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Who identifies with the AfD? Explorative analyses in longitudinal perspective

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**Who Identifies with the AfD?
Explorative Analyses in
Longitudinal Perspective**

Daniel Baron

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Who Identifies with the AfD? Explorative Analyses in Longitudinal Perspective

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Abstract:

Recently, international scholars found two factors that account for partisanship with right-wing populist parties: feelings of economic insecurity and perceived cultural threat. When explaining increasing partisanship with the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD), the first successful right-wing populist party on the state level in Germany, results remain somewhat unclear, especially when it comes to longitudinal analyses. Based on social psychological explanations of party identification and data from the German Socio-Economic Panel 2014 till 2016, this research problem will be tackled throughout this paper. Descriptive analyses show that party identifications among AfD-partisans as well as among partisans of other established parties in the German Bundestag remain stable throughout the observation period. There is a trend of increasing feelings of cultural threat among partisans of all parties, not only of the AfD. To test both explanatory variables, fixed effects and pooled OLS-regressions were used. Only the cultural threat indicator proves to be a significant predictor for strong identification with the AfD.

Keywords: Party identification, economic insecurity, perceived cultural threat, right-wing populism, panel analysis, political orientations, partisanship

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I Introduction

Since its formation in 2013, the Alternative für Deutschland („Alternative for Germany“, AfD) has continuously gained seats in several federal parliaments as well as in the German Bundestag during the federal election in autumn 2017. With a share of 12.8 percent among German voters, the AfD, thus, is the third biggest fraction among all parties in the current Bundestag and – after CDU/CSU and SPD having settled for a third grand coalition – the biggest fraction among all German opposition parties. Without overstating these developments, the AfD is, in fact and finally, the first successful right-wing populist party in Germany as measured by seats in the state parliament (Arzheimer 2015).

Although several cross-sectional studies have been conducted to shed light on the social structure among voters and partisans of the AfD (Arzheimer 2015, Blumenberg/Blumenberg 2017, Frank 2015, Franz et al. 2018, Köppl-Turyana/Grunewald 2017, Kroh/Fetz 2016, Lengfeld 2017, Vehrkamp 2017), relatively little is known about processes of identification with the newly emerging party from a panel perspective. Building on recent explorative results (Flecker/Kirschenhofer 2007, Köppl-Turyana/Grunewald 2017, Lengfeld/Hirschle 2009) as well as international comparative research (Berning/Schlüter 2016, Dunn 2015, Rooduijn et al. 2016), two factors are expected to be at work: first, the so-called economic insecurity-hypothesis posits that partisanship with right-wing populist parties such as the AfD is stronger the more voters are subjected to economic insecurities such as low average income, feelings of unhappiness about the private financial situation or job satisfaction. Second, the so-called cultural backlash-hypothesis states that the more voters feel culturally threatened by members of ethnic outgroups such as immigrants or refugees from international centers of conflict the stronger they tend to support right-wing populist parties.

This paper presents empirical results of an explorative, multivariate panel study on the effects of both these factors on the strength of partisanship with the AfD. The research is based on longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) with time of analyses spanning the years 2014 to 2016. Besides indicators for economic insecurity and feelings of cultural threat several control variables will be considered. To put the analyses in a comparative context, descriptive results for AfD-partisans regarding their party identifications, feelings of economic insecurity and cultural threat will be compared to partisans of other established parties in Germany (CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, The Left, Greens). During the empirical section, results of fixed effects and pooled OLS-regressions will be considered. Open questions for future research approaches will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

II Research background

When defining political ideologies that underlie right-wing populist parties' election programs, scholars in political sociology most often agree on three main characteristics (Kriesi/Pappas 2016, Mudde/Kaltwasser 2010): first, it is supposed that right-wing populist parties arrogate the privilege to exclusively represent certain demographic or political groups in a region or polity. Second, it is assumed that right-wing populist parties' ideas and programs refer to a sharp distinction between insiders and outsiders based on cultural, sometimes racial, grounds. These ideas often result in political narratives that draw distinctions ('we' versus 'them') between legitimate and illegitimate beneficiaries of political measures advocated by right-wing populist activists. Third, it has been continuously observed that populist-parties radically oppose established political parties or officeholders, tending to call into question the political institutions in established democracies such as the principle of checks and balances between legislative, executive, and judicative powers, the status of political parties in the formation of collective will and decision making process, or the necessity of pluralistic standpoints and political opinions during public deliberation and will formation.

Looking at today's political systems throughout democracies in Europe, right-wing populist parties have been potent forces in most countries inside and outside the European Union for a comparatively long time (Kriesi/Pappas 2016). The Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs („Freedom Party of Austria“, FPÖ), the Fronte National in France or the Schweizerische Volkspartei („Swiss People's Party“, SVP), to name but a few, have now been visible on political stages for several decades.

Although all of these and other right-wing populist parties underwent organizational as well as, to a certain degree, ideological changes (Kriesi/Pappas 2016), one may come to the conclusion that they are far from being a new phenomenon in Western democracies. Taking these characteristics into consideration, right-wing populism is, at least, as old a phenomenon as the process of democratization since the early days of the Westminster Modell or the realization of civic rights during French Revolution (Canovan 1981).

