). Pettigrew expands these conditions by emphasizing the importance long-term friendly contact over short term contact in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew 1997.)

Relying on three separate survey groups, Wagner et al. identifies higher concentrations of ethnic prejudice in regions in Germany with less migrant exposure and asserts that a larger foreign presence in a certain region coincide with lower prejudice scores (Wagner et al. 2003). This trend of lower far-right support in areas with larger migrant populations is also supported by regression tests by Chapin in 1997. On the other hand, a district analysis of the city of Hamburg in Germany revealed correlation between higher shares of immigrants correlated support for extreme right-wing parties (Otto and Steinhartd 2014), and another study in Berlin arrived at similar results (Matejskova and Leitner 2017). These studies reveal that the influence of intergroup contact is not clear cut and is highly contextual. Exposure to immigrants may reduce
or increase prejudice scores, and therein votes for the far right, depending on the characteristics of the locale in which these interactions take place. For example, the 2019 study conducted by Dustmann et al. in which they examine the impact of refugee allocation among voting behavior using survey data across 275 Danish Municipalities demonstrated increases in the voting share for anti-immigrant parties in municipalities with more refugees running contrary intergroup contact theory, yet this effect was absent in urban municipalities where the opposite trend was evident. As opposed to rural municipalities, individuals in urban districts had a higher likelihood of having a refugee as a colleague or friend correlating with more positive attitudes towards refugees and less votes for anti-immigrant parties (Dustmann et al. 2019). Random variables such as interactions with foreigners in a church or neighborhood also produced different results in terms of changing perspectives towards foreigners as seen in an attitudinal analysis of the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) (Jennifer 2012).

When describing prejudice against foreigners, this analysis uses anti-immigrant sentiment as an umbrella term that cover both immigration skepticism and as well as pure xenophobia, as research has shown that in many cases it is not pure xenophobia and outright hatred of minority groups that drive far-right support, but also milder cases of immigration skepticism (Rydgren 2008). This skepticism may take many forms, individuals from the local population may believe for example, that foreigners do not integrate properly, mesh well with German culture. They may also believe that foreigners induce higher crime rates and negatively impact the economy. Chapin frames the complexity of the issue by stating how the belief by German citizens that foreigners should return to their country of origin may not be a direct indicator of xenophobia, but rather that the belief may stem from other reasons such as the strong belief that the foreigner may benefit more from staying in their home countries due to cultural or economic factors (Chapin 54, 1997).

**Methodology and Data:**

The studies made into the AfD and its voter base thus far rely largely on attitudinal data from public opinion surveys with the exception of Chapin in 1997, who conducted multinomial regression tests testing the correlation of immigration on far-right electoral performance during the 1980’s (the results indicated moderate correlation and significance between distribution of foreigners and Far-right success). These survey studies include the GLES, the European Social Survey, the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), and individual surveys crafted by the respective research teams. This paper seeks to contribute to the literature by conducting a regression analysis by examining demographic data made available by the Federal Statistical Office and the Federal Returning Officer in Germany as opposed to survey data. This paper is limited to the state level (n = 16) as structural data were not available for Germany at the electoral district level. While the database contains socio-economic data for its 400 administrative districts, many of these districts are consolidated to form electoral districts (of which there are 300) that make it difficult to compare the demographic data of each individual district with the election results in 2017, thus limiting this paper to a macro-level overview. A timeframe of 12 years was chosen as 2005 was the earliest year with available data in the database of the statistical office, and a time period of at least a decade was deemed appropriate for observing noticeable changes in the state populations. While similar to Chapin’s regression test (Chapin 83, 1997), his study centered on elections in the period before 1997, most of which
were before unification, and thus mainly focused on the Federal Republic of Germany and the variable of growth in foreigner rates was absent in his tests.

Dependent Variable

For the dependent variable, this paper will use the vote share of the AfD during the 2017 national elections as a direct indicator of far-right support as provided by Germany’s Federal Returning Officer. This was the most obvious choice as the other far right parties did not meet the 5% national threshold, and due to the far greater popularity and visibility of the AfD relative to these parties. This paper does not test similarly for correlation for the 2013 election, as the AfD was barely formed that year and had not yet transitioned into adopting a nationalist and anti-immigrant platform and no other far-right party received more than 5% of the vote. The percentages of the vote share are derived from the second election vote, for under the German Parliamentary system the first round of voting is for electing individual candidates, and the second is reserved for electing political parties into the Bundenstag.

