

# Persistence and Activation of Right-Wing Political Ideology

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## Abstract

We argue that persistence of right-wing ideology can explain the recent rise of populism. Shifts in the supply of party platforms interact with an existing demand, giving rise to hitherto invisible patterns of persistence. The emergence of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) offered German voters a populist right-wing option with little social stigma attached. We show that municipalities that expressed strong support for the Nazi party in 1933 are more likely to vote for the AfD. These dynamics are not generated by a concurrent rightward shift in political attitudes, nor by other factors or shocks commonly associated with right-wing populism.

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# 1 Introduction

Throughout Western democracies, the rise of right-wing populism over the past decade has been swift and remarkable. Researchers have widely studied the causes of this trend. Several explanations have focused on demand-side shifts, triggered for example by immigration shocks (Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Piil Damm, 2019; Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller, 2017; Hangartner et al., 2019), by economic insecurity (Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Autor et al., 2020; Dehdari, 2021; Dippel et al., 2022), or to a cultural backlash against progressive value change (Inglehart and Norris, 2019). Other demand-side explanations have emphasized changes in voters' priorities, rather than changes in opinions and preferences (Bonomi, Gennaioli, and Tabellini, 2021; Enke, Polborn, and Wu, 2023). Finally, another set of explanations has focused on supply-side reasons, such as the emergence of new parties representing hitherto marginalized groups (Dal Bó et al., 2022) or the failure of traditional parties (Grzymala-Busse, 2019).<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we argue that to fully account for this phenomenon, the interaction between local cultural factors and changes in the political supply side has to be considered. A persistent, latent demand for right-wing ideology can become relevant when sudden rightward shifts occur in the set of options for electoral expression. This interaction can then lead to rapid changes in electoral outcomes even in the absence of sharp changes in the ideology of the electorate.

We study the rise of the “Alternative for Germany” (*Alternative für Deutschland*, henceforth AfD). Its emergence in the German political landscape has offered a new political platform on the far right: populist, nativist, nationalist, often outright xenophobic. We show how support for this party can be partially explained by considering the long-term persistent right-wing ideological beliefs at the municipality level, proxied by local support for the Nazi Party (NSDAP) in 1933. Importantly, we find no such correlation between Nazi and AfD voting in 2013, when the party was mostly viewed as fiscally conservative, while the correlation is positive and significant in the federal elections of 2017, 2021, and 2025, after the party had veered sharply to the right.

In our baseline specification, using a panel of municipal-level electoral returns for the federal (*Bundestag*) elections from 2013 until 2025, a one standard deviation increase in Nazi support is associated with 0.05 standard deviations more support for the AfD in the more recent elections. This result is robust to a series of alternative specifications, and is not confounded by other factors often associated with the rise of right-wing populist parties. Specifically, we find that controlling for other major determinants of the rise of right-wing populism proposed by the literature, such as unemployment, import competition, or the influx of refugees, does not affect the estimated historical persistence of Nazi voting. Importantly, we do not suggest that this finding should be seen as a *causal* effect of Nazi voting on contemporary electoral outcomes. Rather, we see Nazi vote share in 1933 as a proxy for a deep-seated, persistent right-wing ideology.

The sudden and quick transformation of the AfD in 2015 into a populist right-wing, but electorally viable and, in large parts of the population, socially accepted party is key to the interpretation of our findings.<sup>2</sup> We show that other, more extreme right-wing parties existing already before the AfD exhibit only a much lower correlation with Nazi vote share (one order of magnitude smaller than the AfD) in

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<sup>1</sup>This brief review of the literature is hardly exhaustive. Guriev and Papaioannou (2022) provide a rich summary of the literature. Danieli et al. (2023) pursue an analytic decomposition of the relative importance of these factors.

<sup>2</sup>While we exploit the entry and change in political positioning of the AfD, note that our argument does not rest on an assumption of the exogeneity of the *timing* of this shift. The AfD's rightward turn occurred in the spring/summer of 2015, and thus preceded the massive inflow of Syrian refugees that peaked in the following fall. A general, overall rightward shift in attitudes would be accounted for by the comparison of elections in different years (2013 vs. later years). For a single municipality, the new availability of the AfD as a populist right-wing option in 2017 was exogenous. It represented an expansion of the political supply that affected all regions equally, as the AfD was on the ballot in all states.

the federal elections from 1980 until today.

Our interpretation of the findings as a supply-side shift — a new, viable right-wing political platform — meeting an existing, persistent ideological demand would be incorrect if, instead, a sharp rightward move in attitudes had occurred over the same time period in the municipalities that had historically voted for the NSDAP. To exclude a contemporaneous demand-side shift, we use data from the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS). We find that respondents in municipalities with higher historical Nazi support expressed more right-wing attitudes along a wide range of questions throughout all waves studied (1996–2020), consistent with the interpretation of a persistent right-wing ideology in these areas. Importantly, however, we do not find a rightward shift in these municipalities after 2015, suggesting that there was no concurrent, local shift in demand that could explain the geography of electoral support of the AfD.