Compared to other right-wing populist parties in Europe, the AfD is of relative young age.¹ Formed in 2013 as a national conservative, Euro-skeptical movement mainly initiated by scientific, journalistic and economic elites the AfD quickly gained in public support. Throughout its development, the party underwent several changes in its leading personnel. In 2015, one of the founding speakers of the AfD, Bernd Lucke, had to give away his leading position to Frauke Petry, the latter being the leader of the far more nationalist wing within the AfD. Scholars widely agree that these developments are symptomatic of the AfD ideologically turning from a national conservative, liberal-economic into a right-wing populist party (Arzheimer 2015).

These developments did not hinder the AfD to win considerable shares of the votes during communal, German state, federal and European elections. As of July 2018, the party holds seats in fourteen of the sixteen German state parliaments ("Landtage"). In the federal election in September 2017, the AfD gained seats in the German Bundestag for the first time in its history above the five-percent-hurdle resulting in a share of votes of 12.6 percent. This means that the AfD now is the strongest opposition party during the 2017 legislative period.

Since the AfD started winning seats during parliamentary elections, several studies shed light on the demography of the AfD-electorate. Based on aggregate data for the federal election in 2017, Franz et al. (2018) find that a high percentage of AfD-voters positively correlates with shares of foreigners and shares of elder people in election districts. Furthermore, the AfD disproportionately gained votes in districts with a comparatively low population density. Using data from the 2016 German General Social Survey (Allbus), Brenke and Kritikos (2017) report a disproportionately high share of males among the electorate who intends to vote for the AfD (69 percent).²

Based on SOEP-data, Kroh and Fetz (2016) facilitated explorative, descriptive analyses and found that the attitudinal characteristics among AfD-partisans changed between 2014 and 2016. The share of the partisans who identify with the AfD and who reported that they strongly worry about immigration to Germany rose from 4 percent in 2014 to 10 percent in 2016. During the same period, the percentage of partisans who identify with the AfD and who are strongly dissatisfied with democracy in Germany increased from 5 percent in 2014 to 26 percent in 2016 (Kroh/Fetz 2016). Thus, AfD's programmatic change from a merely Euro-skeptical, national conservative movement into a anti-elitist, ethnocentric right-wing populist party that was reported earlier in this paper is resembled by a change of their partisans' attitudes towards outgroups as well as towards the democratic polity in Germany (Blumenberg/Blumenberg 2017, Frank 2015, Niedermayer/Hofrichter 2016)

III Attitudinal orientations among AfD-partisans: Economic insecurities vs. perceived cultural threat

There is an ongoing debate among scholars on whether right-wing populist partisanship is the result of voters severely suffering socioeconomic insecurities and, therefore, losing out on global modernization

¹ For detailed descriptions of the party's history, see Häusler (2016) and Lewandowsky (2014).

² Each of the studies that are reported here and deal with voting behavior uses the voting intention as an indicator for voting behavior. It should be taken into consideration that the reported correlation coefficients in these studies might be biased due to interviewees' voting behavior digressing from the stated intention. Other studies such as the German Longitudinal Election Study try to resolve this methodical issue by using indicators that measure voting behavior retrospectively. Although these indicators might reduce measurement errors due to digressions between expressed voting intention and factual voting behavior, retrospective measures might be biased as well due to interviewees erroneously recalling their earlier voting behavior (Brückner 1990).

processes, or of voters harboring feelings of cultural threat towards members of foreign outgroups. Further going approaches assume that both dimensions – feelings of being on the loser's side of modernization and globalization as well as feelings of cultural threat that might result in prejudices towards outgroups – go hand in hand (Dörre 2008, Zarate et al. 2004). Although, empirical research on an interaction effect between both these constructs is still pending.³

Up to the present day, it is unclear which of the aforementioned hypotheses is empirically valid as some studies find evidence for the economic insecurities-hypothesis while others support the cultural backlash-hypothesis (Bakker et al. 2016, Köppl-Turyna/Grunewald 2017, Oesch 2008). Throughout all of these studies a broad array of indicators for both of these constructs is used which complicates comparisons of empirical results and, thus, interpreting empirical effects. Comparability of results is also compounded by the fact that partisanship is operationalized in various conceptual ways, ranging from voting-intentions to party identifications and retrospective measures for voting behavior.⁴ However, in the remainder of this section research correlations between voting behavior and voting intentions on the one hand and economic insecurities as well as feelings of cultural threat on the other hand will be reported.

Based on 2016 Allbus-data, Brenke and Kritikos (2017) use the average monthly income as a measure for economic insecurity. Average income among those who intend to vote for the AfD lies slightly below the general mean for all voters in Germany. A similar result was found by Bergmann (2017) based on data from the German Socio Economic Panel (SOEP). Here, partisanship was measured as self-reported party identification. In contrast, Lengfeld, by using data from Infratest dimap in 2016, could not find any significant correlation between AfD-voting-intention and monthly income (Lengfeld 2017).