Independent Variables

Independent Variable 1: Proportion of foreigners born as percent of total state population
Independent Variable 2: Growth rate in the proportion of foreigners by state between 2005-2017
Independent Variable 3: Unemployment rate by state in 2017

Both the proportion of foreigners and the growth in proportion of foreigners are included to determine not only whether the number of immigrants in an area affect support for the AfD but also how the rate of demographic change in terms of foreigners affects far-right support. In other words, is it the total number of immigrants in an area that propel voters to vote far right, or is it how fast immigrants are settling in a region? To illustrate the distinction, take for example, the state of Baden-Wattenburg with one of the highest number of immigrants in the country, totaling around 1,800,000 in the year of 2017. This is not a drastic jump from its population in 2005 that totaled around 1,100,000, a growth rate of approximately 45%. Compare this to the state of Thuringia that had an initial immigrant population of ~3,500 foreigners in 2005 that increased to a total of ~100,000 by 2017. Tallying the figures, it’s 2017 population is far out scaled by the number of immigrants in Baden-Wattenburg (by a factor of 10), yet if one looks at the change in terms of growth rates, Thuringia experienced a foreigner growth rate of over 200% in just over 10 years. Furthermore, as demonstrated by figure 3, the population density of East German states is much smaller than the populations of West German States.
Following intergroup contact theory, we expect to find that areas with larger immigrant populations should vote less for the far right due to higher exposure rates and thereby opportunities to reduce prejudice. We also expect to find more votes for the far right in areas that have experienced rapid change in their immigrant populations, as this can trigger a negative backlash by native Germans. The larger literature found few links between unemployment and support for the far right in Germany. However, as this is based on attitudinal data, unemployment as an indicator of economic security will also be included in the regression tests.

Hypothesis 1: An increase in the percentage of foreigners correlates with a lower share of votes for the AfD
Hypothesis 2: An increase in the growth of the percentage of foreigners correlates with a higher share of votes for the AfD
Results and Empirical Analysis

Three individual regression tests were conducted, the outputs of which are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3, and the inputs of which are presented in figure 4. The correlation test for percentage of foreigners and the AfD vote share (Table 1) yielded a negative correlation of (-.67) with an adjusted R squared value of (.39) suggesting a negative relationship in which states with higher percentages of foreigners have a lower percentage of votes cast for the AfD supporting our hypothesis 1. These results conform with the AfD performance in the East vs the West. The five Eastern German states averaged 22% of percentage of votes cast for the Alternative for Germany, while the West averaged 10% (Table 4).
Table 1: Results of Correlation Analysis between the Proportion of Foreigners by State in 2017 and the Vote Share for the AfD in the 2017 National Parliamentary Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>R^2</th>
<th>P Value</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Foreigners</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed in Table 4 the top three states with the lowest percentage of foreigners are all located in the former territory of the GDR and contain the higher vote share for the AfD while the top three states (excluding Berlin) with the highest percentage of foreigners are West German states and contain much lower AfD vote shares never rising above 12%. In fact, all former GDR states top the list of lowest immigration shares, containing similar foreign population rates (within 1% of each other), the lowest being 4.5%; the highest 4.9% (Table 4). The lowest share of foreigners for a western state is 8.4%; the highest is 18.5% with an average of 14% out of a sample of 10 (again excluding for Berlin) (Table 4). Berlin is a notable case in this sample, as it functions administratively as both a city and a state. Moreover, despite being located in the middle of the former territory of the GDR it contains the highest foreigner percentage in the country overall (25%). This demographic difference between Berlin and the surrounding Eastern states can partly be explained by its large urban nature and the fact that as the capital of Germany the city itself was split by the allied powers and therefore half the city operated under the structural norms of the FGR. These findings run counter to the two separate city district studies (Hamburg and Berlin) that found correlation between higher concentrations of foreigners and votes for the Far right (Matjeskova and Leitner 2017, Otto and Steinhartd 2014).

The correlation analysis for the growth rate of foreigners (Table 2) produced a higher correlation coefficient of (.83) and an adjusted R squared value of (.66) indicating a strong positive relationship between increases in share of foreigners and increases in share of AfD votes.
supporting hypothesis 2. Greater foreigner growth rates strongly correlated with higher votes for the AfD. Thuringia, the state with the highest increase in foreigners (203%) holds the highest vote share for the AfD at 22.7%, and Bremen with the smallest increase (33%) likewise holds the smallest share in votes (7.8%). Between 2005 to 2017 all former GDR states experienced foreigner growth rate percentages above 100% with an average of 147% and the rest of the German federal states experienced growth rates below 80% with an average of 54%.