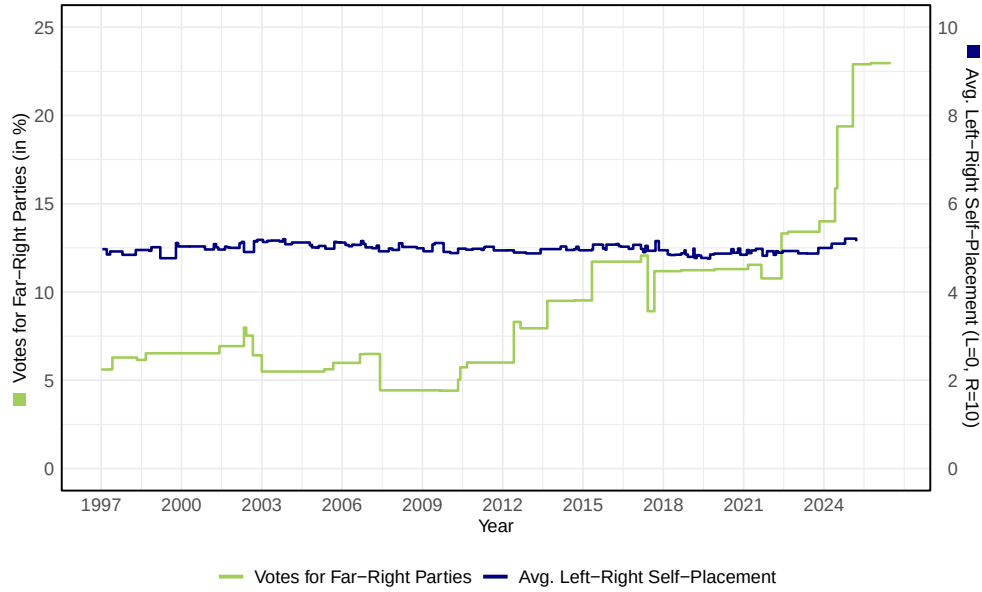
We interpret our findings in the context of the literature on cultural persistence, which has shown how norms and values often have roots in the distant past and are transmitted across generations. Such norms and values can have a first-order impact on a wide set of social and economic outcomes. And yet, not all historical shocks that shape culture and values manifest themselves up to the present: cultural persistence may be mediated or dampened by intervening factors (Giuliano and Nunn, 2021). Our research argues that for the understanding of cultural persistence one needs to distinguish between the persistence of cultural traits, such as xenophobia or antisemitism, and their activation, as they turn into manifest actions. Cultural traits may be present but dormant: antisemitism may be persistent but not result in pogroms; xenophobia may be persistent but not result in votes for extreme right-wing parties. The persistent, but latent demand for the expression of cultural attitudes will only result in actions once its manifestation becomes less costly.

Why, then, did a change in the availability of political options not occur earlier? Historical and institutional contingencies can explain this. The postwar legal setting and social consensus in Germany severely constrained the creation of parties at the extreme right fringe, through explicit prohibitions and social stigma. Before the AfD, no far-right party ever managed to pass the 5% threshold required to obtain seats in parliament. By starting as a party of fiscal conservatism, and moving to nationalist and xenophobic positions only after 2015, the AfD could avoid intense legal scrutiny and social stigma usually applied to far-right parties in Germany. Since then, voters in Germany have the option to vote and mobilize for a party that espouses a clearly far-right ideological platform, without the strong social stigma attached to previously existing extreme right-wing (often, neo-Nazi) parties. Finally, since 2017 the AfD has always been predicted to pass the 5% threshold comfortably; voting for it thus did not represent a pure protest/expressive vote.

We believe that this interpretation can help understand the increasing electoral success of newly founded, populist right-wing movements beyond the case of the AfD in Germany. Sudden shifts in electoral outcomes and the successful establishment of new populist, right-wing parties eschewing extremist or neo-fascist associations have been observed throughout Europe and the world. Figure 1 shows evidence from four additional Western European countries: France, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Sweden. For each of these countries (as well as Germany), we calculate vote shares going to far-right parties in national elections, from 1997 until today. From Eurobarometer surveys, we calculate the average left-right self-placement of individuals. We then add up results across five countries, weighting by population.

The aggregate share of votes going to far-right parties picks up in 2010 and rises in several steps through 2025, reaching approximately 23 percent. Major jumps in the aggregate share of votes for the far right are mostly caused either by entry of new parties (such as the AfD) or of new political lead-

**FIGURE 1: LEFT-RIGHT SELF-EVALUATION AND VOTES FOR THE FAR RIGHT**



*Notes:* The graph shows average left-right self-evaluation and votes for far right parties, 1997–2025, for five European countries: Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands (population-weighted average). Left-right self-evaluation is from Eurobarometer. Electoral data data are from the ParlGov database, <http://www.parlgov.org/>. We classified parties with a score of 7.8 or above as “far-right”. This includes, among others, UKIP, AfD, Front National, Sweden Democrats, and the Dutch Party for Freedom, in the category.

ers skilled in changing the terms of political communication (e.g., Geert Wilders in the Netherlands). In contrast to this increase, the time series of average left-right self-placement shows no comparable movement, remaining remarkably flat through 2025.

## 2 Studying the Rise of Far-Right Voting

Understanding the rise of right-wing populism has generated a robust and varied literature, reviewed, among others, by Golder (2016) and Guriev and Papaioannou (2021).<sup>3</sup> Economic insecurity, spurred by increasing globalization, the demise of traditional manufacturing, or the rise of automation, may explain part of this political shift (Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Anelli, Colantone, and Stanig, 2019; Autor et al., 2020; Dehdari, 2021; Malgouyres, 2017); so do increasing levels of immigrant population in (Western European) countries (Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller, 2017; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Piil Damm, 2019). Cultural factors are also discussed frequently: Inglehart and Norris (2016) argue that the recent rise of populism can best be understood as a reactionary response to a cultural change that is perceived as too fast and unsettling by some sectors of the population (Schwander and Manow, 2017; Ziblatt, Hilbig, and Bischof, 2020; and Gidron and Hall, 2020, also test the importance of the cultural dimension).

To our knowledge, we are among the first to bring two new factors, and the interaction thereof, to the explanation of the electoral successes of right-wing parties: we shed light on the role of long-standing, deeply ingrained political beliefs — this is especially salient in Germany, a country that experienced a

<sup>3</sup>See also the earlier works by Norris (2005), Mudde (2007), and Arzheimer (2008).

most destructive instance of fascism.<sup>4</sup> In addition, we emphasize the importance of political structures in facilitating the expression of right-wing ideology.