Testing the cultural backlash hypothesis, Köppl-Turyna and Grunewald (2017) used data from the Politbarometer 2016 and found a significant correlation between intending to vote for the AfD and anti-immigrant attitudes. A correlation between AfD-voting and indicators for socioeconomic insecurities could not be found by Köppl-Turyna and Grunewald (2017). Similarly, Schmitt-Beck et al. (2017) found a significant correlation between the intention to vote for the AfD and ethnocentrist attitudes when studying data in the wake of the 2016 state election in Baden-Württemberg. These results are widely in accordance with earlier international studies that found similar effects in other European democracies, especially in Austria, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland (Bakker et al. 2016, Berning/Schlüter 2016, Dunn 2015, Lubbers/Coenders 2017, Oesch 2008).

Concluding these results, both of the constructs can claim to yield explanatory power to certain extents, although the cultural backlash-hypothesis seems to stand on less shaky empirical grounds than the economic insecurities-hypothesis. But up to the present day it is still unclear if one or both of these constructs can claim to be empirically valid when being tested based on a longitudinal research design using subjective measures of economic insecurity and cultural threat and, furthermore, when party identification is used as a dependent variable instead of voting behavior.

Before turning to the methodical considerations and empirical results a few remarks on why it is important to shed light on party identifications and their explanatory foundations is in order.

IV Theory and hypotheses

Looking at recent research, casting the vote for the AfD has been the most important object of explanation when studying the factors explaining the rise of the AfD during the latest state and federal elections in Germany. But besides voting behavior, there are several other theoretical constructs that might qualify as useful indicators for the changing preferences among parts of the German electorate.

³ Due to data restrictions, analyzing an interaction effect cannot be maintained during this study.

⁴ For a critical discussion of analytic similarities and differences between the concepts of voting behavior and partisanship or party identification see Campbell et al. (1964), Johnston (2006) and Weinschenk (2010).

One of the most important constructs in this field is the so called socio-psychological or Ann Arbor model (Campbell et al. 1964, Johnston 2006).⁵

The latter approach assumes that the electorates' weighing of the pro and cons of supplying a party with their votes is caused by feelings of affiliation to the individually chosen party. Scholars following the Ann Arbor model argue that these feelings of affiliation are merely learned during early political socialization. Only in times of vast societal changes such as in wartimes or during economic recessions, party identifications might shift, that is, parts of the electorate might change their objects of affiliation. Thus, most often, party identifications among members of the electorate might remain stable after they entered adulthood (Campbell et al. 1964, Kroh/Selb 2009, Zuckerman et al. 2007).

The AfD started winning seats after having politically instrumentalized the national-European cleavage, a social cleavage that had been neglected by most of the established parties in Germany as well as in other European states for a long time (Bornschieer 2010, Kriesi 2008). It might remain an unanswered question whether this kind of cleavage represents an exceptional societal development in the terminological and theoretical sense that Campbell et al. (1964) had conceived of it. But it is reasonable to assume that processes of globalization and European integration might represent societal changes on a large scale – especially for those groups among the German as well as other European electorates that feel economically or culturally threatened by some of the social consequences of these developments. Assumed that the nationalist and populist shift in the programmatic of the AfD since 2015 was a reaction to these societal developments (Bergmann et al. 2017, Kroh/Fetz 2016, Vehrkamp 2017), especially those groups of the German electorate should identify with the AfD who feel severely threatened by the social consequences of recent economic and cultural globalization processes.

Sticking to social-historic approaches, these processes manifest in various ways (Held et al. 1999) although a detailed description of these developments cannot be provided in this study. Regarding the economic dimension, deregulation of employment contracts as well as decelerated or even stagnating pay increases negatively affected many blue collar as well as white collar workers' feelings of social security for the last ten to twenty years (Lengfeld/Hirschle 2009, Lengfeld/Ordemann 2017, Mau 2012). Regarding the cultural dimension, forced migration to Europe since 2015 makes certain groups of the German electorate feeling anxious about losing their cultural and national identities due to foreign habits and cultural context being transferred into daily life in Germany (Ariely 2011, Artiles/Meardi 2014, Schnaudt/Weinhardt 2017).

Many scholars in the field of research on party identification assume social group identification processes to be at work (Johnston 2006, Ohr/Quandt 2012, Zuckerman et al. 2007). From this socio-psychological perspective, identification with a party resembles an imagined group membership that yields immaterial rewards in the form of increased self-esteem, feelings of social affiliation and political endowment of meaning (Tajfel/Turner 2004). Thus, party identifications grow stronger the more rewarding partisans conceive of the programmatic and personnel-wise decisions of a party for their political self-esteem (Campbell et al. 1964).

During the last five years, the AfD, like many other European right-wing populist parties, formulated national-conservative as well as anti-elitist ideologies, thereby addressing especially those groups among the German electorate who felt abandoned by the established German parties when it came to policy issues that dealt with problems around migration, European integration, or economic welfare (Bornschieer/Kriesi 2013). Considering that shaping of party identifications is stronger the more actors feel rewarded by the offered party programmatic⁶ it is reasonable to assume that both the economic as well as

⁵ Of course, there are many other approaches to describe and explain the rise of right wing populist parties such as institutionalist approaches or research that deals with party programmatic and changing political narratives (Häusler 2016, Lewandowsky 2014, Werner 2015).