*Figure 6*

![Figure 6: Foreigner Growth Rate and the AfD Vote Share in 2017 (State Level)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>P Value</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
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<tr>
<td>Foreigner Growth Rate</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.0000</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Table 2: Results of Correlational Analysis between the Foreigner Growth Rate (2005-2017) by State and the Vote Share for the AfD in the 2017 National Parliamentary Election*

The R squared value indicates how much of the variation in our dependent variable is explained by our independent variables. By themselves in the separate models, the proportion of foreigners accounts for approximately 40% of the variation (moderately statistically relevant) in the AfD vote share and the growth in the share of foreigners accounts for approximately 70% of the variation (significantly statistically relevant) respectively. Lastly, the P-values produced by the regression analysis for these independent variables (Figures 1 & 2) were quite low allowing us to strongly reject the null hypothesis in both cases.
Figure 7

Map of Proportion of Foreigners at the State Level 2017

IGIS CaroAguilar
November 30, 2019

Proportion of Foreigners
- 0 - 5 %
- 5 - 10 %
- 10 - 15 %
- 15 - 20 %
- 20 - 25 %

Source: Federal Statistical Office of Germany

Figure 8

Map of Foreigner Growth Rate by State 2005-2017

IGIS CaroAguilar
November 30, 2019

Foreigner Growth Rate
- Less than 45 %
- 45 - 75 %
- 75 - 105 %
- 105 - 135 %
- More than 135 %

Source: Federal Statistical Office of Germany
Additionally, in line with the survey research from Hansen, etc, unemployment was not statistically relevant to the vote share for the AfD as can be seen by its very low coefficient of (.001) and R squared of (0)

*Figure 9*


![Figure 9: Unemployment Rate and AfD Vote Share (2017)](image)

*Table 3*: Results of Correlational Analysis between the Unemployment Rate by State in 2017 and the Vote Share for the AfD in the 2017 National Parliamentary Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>P Value</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
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<td>Unemployment</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.79</td>
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</table>
### Table 4: Data Table of Compiled Demographic Data of Germany’s States from the Federal German Statistical Database.

*Former GDR States are Denoted by (E)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>Baden-Wurttemberg</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>12.4</td>
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<td>2504040</td>
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</table>

### Discussion and Causal Analysis

**Immigrants, Resources, and Perceptions of Victimization and Competition**

According to the findings of this paper Western Germany, although containing the larger segment of the foreign population, did not experience as much growth in its foreign populations over 12 years. While Germans in the West had become used to a large foreign population, Eastern Germans had to contend with the rapid growth of this demographic over the years relative to the population in 2005 which may had led to more threat perceptions in the region. The prominence of the AfD as opposed to previous far right parties can then potentially be attributed to rapid increases in the foreign population in largely homogenous areas over the years and the migration crisis in 2015 that increased the salience of immigration among voters. In addition, the previous far right parties were unable to rely on support in the East, as the two Germanys did not unify until 1990.
The disparity in immigration skepticism and xenophobia between the two blocs could also be further exacerbated by larger feelings of inadequacy and economic insecurity among the population in the East. Thus far, the idea of economic insecurity playing an integral role as a driver of the far right has heretofore been discounted. Unemployment in survey data and in this investigation did not demonstrate strong statistical relevance to far right support, and the 2018 Annual Report on the State of German Unity reveals improving economic conditions among eastern Germans. However, Krell et al. 1996, in their study make note that aggrieved parties need not necessarily be economically disadvantaged relative to other groups in order to feel victimized (Krell et al.1996). Instead the mere perception that they are losers of the invisible effects of globalization regardless of their actual economic conditions can drive citizens to scapegoat immigrants (Inken 2017). as the harbingers of their plights (imagined or otherwise) and veer to the radical right (Krell et al.1996, Jackle and Konig 2018). The benefits of unification aside, many Eastern Germany still hold feelings of being treated second class citizens and of neglect from the ruling coalition (2018 Annual Report on the State of German Unity). Therefore, a rapid increase in the percentage of foreigners along with increased salience from the media could provide an easily identifiable outgroup on which these groups can blame and subsequently punish/restrict through voting for anti-immigration parties.