Our particular assessment of far-right voting is also related to the burgeoning literature on the long-term persistence of cultural traits and attitudes (Cirone and Pepinsky, 2021; Voth, 2021). As in several recent papers (Voigtländer and Voth, 2012; Jha, 2013; Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen, 2016; Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales, 2016; Becker et al., 2016; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017) we show that certain cultural traits — in our case, political attitudes — have deep origins and are transmitted across generations. Our findings add to a growing understanding that not all historical shocks that shape culture and values manifest themselves up to the present: cultural persistence may be mediated or dampened by intervening factors (Giuliano and Nunn, 2021). We also join a large literature studying specifically the legacy of Nazi history in Germany (Hoerner, Jaax, and Rodon, 2019; Homola, Pereira, and Tavits, 2020).

Additionally, the AfD’s electoral success shows that the historical persistence of political attitudes is not always visible, and may need to be “activated” by changes in the institutional setting or the political marketplace. This activation of historical memories has also been evidenced by recent scholarship. Fouka and Voth (2020) show how, as the debt crisis of 2010–2015 mounted, sales of German cars declined in Greek localities that witnessed massacres perpetrated by German forces in WWII. Similarly, the work by Suryanarayan (2019) also studies how an interaction between a historical legacy (1930s upper-caste dominance) and a policy change yields a surge of right-wing voting in 1990s India.

Another literature has focused on the endogenous choice of politicians to selectively exploit or activate feelings in the electorate: Glaeser (2005) and, more recently, Guiso et al. (2018) discuss how the supply of political platforms interacts with voters’ demand for policies such as hatred or populism. Charnysh (2015) demonstrates how antisemitic sentiments in Poland were activated by Eurosceptic politicians, leveraging latent beliefs. Recent work by Ochsner and Roesel (2019) studies a context close to ours — the populist right-wing FPÖ party in Austria — showing that this party is successful in unearthing a resentment against Turkish immigrants that dates back to the Ottoman sieges of Vienna in the 16th and 17th century. While in Ochsner and Roesel (2019) memories of Turkish massacres are not present in the population any more and are strategically inculcated by politicians, in our setting we argue that right-wing leanings are present throughout, and emerge incidentally as a consequence of the change in political landscape.

### 3 Historical and Institutional Context

#### 3.1 The Political Landscape in Germany

After the collapse of the Nazi regime, the reconstruction of the party system in West Germany faced two major challenges: preventing the rise of an extremist party, and integrating the 8.5 million former NSDAP members into the democratic system. These challenges were met through the creation of new parties and through special provisions in the post-war constitution.

On the political right, the main actor was the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). It built on the previous experience of the Catholic “Zentrum” party, but explicitly tried to appeal also to Protestant

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<sup>4</sup>Despite the availability of high-quality electoral data from the Weimar era, only few researchers have tried to correlate post-war political outcomes in the Federal Republic of Germany with past Nazi support: Liepelt (1967) showed that in 1966 there was a strong correlation between electoral successes of the NPD (a neo-Nazi party) and the NSDAP in 1932. See also the early contributions by Kaltefleiter (1966), Kühnl, Rilling, and Sager (1969), Sahner (1972), and Winkler (1994). Schwander and Manow (2017) point out how areas of AfD support voted for other, far-right parties in the years before 2017; we also document this correlation, but emphasize how the correlation has increased by an order of magnitude after the appearance of the AfD.

voters, who before the war largely supported nationalist and conservative parties. The CDU (and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU) succeeded in becoming the main “big tent” conservative party. Political parties emerging to the right of the CDU in later years garnered temporary support at best. The NPD (National Democratic Party) was founded in 1964 and enjoyed some temporary popularity in the late 1960s, and then again in the late 2000s in East Germany; the *Republikaner* (Republicans) were notable for their successes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, no party ever managed to break through the 5% threshold of votes required to gain representation in the *Bundestag*.<sup>5</sup>

Another factor constraining the success of far-right parties was a provision in the Basic Law (the post-war constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany) that enabled the Constitutional Court to disband extremist parties. Article 21.2 of the Basic Law states that “[p]arties that, by reason of their aims or the behavior of their adherents, seek to undermine or abolish the free democratic basic order or to endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany shall be unconstitutional.” This article was invoked twice with success.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2 The “Alternative for Germany” (AfD)

In September 2012 three individuals launched a manifesto opposing the German government’s response to the Euro crisis. The manifesto called for the foundation of a party, the “Alternative for Germany” (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or AfD), and explicitly ruled out that this party should take a stance on policy concerns other than the Euro crisis and the Greek bailout. Running on this platform, the AfD won 4.7% of the votes in the federal election of September 2013, narrowly missing the 5% threshold to enter the *Bundestag*.

Following the federal election, the AfD gained further strength, obtaining 7.1% of the votes in the European Parliament election of May 2014. This expansion meant that the party increasingly attracted conservatives of all sorts. The tensions between the initial group of party members — mostly fiscal conservatives — and the newer, nationalist, anti-immigration members became virulent in the spring of 2015 when two leading party functionaries published the “Erfurt Resolution,” calling for a policy of opposition to the “social experiments of the past decades (gender mainstreaming, multiculturalism) [...]” and encouraged the party leadership to embrace the xenophobic, anti-immigrant movement. At the following party congress in Essen, in July 2015, a member of the conservative, anti-immigrant wing was unexpectedly elected party leader with 60% of the vote, sanctioning the takeover of the party by its right-wing, nationalistic faction.

The “new” AfD quickly adopted a very different rhetoric, moving away from the fiscally conservative topics centering around the Euro and the Greek bailout, and focusing instead on mainstay themes of the European populist right: immigration, nationalism, and islamophobia. As a consequence, the AfD enjoyed considerable successes in the state elections held in 2016, obtaining over 20% of the votes in some states. At the federal election of September 2017 the AfD scored 12.6%, thus becoming the third largest force in the German Parliament: the first time that a conservative party to the right of the CDU would gain representation in the *Bundestag*. The AfD maintained substantial electoral support, winning 10.3% in 2021 and 20.8% in 2025.