⁶ As second important pillar of rewards and, thus, party identification, Campbell et al. (1964) name feelings of accordance and sympathy towards candidates during electoral campaigns. Due to data restrictions, identification with candidates cannot be analyzed in this study.

the cultural dimensions of conceived threat are positively correlated with a strong identification with the AfD.

Building on these theoretical considerations, the following research hypotheses will be tested during the remainder of this paper:

- (1) The more insecure voters in Germany feel about their socioeconomic situation, the stronger they identify with the AfD.
- (2) The stronger voters in Germany feel threatened by (forced) immigration to Germany, the stronger they identify with the AfD.

In the empirical study of this paper it will be controlled for voters' age and objective socioeconomic situation. Due to the fact that the AfD gained stronger support in East German states than in West German states (Niedermayer/Hofrichter 2016) separate models will be calculated for voters living East and in West Germany.

From a comparative perspective it is interesting to know to what extent the strength of party identification among AfD-partisans differs from the strength of party identification among partisans of other established parties in Germany. Thus, the changes in strength of party identification will be presented for the AfD, the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Die Linke (The Left) and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens) for the time of analyses, 2014 till 2016. Based on these descriptive analyses the question will be tackled to what extent strengths of party identification changed in the light of the so-called European migration crisis in 2015. To shed broader light on this question, also both independent variables – insecurity about socioeconomic status and feeling threatened by immigration – will be studied based on a party-comparative perspective.

V Data and method

To test the aforementioned hypotheses, data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) for the years 2014 to 2016 will be used. The SOEP is a panel data set that contains indicators for socioeconomic status, cultural attitudes as well as for political behavior and attitudes (Göbel et al. 2018). In the following multivariate analyses, a total amount of 408 participants were included. To ensure using a balanced panel only those participants were included who responded the items of interest for each wave of the study. The used sample contains 282 men and 126 were women. 255 members of the sample live in West Germany and 153 live in East Germany. The average age of all 408 participants is 51.2 years and the average income amounts to 2,742 Euros per month.⁷

For the dependent variable, an indicator for the strength of party identification was used based on a five-pointed Likert scale, ranging from very weak AfD-partisanship (1) to very strong AfD-partisanship (5). To ensure that only AfD-partisans were included in the analyses two preliminary indicators were used: The first one asked whether participants held a party identification or not. The second one measured which party participants preferred (Falter et al. 2000).⁸ Based on these indicators the sample for the multivariate hypothesis testing was selected (n=408). Obviously, larger sub-samples that contain partisans of the other established parties in Germany (CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, The Left and Alliance 90/Greens) were used for comparative reasons (for details on sample sizes see tables 1 to 5 in the results section).

As an indicator for the economic insecurity-hypothesis an eleven-pointed Likert scale will be used that measures dissatisfaction with monthly labor-income. Using this indicator implies that unemployed persons will not be covered by the later models. As a solution for this problem, separate models for employed and unemployed participants could have been calculated. Due small sub-sample sizes this method proved not being feasible. As an indicator for feelings of cultural threat according to the cultural backlash-hypothesis,

⁷ Detailed descriptive statistics for each year and each of the used variables will be provided in the first paragraphs and tables of the following section.

⁸ Obviously, changes in partisanship cannot be studied with this design and indicator. This research question has to stay unanswered until further research will have been conducted.

a three-pointed Likert-scale was used that measures worries about foreign immigration to Germany. Age and monthly income were used as control variables in the multivariate hypotheses tests. For an outlook on possible methodical enhancements in future research approaches see the last section of this study.

While earlier research studied the impacts of perceived socioeconomic insecurity and feelings of cultural threat on party identification with the AfD on mostly descriptive grounds (Blumenberg/Blumenberg 2017, Brenke/Kritikos 2017, Kroh/Fetz 2016), the aforementioned hypotheses will be tested based on multivariate approach. Therefore, a panel analysis based on the fixed-effects regression approach will be conducted (Allison 2009). This approach allows for testing the effects of time-varying explanatory variables in a panel perspective while the impacts of time-constant variables such as gender or place of living in order to control for living in East or West Germany. To compensate for these methodical problems, additional models that differentiate between men and women and between participants living in East Germany and those living in West Germany will be presented in the remainder of this study.

When calculating descriptive statistics for each wave and party under consideration, standard cross-sectional person weights are used (Göbel et al. 2018: 5, Haisken-DeNew/Frick 2005: 177).⁹ Fixed effects regression models are calculated without using cross-sectional weights.

VI Empirical results

In each of the waves under consideration (see table 1), at least 9.800 participants report that they support a party. Not surprisingly due the young age of the AfD, there are comparatively few participants who report that they support this party. As becomes clear in the remainder of these descriptive analyses (see tables 3 to 6, below), the amount of AfD-partisans as well as of FDP-partisans is seriously underrepresented in the SOEP. In contrast to that, the number of partisans of the Greens in the SOEP-data in 2014, 2015 and 2016 is overrepresented.