In this manner, the narrative of economic insecurity can dovetail with group conflict theory, as competition for resources can trigger feelings of resentment among different groups, even if it is just a perceived competition which still falls under the theoretical framework for group conflict to function. This can partly explain how larger immigration groups may trigger a sense of competition among native Germans even if the actual conditions on the ground do not reflect it. Portions of the population who formerly lived under the GDR may also be less equipped to deal with rising radicalism. Due to the division of East Germany into the GDR, the introspective quality concerning guilt and responsibility for the actions of the Third Reich ingrained in the FRG citizenry was largely absent in the GDR society. Instead, GDR citizens largely viewed themselves as victims of the Nazis and thus avoided responsibility or confrontations with Germany’s fascist past which rendered them less prepared to address issues of racism and radical nationalism as they began sprouting in the GDR over the years (Staab 137). That most of the violence against migrants is concentrated in the East can attest to higher rates of prejudice and hostility among the population of East German states (Bencek and Strasheim 2016).

Resentments among East Germans due to the rate in which immigrants and refugees move into the region has been recorded by historians in the past. In his book “National Identity in Eastern Germany” Staab asserts that the former states of the GDR were relatively unprepared to accommodate the placement of thousands of asylum seekers due to the lack of foreigners in the social fabric of GDR society before unification, and because of housing decisions by the government in the early 90’s that led to heavily concentrating asylum seekers in one area resulting in overcrowding and poor living conditions which led to associations among the local population with foreigners and negative economic conditions (Staab 143, 1998). The speed in which foreigners were moving into the region therefore outpaced the Eastern German’s population willingness to receive them during the 90’s. The relationship between ethnic Easterners and foreigners developed negative undertones which were further exacerbated by the social and economic disorder of East and West German integration that had already left the citizens of the now defunct GDR feeling socially isolated and unsettled. In line with group conflict theory, these feelings of marginalization among the East German populace led to a
projection of their worries onto foreigners who were scapegoated into being the culprits behind most of their woes (Staab 148, 1998).

Another factor at play is how the populations from both regions receive coverage of immigrant populations. The findings of a 2007 study by Bloomgarden and Velegenthart suggest that negative framing of immigrants in the media induce votes for anti-immigrant parties. Following the 2015 migration crisis, Syrian refugees in Germany were increasingly framed negatively among major German newspapers following a series of high-profile sexual assault cases that occurred in a festival in Cologne that were purported to have been committed by foreigners (Vollmer and Karakayali 2017). While initially welcoming, the portrayal of immigrants from “deserving” to “undeserving” in the media in the aftermath of the Cologne incident led to a shift in public discourse concerning immigrants and to an overall more cautious and hostile attitude towards foreigners which the authors assert provides an ideological opportunity for the far-right (Vollmer and Karakayali 2017). However, a study by Cysmara et al. demonstrated that regions in areas with a large number of foreigners have been shown to be less receptive to media induced concerns around immigration, partially explaining why larger number of foreigners in the west translates to a lower vote share for the AfD.

Western Germany also holds the majority of the country’s urban centers that are believed to facilitate more positive forms of intergroup interaction than that observed in rural communities that make up a large portion of the East (Dustmann et al. 2019). Urban environments are more likely to foster environments in which individuals of the population have higher chances of having foreigners as a coworker, friend, and/or member of their social group (Dustmann et al. 2019). These long-term friendships over short term contact seen in rural communities unaccustomed to foreigners is cited by Pettigrew as an important variable determining the success of lowering prejudice (Pettigrew 1997). In this manner the foreign populations are engaging with East and West Germans in different ways that impact their perceptions of immigrants. This trend of lower votes for the far-right in areas with large foreigner populations is not a uniquely a modern trend and has been reflected before in Germany. Similar to the AfD in 2017, during the 1980’s to early 1990’s, the far right parties performed worse in areas containing a higher number of immigrants (Chapin 65, 1997), and in the 1970’s hostility increased against Hungarians and Poles who entered Eastern Germany in greater numbers due to the relaxation of tourist transit (Chapin 69, 1997). Despite the similar reactions in the populations, the potency of the Far Right as a political force in the past was always drastically worse on the national level. Their recent success vis a vis the AfD, can be explained by the increases in the proportion of foreigners over the years.