<sup>5</sup>The ability of the CDU/CSU to squeeze out all margins on the right end of the political spectrum, all the while remaining solidly grounded in democratic and liberal principles, is well summarized by the long-time leader of the CSU, Franz Josef Strauss, who quipped in 1986 that there “*shall not be a democratically legitimate party to the right of the CSU.*”

<sup>6</sup>The NPD was twice brought to the Constitutional Court: in the early 2000s, when the case was dismissed on formal grounds, and in 2016-17, when the court ruled that, while the party’s ideology is unconstitutional, its support is too small to undermine the democratic order and thus to justify its ban.

### 3.3 The AfD: Offering a Low-Stigma, Right-Wing Political Option

We view the turn of the AfD from a monothematic, anti-Greek bailout party to a more traditional xenophobic, anti-immigrant right-wing party as a policy experiment in which an existing party changes its placement on the political spectrum, without changing the name, logo, or most of the party structures. For the first time in post-war German history, voters could choose a political party with a staunchly right-wing profile, without the social stigma attached to previous fringe parties.<sup>7</sup>

Importantly, much more than any other right-wing party to the right of the CDU, the AfD could claim a certain aura of respectability. This was true even after its more moderate, fiscally conservative founders had left in 2015. As described by Arzheimer (2015, p. 540), its *“success was only possible because the party was formed by ‘moderates’ with very high SES, considerable civic skills, and some political experience.”* This distinguishes the AfD from other right-wing parties such as the NPD or the *Republikaner*, who never managed to dismiss their extremist, even neo-Nazi image. Such parties were strongly stigmatized in the political discourse of post-war Germany and thus, lacking endorsement from “respectable” people, had difficulties in mobilizing any existing voter potential (Güllner, 2016). In its first years, the AfD was very careful not to accept members that had previously been active in organizations of the extreme right, and tried to avoid controversial statements on Germany’s Nazi past or the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

A final, important dimension of the AfD as a viable political option is that the party, prior to the federal election of September 2017, had a realistic chance of passing the 5% threshold and entering parliament. In all state elections between 2016 and 2017 the AfD had passed the threshold, and obtained up to 24.1% of the vote. Voters in 2017 thus had the plausible expectation that the AfD would pass the threshold at the national level. A vote for the AfD was thus not merely an act of protest/expressive voting (Fiorina, 1976). This, again, distinguishes the AfD from other parties to the right of the CDU, which never polled close to 5% nationally.

## 4 Data Description

### 4.1 Electoral Data

Our electoral data are drawn from the official website of the Federal Returning Officer (*Bundeswahlleiter*) for the federal elections to the *Bundestag* in September 2013, 2017, 2021, and in February 2025. The data are provided at the municipality (*Gemeinde*) level. Data for the federal elections are obtained from DESTATIS, the German federal statistical office. From 1998, we harmonize all results to reflect the geography of municipalities in 2015.<sup>9</sup>

For the electoral results of right-wing parties during the Weimar Republic, we make use of the path-breaking work of Jürgen Falter and Dirk Hänisch (Falter and Hänisch, 1990), who digitized the votes for the *Reichstag* elections from 1920 until 1933 as published in the series *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*. In all years, except for the two elections of 1932 (July and November), electoral results were published at the level of counties as a whole (*Kreis* or *Stadtkreis*), and then separately for all municipalities above 2,000 inhabitants contained in a county.<sup>10</sup> We match present-day electoral outcomes to Weimar-era party

<sup>7</sup>See Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri (2015) and Arzheimer (2015) for early analyses of the party’s populist communication strategy.

<sup>8</sup>Most newly-founded extreme right-wing parties in Germany are immediately scrutinized by the German domestic intelligence agency. By developing out of an existing, “bourgeois” party, the present-day AfD managed to avoid this fate.

<sup>9</sup>This algorithm is explained in Appendix A.2

<sup>10</sup>From this disaggregation, we can easily reconstruct the aggregate votes for all municipalities contained in a county, but below the 2,000 inhabitants threshold (the “remainder of the county”). For the elections of 1932, no data at a level of disaggregation

support through a geocoding algorithm.<sup>11</sup> To capture the voter mobilization angle (extensive margin), we use “gross vote shares”, i.e. the number of votes cast for the AfD divided by the number of eligible voters (rather than by total votes cast).

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY STATISTICS**

|                                                    | (1)<br>Mean | (2)<br>Std.Dev. | (3)<br>Min | (4)<br>Max | (5)<br>Obs. |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>PANEL A: Voting outcomes</b>                    |             |                 |            |            |             |
| AfD vote share, 2013–2025 (gross)                  | 0.11        | 0.09            | 0.00       | 0.57       | 42548       |
| NSDAP vote share, March 1933                       | 0.50        | 0.14            | 0.03       | 0.93       | 10637       |
| NSDAP vote share, Sept. 1930                       | 0.19        | 0.11            | 0.01       | 0.78       | 10624       |
| NSDAP vote share, May 1928                         | 0.03        | 0.04            | 0.00       | 0.63       | 10586       |
| DVFP vote share, May 1924                          | 0.07        | 0.07            | 0.00       | 0.59       | 10420       |
| DNVP vote share, May 1924                          | 0.19        | 0.17            | 0.00       | 0.81       | 10420       |
| <b>PANEL B: Control Variables</b>                  |             |                 |            |            |             |
| Share unemployed, 2013–2025                        | 0.03        | 0.02            | 0.00       | 0.22       | 42548       |
| Log population, 1933                               | 10.05       | 0.91            | 7.36       | 13.59      | 10569       |
| Log population, 2015                               | 7.60        | 1.44            | 3.87       | 14.19      | 10637       |
| Share employed in industry and manufacturing, 1925 | 0.30        | 0.13            | 0.04       | 0.90       | 8642        |
| Share employed in trade and commerce, 1925         | 0.10        | 0.05            | 0.02       | 0.52       | 8642        |
| Share employed in administration, 1925             | 0.03        | 0.01            | 0.01       | 0.43       | 8642        |
| Share unemployed, 1933                             | 0.05        | 0.03            | 0.01       | 0.22       | 8248        |
| Share Catholic, 1925                               | 0.41        | 0.40            | 0.00       | 1.00       | 9945        |
| Share Jewish, 1925                                 | 0.00        | 0.01            | 0.00       | 0.14       | 9945        |
| Share Catholic, 2011                               | 0.34        | 0.31            | 0.00       | 1.00       | 9810        |
| Share other/no religion, 2011                      | 0.31        | 0.21            | 0.00       | 0.95       | 9808        |
| Share refugees, 2016                               | 0.00        | 0.00            | 0.00       | 0.05       | 10552       |
| Trade exposure, $\Delta$ 2008–1998                 | -0.93       | 1.77            | -16.11     | 12.94      | 10610       |
| Share expellees, 1940–50s                          | 0.21        | 0.12            | 0.02       | 0.54       | 10475       |
| Share workers with tertiary education, 2015        | 0.10        | 0.03            | 0.05       | 0.40       | 10637       |