⁹ Cross-sectional person weights are denoted using the shortcut PHRF in the SOEP-datasets (Göbel et al. 2018, Haisken-DeNew/Frick 2005: 177).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for supported parties in the SOEP 2014 to 2016

	2014	2015	2016
Supports a party	12,444 (45.7 %)	10,764 (40.0 %)	9,800 (40.0 %)
Does not support any party	14,782 (54.3 %)	16,171 (60.0 %)	14,721 (60.0 %)
Total	27,226	26,935	29,467
AfD	212 [1.8 %]	274 [2.7 %]	517 [5.6 %]
CDU/CSU	4,809 [41.5 %]	4,153 [41.4 %]	3,681 [40.0 %]
SPD	3,615 [31.2 %]	3,009 [30.0 %]	2,500 [27.2 %]
FDP	302 [2.6 %]	270 [2.7 %]	283 [3.1 %]
The Left	922 [8.0 %]	832 [8.3 %]	708 [7.7 %]
Greens	1,734 [15.0 %]	1,488 [14.8 %]	1,518 [16.5 %]
Total	11,594 [100.0 %]	10,026 [100.0 %]	9,207 [100.0 %]

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; variations in differences among total n's for each wave due to participants who identified with other parties (not reported), multiple partisans not included; percentages per wave in angular shaped parentheses. Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2013: AfD: 4.7 %, CDU/CSU: 41.5 %, SPD: 25.7 %, FDP: 4.8 %, The Left: 8.6 %, Greens 8.4 %; Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2017: AfD: 12.6 %, CDU/CSU: 32.9 %, SPD: 20.5 %, FDP: 10.7 %, The Left: 9.2 %, Greens 8.9 % (figures taken from official election statistics).

Strength of party identification among partisans of the AfD did not change in large amounts between 2014 and 2016. On average, AfD-partisans are mildly dissatisfied with their personal income. According to the 3-pointed Likert scale, AfD-partisans seriously worry about immigration from foreign countries to Germany. As reported in other studies (Blumenberg/Blumenberg 2017, Kroh/Fetz 2016), the average monthly wages among partisans of the AfD lie slightly above the average income in the FRG, although the average income among AfD-partisans slightly decreased between 2014 and 2016.¹⁰ Considering that the wages of German employees were fairly stable in the reported time-span,¹¹ this trend might mirror the party's opening towards middle-class-situated electorates after Bernd Lucke having resigned from his position as a party leader in 2015. Furthermore the average age among AfD-partisans decreased from 54.5 to 50.1 years, indicating an opening towards new, younger electorates as well.

There are more partisans of the AfD who report living in East than in West Germany, although the share of West Germans noticeably increased from 25 percent to 40 percent in 2015. These figures are not very surprising considering that the AfD started winning seats very early in its history not only in the Eastern, but also in the Western Länder. All in all, these descriptive figures indicate that not only specific groups such as high income-classes or older voters sympathize with the AfD, but that sympathy with the AfD proliferates into electorates who are situated comparatively close to the centres of society.

¹⁰ It has to be noted, that those participants were excluded from the analyses who did not earn a labor-income or who were reluctant to report their personal income. Thus, the means reported here might over-represent persons with average to high incomes and underrepresent those who earn low wages or who are unemployed.

¹¹ See the official wage statistics offered by the Federal Office of Statistics (accessed: 8th September, 2018): <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/75731/umfrage/entwicklung-der-bruttolohnen-in-deutschland/>.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for AfD-partisans

	Strength of PI	Dissatisfaction with personal income	Worried about immigration	Age	Wages (p. month/pers.)	West vs. East Germany
2014	3.71 (.74) n=128	4.49 (2.33) n=125	2.55 (.58) n=128	54.5 (16.8) n=128	2,829.44 (2059.42) n=82	1.25 (.43) n=128
2015	3.45 (.96) n=185	4.45 (2.57) n=178	2.80 (.46) n=185	53.1 (16.6) n=184	2,521.01 (1,621.72) n=109	1.36 (.48) n=184
2016	3.65 (.82) n=350	4.72 (2.84) n=345	2.90 (.31) n=350	50.1 (16.4) n=350	2,657.20 (1,661.31) n=222	1.40 (.49) n=350

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; standard deviations in parantheses, weighted means (cross-sectional weights)

Coding: Strength of party identification (PI): 1= very weak to 5=very strong; Dissatisfaction with personal income: 0=very low to 10= very high; Worried about immigration: 1=not worried to 3=worry strongly; Wages measured in Euro per month and person; West (1) vs. East (2) Germany.

For each party, we see a relatively stable strength of party identification during each wave (table 3). Means between parties do not differ very much and changes in the strength of party identification for each party over time are, at best, marginal. Further research is needed to highlight intra-individual changes in the strength of party identifications as well as changes of supported parties during time that may underlie these trends (Neundorf et al. 2011).