A Closer Look at Minority Groups Among the Foreign Population

Another explanation for the divide in attitudes and support for the far right could be the disproportionate distribution of ethnic groups among the states. While this analysis examined the overall percentage of foreigners in a region it did not distinguish between origin of foreigners. This can merit examination as the ethnic population of Germany may have different reactions and attitudes towards foreigners based on their countries of origin. For example, ethnic Germanys may be more receptive of European immigrants versus those hailing from regions such as the Middle East and Africa, due to perceived cultural similarities and differences. Under this vein of “ethnopluralism” Muslim minorities in particular are singled out by right-wing parties as incompatible or threatening to European culture (Rydgren 2008). The AfD has
espoused Islamophobic rhetoric in the past, and as such anti-immigration sentiments may be higher towards Muslims or ethnicities arriving from the Middle East. The AfD may then be tapping into and exacerbating existing prejudices inherent in the country’s population towards foreigners deemed culturally incompatible or of significant cultural difference. A 2004 opinion poll was conducted asking respondents “To what degree would you find it pleasant or unpleasant if a Muslim/Catholic/Protestant/Jew/Atheist married into your family?” and the category for Muslims received the highest percentage in unpleasantness, scoring around 40-50% among respondents while the next highest score was 27% for Jews and the rest scoring an average of approximately 10% in unpleasantness, indicating that Muslims were viewed as more culturally distinct (Chapin 448, 1997).

Figure 10 & 11 reveal how different ethnic groups among the foreigner population are not equally distributed among the German States.

Figure 10 Map of Foreigners from Afghanistan

![Map of Foreigners from Afghanistan](image_url)
For example, the greater share of foreigners from Afghanistan are consolidated in the east and northern portions of the country, while EU immigrants are mostly located in the west and south. Unfortunately, the data provided the regional database of Germany’s Statistical office in
terms of ethnic group distributions is available by administrative district, not electoral district, limiting a closer statistical analysis. It should be noted that this analysis is also limited in that it did not delve into the effect of the foreigner vote on election outcomes. This paper makes the assumption that it is unlikely that foreigners would (largely) vote for far-right groups since that would lead to their own potential stigmatization in German society, but no tests were conducted to verify this belief.

**Policy Implications**

The results of the analysis of this paper indicate strong correlation between both proportion of foreigners, and the growth of foreign populations with far-right support in the case of the 2017 German election. Following intergroup contact theory, to reduce populist support and conflict amongst majority and minority groups, one would need to address the areas of the population in which growing number of foreigners is generating an anti-immigrant backlash. In the case of Germany, further improvements in reducing unemployment in the East is not likely to significantly impact support for the far right as the unemployment rates have been improving and support for the far-right increasing.

Policymakers could help to counter this trend by funding or encouraging integration projects in local community centers. Projects in Berlin have already demonstrated instances of increased empathy to foreigners (Matejskova and Leitner 2011). Specifically, these integration projects can take the form of local workshops, be they leisure classes like pottery making for example (Matejskova and Leitner 2011), as working alongside immigrants have higher chances of lowering prejudices (Dustmann et al. 2019). By engaging in a working environment foreigners and native Germans can interact in the roles of coworkers instead of as “representatives of their respective ethnic or cultural group” which facilitates more casual exposure, and in a similar vein, engaging in community projects “with” instead of “for” foreigners increases the likelihood of more positive exposure between both groups (Matejskova and Leitner 2011). Another possible conducive environment to improve intergroup contact is at the school level through the organization of group leisure programs (Wagner et al 2003). The likelihood of interactions between outgroups and ingroups is higher in terms of forming friendships than in other contexts and contact between the children of two different groups could also bring the parents into more contact with each other and reduce prejudice amongst themselves (Wagner et al. 2003). The interactions in these projects fulfill Allport’s condition of common goals as an important factor in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew 1998). These integration projects are intensive efforts however that require continued contact between both parties in pursuit of a common goal, and given the nuances of individuals, do not always produce a positive result. It should also be noted that there are cases that even when an ingroup forms a friendship with an individual from an outgroup, the prejudice towards the entire outgroup may not necessarily decrease and that the ingroup may view the individual as an “exception to the rule” as noted by Matesjkova and Leitner in their research. Nonetheless, these projects should be pursued in areas experiencing rapid demographic change to mitigate possible backlash from the local population. By improving the levels of integration between migrants and ethnic Germans one can hopefully ameliorate the frequency of violence against immigrant groups and xenophobia and immigration skepticism.