*Notes:* Entries are unweighted summaries from the balanced set of German municipalities observed in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025, except city states and the Saarland. AfD gross vote shares and contemporary unemployment are pooled across the four municipality-year cross-sections; time-invariant variables are counted once per municipality. Observation counts are variable-specific. Geographic municipalities are harmonized for the year 2015. Gross vote shares are votes cast divided by the total of eligible voters. See A.1 for more detail on sources and definitions of the variables.

## 4.2 Other Variables

We complement our analysis of electoral results with a range of historical and contemporary control variables, used for robustness checks in the main analysis and in the Online Appendix. For the Weimar era, we rely on the same dataset by Falter and Hänisch (1990), which also contains statistics on, among others, population, unemployment, employment structure, and religious composition in 1925 and 1933.

below the county were published.

<sup>11</sup>Based on the geographic location, a current municipality is either matched to a city-county (*Stadtkreis*) of the Weimar era, or to one of the municipalities whose electoral data is known because it had more than 2,000 inhabitants. We call these municipalities “exact matches”. The remaining municipalities are then assigned, based on their location, to the entity “remainder of the county”, i.e. to the aggregate electoral results in a historical county, *outside* the municipalities with more than 2,000 inhabitants. Typically, for any Weimar-era observation relating to the “remainder of the county”, there will be several present-day municipalities matched. We account for this by clustering our regression analysis at the level of observation in the Weimar era (*Stadtkreis*, municipality above 2,000 inhabitants, or “remainder of the county”). See Appendix A.3 for further details.



For the contemporary period, we resort to official statistics from DESTATIS or the Federal Employment Agency.<sup>12</sup> A major shock often blamed for the rise of right-wing populism is the loss of qualified manufacturing jobs over the last decades, due to import competition from China or other low-wage countries. We capture these forces through the “trade exposure” variable (import competition minus export competition), measured at the county level, from Dauth, Findeisen, and Südekum (2014).

Finally, we analyze public opinion data to investigate whether a localized shift towards more right-wing viewpoints is responsible for the AfD’s electoral success. We use the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS), an opinion survey conducted as a repeated cross-section every two years (we use the waves spanning the period 1996–2018). These data are described in more detail in section 6 below.

## 5 Electoral Results

### 5.1 Empirical Setup

How did the emergence of the AfD as a new, relatively cheap (in terms of social image costs) and viable political option to the right of the CDU result in a realignment of the electoral geography of Germany, reflecting older patterns of Nazi party support? In our baseline research design we compare electoral results in the elections to the federal parliament in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025: i.e., before and after 2015, the watershed year in which fiscal conservatives were replaced by right-wing populists in the party leadership. In 2013, running on a strict anti-Euro platform, the AfD barely missed the 5% threshold to enter the federal parliament; in 2017, the AfD became the third largest force in the German Parliament, scoring 12.6%.

Our baseline regression specification is as follows:

$$\text{ShareAfD}_{it} = \theta_i + \varphi_{s(i)t} + \beta \cdot \text{NSDAP}_i \times \text{Post 2015}_t + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad t \in \{2013, 2017, 2021, 2025\} \quad (1)$$

where  $\text{ShareAfD}_{it}$  is the gross vote share of the AfD in municipality  $i$  in year  $t$ . Note that, in our baseline setting, we calculate the share of votes relative to *all* eligible voters, not just relative to votes cast. We do this in order to incorporate two margins of voter mobilization towards the AfD: switching from non-voting to the AfD, or from other parties to the AfD. The dependent variable is regressed on a full set of municipality fixed effects,  $\theta_i$ , state-year fixed effects,  $\varphi_{s(i)t}$ , and an interaction term between the (standardized) vote share of the NSDAP party in 1933,  $\text{NSDAP}_i$ , and an indicator for the time after the AfD’s right-ward shift,  $\text{Post 2015}_t$ . To facilitate the interpretation of the coefficients, all variables, dependent and explanatory, are standardized, and thus have a mean equal to zero and a standard deviation of one.<sup>13</sup> Following our hypotheses developed in the introduction, we expect  $\beta$  to be positive and significant.

Of the 10,963 municipalities in the sample, 2,466 are exactly matched to the same municipality in the Weimar era; the remaining municipalities are assigned one of 259 Weimar-era “remainders of a county”. To account for potential correlation between these multiple observations assigned to a single historical electoral result, we cluster all error terms  $\varepsilon_{it}$  at the Weimar-era unit of observation (either exactly matched municipality, or “remainder of the county”).

<sup>12</sup>See Appendix Section A.1 for details.

<sup>13</sup>Note that we ignore the election results from the federal state of Saarland, as the Saar region did not vote for the *Reichstag* in the Weimar era, being under French occupation).