Comparing percentages of AfD-, FDP- and Greens-partisans with those in the SOEP with the results from the federal elections in 2013 and 2017, the already known biases occur. One reason for these biases might be that reported party identifications are not congruent with voting behavior. Furthermore, there is reason to assume that these biases depend, at least to a certain extent, on self-selection issues due to the perceived social desirability to withhold reporting their favored party might be very high among those participants who feel a cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) between their former party identification and their newly emerging identification with the AfD. Empirical evidence on this issue is still pending so more research is needed here. Furthermore, the number of partisans of the Greens in each wave is clearly overrepresented. As an explanation, a rational choice theoretical approach could be offered (Schnell 1997): those participants whose values and preferences are congruent with the – assumed – goals of the survey or survey institute are more willing to cooperate during the interviews than those who feel of the interviewers as being in compliance with state or other institutions that are declined by the interviewees. In future research, thus, partisans' trust in and satisfaction with state institutions should be correlated with indicators for unwillingness to cooperate during empirical interviews and, thus, of unit-nonresponse.

Table 3: Strength of party identifications (comparison between parties)

	AfD	CDU/ CSU	SPD	FDP	The Left	Greens	n p. year
2014	3.71 (.74) n=128 [1.8 %]	3.42 (.72) n=3,066 [42.3 %]	3.42 (.70) n=2,162 [29.8 %]	3.44 (.74) n=200 [2.7 %]	3.47 (.74) n=578 [8.0 %]	3.41 (.63) n=1,115 [15.4 %]	7,249 [100.0 %]
2015	3.45 (.96) n=185 [2.7 %]	3.43 (.71) n=2,829 [42.1 %]	3.39 (.73) n=2,026 [30.1 %]	3.50 (.81) n=183 [2.7 %]	3.48 (.73) n=499 [7.5 %]	3.47 (.66) n=1,006 [15.0 %]	6,728 [100.0 %]
2016	3.65 (.82) n=350 [5.2 %]	3.40 (.76) n=2,792 [41.7 %]	3.38 (.78) n=1,812 [27.0 %]	3.52 (.82) n=219 [3.3 %]	3.41 (.68) n=478 [7.1 %]	3.47 (.71) n=1,049 [15.7 %]	6,700 [100.0 %]

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; coding: 1= very weak to 5=very strong; weighted means (cross-sectional weights); standard deviations in round parentheses; percentages per wave in angular shaped parentheses. Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2013: AfD: 4.7 %, CDU/CSU: 41.5 %, SPD: 25.7 %, FDP: 4.8 %, The Left: 8.6 %, Greens 8.4 %; Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2017: AfD: 12.6 %, CDU/CSU: 32.9 %, SPD: 20.5 %, FDP: 10.7 %, The Left: 9.2 %, Greens 8.9 % (figures taken from official election statistics).

Next, it becomes clear that AfD-partisans and partisans of the Left report the highest means for dissatisfaction with personal income among all established parties in the FRG (table 4), although the latter ones' mildly decreased between 2014 and 2016. Partisans of the CDU/CSU and of the FDP report the lowest amount of dissatisfaction for each wave.

Table 4: Dissatisfaction with personal income (comparison between parties)

	AfD	CDU/ CSU	SPD	FDP	The Left	Greens	n p. year
2014	4.49 (2.33) n=125 [1.8 %]	3.15 (2.24) n=3,010 [42.2 %]	3.45 (2.28) n=2,130 [29.9 %]	3.22 (2.72) n=196 [2.7 %]	4.29 (2.60) n=573 [8.0 %]	3.29 (2.44) n=1,096 [15.4 %]	7,130 [100.0 %]
2015	4.45 (2.57) n=178 [2.7 %]	3.04 (2.19) n=2,778 [42.0 %]	3.26 (2.26) n=1,998 [30.2 %]	2.74 (2.38) n=177 [2.7 %]	4.10 (2.40) n=495 [7.5 %]	3.08 (2.28) n=986 [15.0 %]	6,612 [100.0 %]
2016	4.72 (2.84) n=345 [5.2 %]	2.86 (2.11) n=2,741 [41.6 %]	3.18 (2.13) n=1,781 [2.7 %]	2.97 (2.41) n=214 [3.2 %]	3.80 (2.29) n=474 [7.2 %]	3.10 (2.26) n=1,032 [15.7 %]	6,587 % [100,0]

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; coding: 0=very low to 10= very high; weighted means (cross-sectional weights); standard deviations in round parentheses; percentages per wave in angular shaped parentheses. Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2013: AfD: 4.7 %, CDU/CSU: 41.5 %, SPD: 25.7 %, FDP: 4.8 %, The Left: 8.6 %, Greens 8.4 %; Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2017: AfD: 12.6 %, CDU/CSU: 32.9 %, SPD: 20.5 %, FDP: 10.7 %, The Left: 9.2 %, Greens 8.9 % (figures taken from official election statistics).

Compared to all other parties, partisans of the AfD are the ones who worry most about immigrants moving to Germany. This descriptive result indicates that, according to the cultural backlash hypothesis (Köppel-Turyna/Grünwald 2017), perceptions of cultural threat towards foreign groups could play an important role for electorates identifying with right-wing populist parties. Due to the very unspecific character of the empirical indicator in the SOEP-data, further analyses on whether these worries about immigration correlate with socioeconomic insecurities or with feelings of cultural threat are necessary. What is also striking is that worries about immigration increased among each party's partisans. Methodical

difficulties when measuring worries about immigration that might, at least to a certain extent, account for these results will be discussed in the concluding section of this study.