Lastly, if a causal connection can be made and promulgated amongst the wider public of the AfD as inciting an environment leading to increasing violence against foreigners, their support may be reduced similarly to the Republikaner as seen in the 1990’s. In 1993 the German
government was unable to ban the Republikaner party outright, but it was able to implement strategies undercutting its support including investigations into the party and changing its status from radical to anti-democratic (Staab 116). These efforts were designed to cast doubt among voters of the far-right of voting for an anti-constitutional party and to dredge up links between violence purported to be supported by the Republikaner and Germany’s fascist past. In this case, studies would have to be made if the AfD is responsible for promoting violence against foreigners or indirectly doing so by fostering an environment that makes it more likely for these kinds of attacks to happen. One study examining the AfD activity on its social media page does indicate such an association. By investigating links between anti-immigrant rhetoric found on the AfD’s Facebook page and cases of crimes against foreigners, the authors found that anti-immigrant sentiment on Facebook predicts crimes against migrants in areas with high social media usage (Muller and Schwarz 2017). Further studies and visibility linking the AfD with anti-foreigner violence can undermine its electoral support. A poll conducted in the aftermath of a far-right shooting in the German city of Halle in October 2019, revealed that the anti-Semitic attack reduced approval ratings for the AfD and that over 90% of respondents that had not voted for the AfD agreed with the sentence “as a result of their positions and choice of words, the AfD paves the way for right-wing extremist acts of violence” indicating that many citizens in Germany associate AfD rhetoric with causing outbreaks of xenophobic violence (Schumacher 2019). The poll also indicates that a disdain for far-right ideology and extremism is still prevalent in the larger public despite the AfD’s success as over 76% of respondents expressed concerns about far-right ideology and xenophobic tendencies becoming acceptable (Schumacher 2019).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze the impact of foreigner populations on support for the Alternative for Germany using demographic data at the state level. Largely relying on survey data, the literature points to the highly salient nature of immigration as a driver for the far-right in general. Research thus far into the effects of the contact hypothesis have also painted a complex and nuanced picture of its effect on prejudice towards immigrants and support for far-right parties. Although this paper approaches the issues of far-right support mainly from an immigration angle, it does acknowledge that there exists a multitude of variables other that affect far-right support. This notwithstanding, proportion of foreigners and the growth rate of foreigners were chosen as independent variables due to the wide disparities of these variables among West and Eastern Germany and the migration crisis that occurred shortly prior to the national elections. Using intergroup contact and group threat as theoretical frameworks, this study expected to find lower share of votes for the AfD in states with higher proportion of immigrants (hypothesis 1) and a higher share of the vote for states that experienced large foreigner growth rates over a 12-year period (hypothesis 2).

Our findings demonstrated a moderate negative correlation between percentage of foreigners in a state and the vote share for the AfD, and a strong correlation between foreigner growth rates and increased votes for the AfD. These results largely support our hypothesis 1 & 2, with stronger evidence for hypothesis 2. Furthermore, in line with the wider literature the regression tests affirm the low predictive power of unemployment for support for the Far Right, at least in the case of Germany, as it produced a coefficient of (.001).

While both theories, group contact and group conflict, seem diametrically opposed, the findings suggest that both theories have explanatory power. Intergroup contact can help explain
why the AfD was more popular in districts that had very few immigrants as higher exposure to foreigners in the west is believed to mitigate anti-immigrant sentiment among the population, even in the face of the migration crisis in 2015. In addition, group threat can help explain the AfD’s popularity in the East, and how the AfD managed to break through onto the national level despite decades of poor nationalist election results.

While this study was limited to the state level, as structural data was not available at the individual electoral district level, it presents compelling evidence of the potency of foreign population as drivers or even mitigators of support for far-right parties and provides further insight for the rise of populism in Europe. The economic explanation for rising far right tendencies has floundered in recent years, but immigration and demographic chance can function as strong predictors of far-right support. The methodology employed can easily be replicated and applied to other countries if the necessary socio-economic data are available for analysis.

Whether the AfD will become a more permanent part of Germany’s political scene remains to be seen until the next national elections due to be held in 2021. In the meantime, if the strides being made by the party at the state level are any indication, the AfD will remain politically salient so long as immigration remains a voting priority in the minds of the public. If the current ruling coalition in the German government wants to avoid further political fragmentation and a shift to the radical right via the AfD, it should conduct large anti-racism campaigns, particularly in the states of the former GDR, that can help bridge and better integrate portions of the German population that are unaccustomed to foreigners or who feel threatened by them. Furthermore, it should engage in community projects that create working environments for both groups to increase contact between the out group and in group and hopefully lead to reduced rates of prejudice.
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