## 5.2 Baseline Electoral Results and Spatial Correlations

Table 2 reports our first results. The first column shows that the historical relationship between NSDAP votes and AfD support in 2013 is positive, but small and insignificant. However, looking at support for the AfD in the federal elections of 2017, 2021, and 2025, when the AfD represented a populist right, xenophobic platform, the results are very different. The correlation is positive and significant in each of these elections: a one standard deviation increase in NSDAP votes in the Weimar era corresponds to an increase in vote share for the AfD by 5.34%, 7.64%, and 7.78% of a standard deviation, respectively (columns 2–4).

**TABLE 2: FIRST RESULTS**

|                               | (1)<br>AfD<br>2013 | (2)<br>AfD<br>2017    | (3)<br>AfD<br>2021    | (4)<br>AfD<br>2025    | (5)<br>AfD<br>2013-25 | (6)<br>AfD<br>2013-25 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]             | 0.0299<br>(0.0254) | 0.0534***<br>(0.0185) | 0.0765***<br>(0.0150) | 0.0778***<br>(0.0163) |                       |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] × Post 2015 |                    |                       |                       |                       | 0.0488***<br>(0.0130) |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] × 2017      |                    |                       |                       |                       |                       | 0.0272**<br>(0.0119)  |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] × 2021      |                    |                       |                       |                       |                       | 0.0469***<br>(0.0114) |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] × 2025      |                    |                       |                       |                       |                       | 0.0723***<br>(0.0174) |
| State FE                      | ✓                  | ✓                     | ✓                     | ✓                     |                       |                       |
| State-Year FE                 |                    |                       |                       |                       | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Municipality FE               |                    |                       |                       |                       | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Observations                  | 10637              | 10637                 | 10637                 | 10637                 | 42548                 | 42548                 |
| R2                            | 0.20               | 0.71                  | 0.79                  | 0.75                  | 0.95                  | 0.95                  |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the standardized gross vote share of the AfD, i.e. the number of valid votes relative to eligible voters. The explanatory variable is the standardized NSDAP vote share in March 1933. Sample includes all municipalities in all German states apart from city states (Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen), and the Saarland, harmonized on their 2015 administrative borders. Columns 1-3 provide results for cross-sectional regressions. Columns 4-5 show results from panel data regressions as detailed in Equation 1. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historic municipalities/counties. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively. See main text for further details.

The effect is stronger in the later elections (columns 2–4). In the fixed-effect panel specification from Equation 1 any unobserved time-constant municipality characteristics are differenced out, but the effect remains similar (column 5). Substituting  $\text{Post 2015}_t$  with election-year dummies for 2017, 2021, and 2025 shows that the effect becomes progressively more pronounced across these elections (column 6).

How large, quantitatively, is the explanatory power of our proposed determinant of right-wing voting? The baseline regressions suggest a standardized effect size (beta coefficient) of approximately 6%. In the Appendix, we compare this result to the effect of other plausible determinants of populist right-wing voting that have been discussed in the literature: unemployment levels, the increase in trade exposure, and the allocation of refugees in municipalities (see Appendix Table C.1). The standardized beta coefficients for the correlations estimated there are in a similar range of magnitude (between 1%

and 4% in absolute terms) as the standardized beta coefficient relating to the NSDAP vote share (7.9%). A comparison of the partial  $R^2$  values leads to similar conclusions: the cultural persistence factor explains about 1.8% of the variance of the outcome, while the other factors range between 0.06% and 0.64%. This simple variance decomposition thus suggests that, while cultural persistence clearly is only one among many factors associated with the rise of populist right-wing parties, the magnitude of the correlation is comparable to other factors often mentioned in the literature.

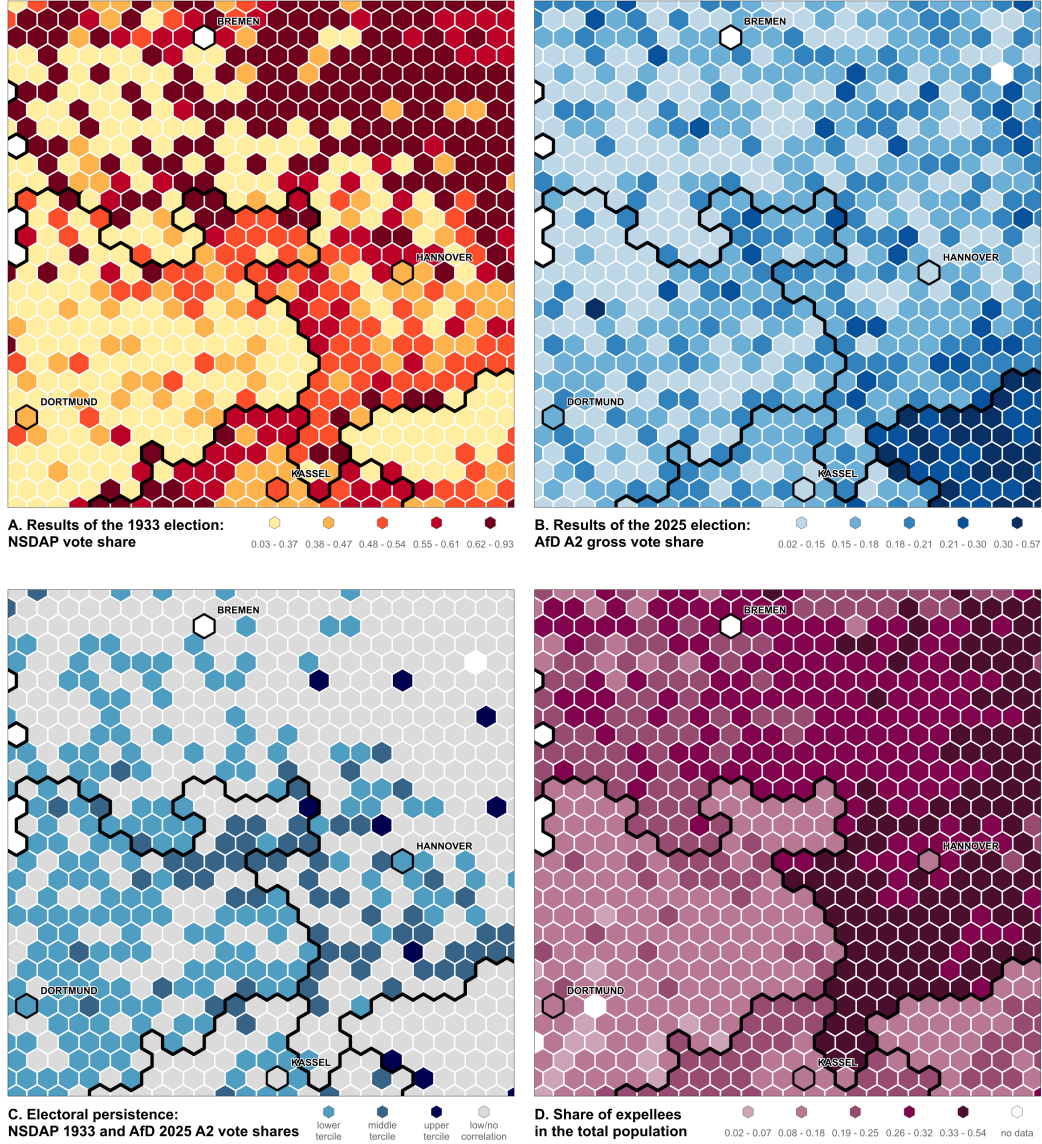
Figure 2 provides an exemplary geographic depiction of the electoral patterns studied here.<sup>14</sup> In these maps, every hexagon corresponds to one municipality. Panel A shows the outcome (NSDAP vote shares) of the 1933 election; Panel B the outcome of the 2017 election (AfD vote shares). Some smooth spatial gradients are evident, as well as apparently very idiosyncratic, highly localized patterns of variation in party support.