Table 5: Worries about immigration to Germany (comparison between parties)

	AfD	CDU/ CSU	SPD	FDP	The Left	Greens	n p. year
2014	2.55 (.58) n=128 [1.8 %]	2.00 (.72) n=3,066 [42.3 %]	1.87 (.75) n=2,162 [29.8 %]	1.67 (.74) n=200 [2.8 %]	1.92 (.79) n=578 [8.0 %]	1.40 (.56) n=1,115 [15.4 %]	7,249 [100.0 %]
2015	2.80 (.46) n=185 [2.7 %]	2.14 (.73) n=2,829 [42.0 %]	1.95 (.74) n=2,026 [30.1 %]	1.85 (.78) n=183 [2.7 %]	1.95 (.83) n=499 [7.4 %]	1.53 (.61) n=1,006 [15.0 %]	6,728 [100.0 %]
2016	2.90 (.31) n=350 [5.2 %]	2.36 (.67) n=2,792 [41.7 %]	2.21 (.73) n=1,812 [27.0 %]	2.14 (.70) n=219 [3.3 %]	2.11 (.79) n=478 [7.1 %]	1.78 (.65) n=1,049 [15.7 %]	6,700 [100.0 %]

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; coding: 1=not worried to 3=worry strongly; weighted means (cross-sectional weights); standard deviations in round parentheses; percentages per wave in angular shaped parentheses. Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2013: AfD: 4.7 %, CDU/CSU: 41.5 %, SPD: 25.7 %, FDP: 4.8 %, The Left: 8.6 %, Greens 8.4 %; Shares of parliamentary seats, federal election 2017: AfD: 12.6 %, CDU/CSU: 32.9 %, SPD: 20.5 %, FDP: 10.7 %, The Left: 9.2 %, Greens 8.9 % (figures taken from official election statistics).

For the multivariate analyses, two methods were applied; a pooled OLS-regression as well as a fixed effects regression. Affected by a low percentage of participants identifying with the AfD in the first two waves of this study (see table 1), standard errors in the fixed effects model are comparatively large (see table 6). Therefore, the discussion will focus the results of the pooled model, although a short outlook on the fixed effects-method will be given in the remainder of this section. It has to be kept in mind that the pooled OLS-approach treats the underlying panel data as cross sectional data. Thus, it does not allow for interpretation of changes within individuals between 2014 and 2016 (Wooldridge 2009: 445-454). Considering the explorative character of this study, this constraint is in order.

Regarding our key assumptions, only the cultural backlash-hypothesis is significantly supported by the data: the stronger partisans worry about foreigners immigrating to Germany the stronger they identify with the AfD (see table 6). With each additional score for worries about immigration the strength of party identification with the AfD increases by .426 scale-points. The economic insecurity-hypothesis is also valid for both men and women as well as for voters living in West and, albeit on a weak level of significance, in East Germany (tables 7 and 8 in the appendix). In contrast, there is no empirical evidence for the economic insecurity-hypothesis. Furthermore, there is a significant, but negligible positive effect of monthly income on strength of party identification among AfD-partisans.

To control for variations in the strength of party identification during the years under consideration, year-dummies were introduced to the pooled model (Wooldridge 2009: 445). In 2015 as well as in 2016, each coefficient indicates a lower strength of party identification compared to the base year, 2014. These results are in accordance with the descriptive findings earlier in this section (see table 2), although changes in strength of party identifications are only marginal in character.

Table 6: Strength of party identifications among AfD-partisans

Regressors	Coeff. (Pooled OLS)	Coeff. (FE Regr.)
Dissatisfaction with personal income	.007 (.019)	.019 (.044)
Worried about immigration	.426 *** (.098)	.135 (.172)
Age	-.005 (.004)	.034 (.064)
Monthly income	.000 * (.000)	.000 (.000)
Year: 2015	-.266 * (.129)	-
Year: 2016	-.218 + (.119)	-
Intercept	2.67 *** (.334)	2.045 (2.838)
n	408	408
F-statistics	4.17	1.01
Adj. R-squared	.044	.004
Sigma u	-	1.022
Sigma e	-	.613
Rho	-	.736

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; coding: s. tables above; unstandardized estimators, standard errors in parentheses; unbalanced panel.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$

Due to the large standard errors, the fixed effects regression yields no significant results. Sample statistics for the third wave of this study (see tables 1 and 2) indicate that the share of interviewees who identify with the AfD might increase during the upcoming data collections of the SOEP. Furthermore, it might be expected that the AfD will not sustain a dramatic loss among its potential partisans in the future. Number of cases for future fixed as well as for random effects or hybrid models should be expected to increase.

VII Discussion and outlook

This study provides an explorative analysis of economic and socio-cultural influences on the strength of party identifications among AfD-partisans. Results of a multivariate trend analysis based on a pooled OLS-regression model provided empirical support for the cultural backlash-hypothesis. The economic insecurity-hypothesis had to be declined, instead, which is in accordance with recent studies by Köppl-Turyna and Grunewald (2017) and, partly, by Lengfeld (2017): It is not merely economic insecurity that drives electorates to strongly identify with the AfD, but being worried about foreign immigration to Germany.