Panel C combines these two spatial distributions and displays areas of historical continuity in voting patterns. To provide a visual comparison, we divide municipalities into terciles of NSDAP and of AfD vote shares (lower, middle and upper terciles), resulting in 9 possible combinations. Municipalities that conform to our hypothesis were in the lower (middle, upper) tercile of NSDAP support in 1933, and are in the lower (middle, upper) tercile of AfD support today. We color these municipalities in shades of blue. The remaining municipalities are those in which NSDAP results in 1933 do not map into current outcomes for the AfD: e.g, municipalities with high rates of NSDAP support historically, but low support for the AfD today. They are colored in grey. As Panel C shows, a large number of municipalities are conforming to our hypothesis: at the high, middle, and low end of the range of right-wing support.

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<sup>14</sup>Figure 2 focuses on a region in North/Central Germany, between Bremen, Hanover, Dortmund, and Kassel, at the intersection of four states (Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse, and Thuringia). We provide full maps of Germany in Appendix B.

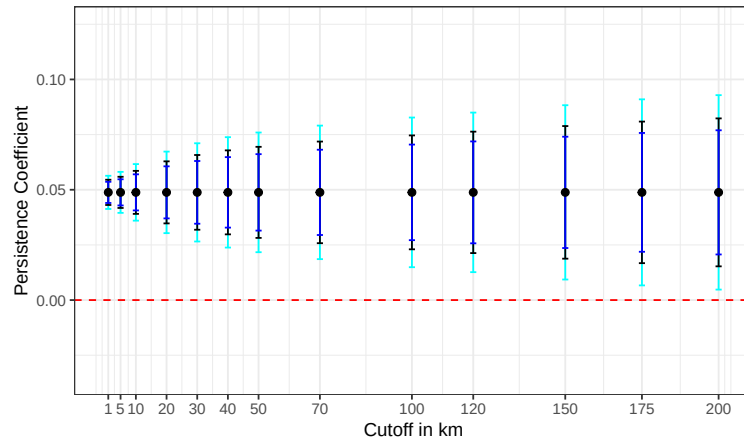
FIGURE 2: ELECTORAL PERSISTENCE



*Notes:* The map shows electoral results, at the municipal level, for a subset of Germany. Every hexagon corresponds to one municipality. Panel A shows 1933 NSDAP vote shares; Panel B shows 2025 AfD gross vote shares. The color scale corresponds to quintiles. Panel C evidences areas of historical persistence. Blue hexagons (of different shades) indicate municipalities that were both in the upper (middle, lower) tercile of NSDAP votes in 1933, and in the upper (middle, lower) tercile of AfD votes in 2025. Grey hexagons are municipalities in which NSDAP support is not correlated with current AfD support. Panel D displays the spatial distribution of post-WII expellees as a fraction of resident population in ca. 1950.

The electoral patterns visible in Figure 2 suggest that spatial autocorrelation of electoral results, while present, is not very high. In recent research, Conley and Kelly (2025) point out how a large part of the literature examining historical persistence relies on highly spatially clustered variables or “treatments”. In our setting, the spatial autocorrelation of residuals — an important diagnostic test suggested by Conley and Kelly (2025) — is low: for the corresponding four-election panel specification, the value of Moran’s  $I$  is 0.05. To further investigate the robustness of our findings to a varying degree of spatial

**FIGURE 3: VARYING SPATIAL CORRELATION CUTOFF DISTANCES**



*Notes:* Figure shows coefficients and confidence intervals from regressions of the standardized annual AfD gross vote share on the interaction of standardized historical vote share for the NSDAP in 1933 with a post-2015 dummy variable. Blue, black, and cyan confidence bands represent 90%, 95%, and 99% confidence interval bounds, respectively. Regressions correct for spatial autocorrelation at different cutoff distances (x-axis). A linear distance decay is imposed in the spatial correlation structure. Data are a panel of all municipalities in all German states apart from city states (Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen), and the Saarland, observed in election years 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025. All regressions include municipality and state-by-year fixed effects. Code from Colella et al. (2019).

autocorrelation, we follow the procedure suggested by Colella et al. (2019) and report Conley standard errors, allowing for varying cutoffs (from 1 to 200 km). Figure 3 shows that the point estimate of 0.0488 remains significant even under very extreme assumptions about the degree of spatial autocorrelation, allowing for correlation over distances of more than 200 km.