On descriptive grounds it could be shown that the social structure of AfD-partisans slightly changed between 2014 and 2016: both, the average age as well as the average income among AfD-partisans decreased indicating that the AfD recently more supporters who are situated closer to the centres of society than in the founding days of the party. It is the task of future research to reveal whether this trend is stable or not.

Furthermore, descriptive results showed that an increase in worries about immigration is not an exclusive phenomenon among AfD-partisans. Although means vary between parties, increasing worries about immigration could be reported for all partisan-groups between 2014 and 2015. Based on the SOEP-indicator it was not possible to differentiate between several understandings or narratives of worry. It is reason to assume that for partisans of right wing parties worrying about immigration is associated with feelings of cultural threat while for partisans of other partisans worry might be associated with humanistic

or cosmopolitan values.¹² Further analyses are necessary to take into consideration these different narratives of worry in research on party identifications.

Several methodical and empirical limitations throughout this study have to be taken into considerations. First, the sample did neither contain unemployed interviewees nor were state benefits taken into consideration as a source of monthly income. The resulting coefficients are thus biased towards higher income groups. Future research should take into consideration effects of these social constraints on strength of party identifications among AfD-partisans. Second, samples for each wave are still considerably small, although an increase in sample sizes is expectable in the future. Third, this study focused on effects of time-varying constructs on strength of party identifications. Future studies should broaden the theoretical and empirical perspective to allow for implementing time-constant covariates as well. Comparisons between men and women or various educational backgrounds should be made feasible in the future. Fourth, throughout this study one indicator for economic insecurity and one for sociocultural attitudes were used. Future research could focus more than these two indicators offered in the SOEP or other databases, such as perceived job insecurity, general life-satisfaction, feelings of social isolation, or attitudes towards European integration (Göbel et al. 2018). Fifth, the present study concentrated on strength of party identifications as an object of sociological explanation. It is also a very important to find out what affects electorates to switch their party identifications, especially when newly-founded parties such as the AfD enter the market for electoral votes. The research on socio economic and socio-cultural causes for the success of right wing populist parties has just begun.

¹² This differentiation underlies recent studies on newly emerging social and political cleavages. For theoretical as well as empirical insights see the works collected by Enyedi and Deegan-Krause (2013) and Kriesi et al. (2008).

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Appendix

Table 7: Strength of party identifications among AfD-partisans, men vs. women

Regressors	(1) Men		(2) Women	
	Coeff. (Pooled OLS)	Coeff. (FE Regr.)	Coeff. (Pooled OLS)	Coeff. (FE Regr.)
Dissatisfaction with personal income	.010 (.023)	.027 (.053)	.000 (.036)	-.064 (.105)
Worried about immigration	.390 *** (.109)	.058 (.182)	.584 ** (.223)	.933 (.622)
Age	.000 (.004)	.039 (.069)	-.020 ** (.007)	.064 (.171)
Monthly income	.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	-.001 (.001)
Year: 2015	-.282 + (.150)	-	-.144 (.244)	-
Year: 2016	-.290 * (.138)	-	.019 (.228)	-
Intercept	2.674 *** (.374)	2.075 (3.083)	2.267 *** (.734)	.260 (7.496)
n	282	282	126	126
F-statistics	2.63	.086	3.14	.69
Adj. R-squared	.034	.000	.093	.002
Sigma u	-	1.014	-	1.836
Sigma e	-	.572	-	.763
Rho	-	.758	-	.853

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; coding: s. tables above; unstandardized estimators, standard errors in parantheses; unbalanced panel.

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, + p < .10

Table 8: Strength of party identifications among AfD-partisans, East vs. West Germany

Regressors	(1) East Germany		(2) West Germany	
	Coeff. (Pooled OLS)	Coeff. (FE Regr.)	Coeff. (Pooled OLS)	Coeff. (FE Regr.)
Dissatisfaction with personal income	.057 (.037)	-.016 (.069)	-.019 (.023)	.035 (.057)
Worried about immigration	.345 + (.186)	.002 (.190)	.439 *** (.116)	.230 (.254)
Age	-.001 (.007)	.181 * (.076)	-.007 + (.005)	-.041 (.089)
Monthly income	.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)	.000 + (.000)	-.000 (.000)
Year: 2015	-.413 + (.235)	-	-.159 (.156)	-
Year: 2016	-.155 (.224)	-	-.242 + (.140)	-
Intercept	2.522 *** (.621)	-4.400 (3.433)	2.862 *** (.396)	5.508 (3.904)
n	153	153	255	255
F-statistics	1.90	1.77	3.32	1.02
Adj. R-squared	.034	.000	.052	.000
Sigma u	-	2.211	-	1.130
Sigma e	-	.423	-	.690
Rho	-	.965	-	.728

Source: SOEP 2014-2016; coding: s. tables above; unstandardized estimators, standard errors in parantheses; unbalanced panel.

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, + p < .10