### 5.3 Contextual and Mediating Factors

The previous results have shown how the pattern of historical Nazi vote shares is correlated with current AfD support. It is, however, crucial to better define this historical legacy. What exactly constitutes this ideological complexion that shaped the electoral geography of the 1930s, and that, in our interpretation, was manifested again in voting after 2015? To shed more light on this relationship, a series of additional regressions is presented in this section and in Appendix C. Table C.2 in the Appendix discusses to what extent this persistence also applies to other proxies of right-wing support in the 1920s and 30s, and refutes the hypothesis that persistent antisemitism underlies these historical patterns. Table C.3 controls for a wide range of historical and contemporary variables (relating to demography, social structure, educational levels, or religion), with little change compared to the baseline analysis.

In the following paragraphs, we explore in more detail a selection of key variables which are of particular interest in the context of far-right support. A common characteristic of these factors is that they can have two roles. The first concern is that some other shocks, such as the refugee crisis of 2015, might coincidentally and spuriously give rise to similar patterns of electoral support, confounding the interpretation of findings. A second concern is that certain variables may have the role of mediating factors: interacting with the historical legacy of right-wing leaning, either amplifying or dampening it.

In each of the columns of Table 3, we run a regression of this type:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ShareAfD}_{it} = & \theta_i + \varphi_{s(i)t} + \beta \cdot \text{NSDAP}_i \times \text{Post 2015}_t + \gamma \cdot C_i \times \text{Post 2015}_t \\ & + \delta \cdot \text{NSDAP}_i \times \text{Post 2015}_t \times C_i + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad t \in \{2013, 2017, 2021, 2025\} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where  $C_i$  is a control variable, measured at the municipal (or county) level.  $\gamma$  indicates whether this control variable has a direct effect (not necessarily with a causal interpretation) on the AfD's electoral success after 2015;  $\delta$  measures to what extent this factor interacts with the electoral geography of 1933. All  $C$  variables are converted to z-scores, so that the coefficients can be interpreted as standardized coefficients, and  $\beta$  thus measures the effect of NSDAP support at average levels of  $C_i$ .

Arguably the most important political event in Germany in 2015 was the sudden and dramatic influx of refugees, mostly fleeing the Syrian civil war. Hundreds of thousands of them reached Germany on foot starting in September 2015. Refugees were allocated to states and counties according to their size and GDP; however, within counties, the allocation of refugees to municipalities was idiosyncratic. The effect of the refugee inflow on votes for the far right is ambiguous. On the one hand, refugees are often perceived as a threat and a potential source of crime, moving voters to the right (Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Piil Damm, 2019); on the other hand, in line with Allport's (1954) "contact hypothesis", direct acquaintance with refugees could actually increase empathy and support for moderate parties (Steinmayr, 2019).

Column 2 of Table 3 augments the baseline specification by controlling for the presence of refugees as relative total population shares. The coefficient for the effect of Nazi vote shares after 2015 is hardly affected. The interaction and triple interaction effects are close to zero, negative, and insignificant or only marginally significant. This is consistent with the allocation of refugees across Germany being fairly orthogonal to NSDAP support: the partial correlation between the control variable and the NSDAP vote shares is negative and small (correlation coefficient, conditional on state fixed effects: -0.102).

Globalization, the decline of manufacturing, and a decrease in job security are often cited as causes of the far right's recent electoral fortunes. Overall, Germany had a comparatively strong economy in the time frame considered, and among developed countries it remains among those with the highest shares of employment in (skilled) manufacturing, and the lowest rates of unemployment.

In column 3, we control for the increase in trade exposure due to the opening of markets to products from Eastern Europe and the Far East.<sup>15</sup> The triple interaction term is again very small, and the direct effect of historical NSDAP voting largely unaffected.

Finally, column 4 looks at a possible mitigating factor that might have reduced the vertical transmission of right-wing ideology since the end of the Nazi Regime: the influx into post-war Germany of over 12 million ethnic German refugees (called *Heimatvertriebene*, or "expellees") from the areas ceded to other countries after 1945 (Poland, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia). These people, having left their homes and fleeing without possessions, were distributed across Germany following idiosyncratic patterns, based on their ports of entry, but also on the availability of housing stock. They brought their values and traditions from their home regions — Silesia, Pomerania, East Prussia, Sudeten — into present-day Germany, partly maintaining their identities but also integrating rapidly (Bauer, Braun, and Kvasnicka, 2013). As such, one would expect areas with a stronger influx of refugees to exhibit less historical persistence, as the vertical transmission of values will be affected by this massive reshuffling of populations. Moreover, the experience of having to integrate and give housing to expellees

<sup>15</sup>We follow the definition of our data source (Dauth, Findeisen, and Südekum, 2014) and capture trade exposure as the difference between import competition and export competition. As an example, regions of Germany specializing in the garment industry score very high on this measure, whereas regions with car factories score low.

TABLE 3: CONTEMPORARY SHOCKS

|                                                            | (1)<br>Baseline       | (2)<br>Refugees<br>2016 | (3)<br>Trade<br>Shocks | (4)<br>Expellees<br>1940-50s |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post                            | 0.0488***<br>(0.0130) | 0.0480***<br>(0.0132)   | 0.0501***<br>(0.0130)  | 0.0370***<br>(0.0117)        |
| Control [std.] $\times$ Post                               |                       | -0.0171**<br>(0.0074)   | -0.0134<br>(0.0101)    | 0.0637**<br>(0.0288)         |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post<br>$\times$ Control [std.] |                       | -0.0057<br>(0.0061)     | -0.0024<br>(0.0085)    | -0.0391***<br>(0.0141)       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post<br>at 10th Percentile      |                       | 0.0521                  | 0.0523                 | 0.0889                       |
| at 90th Percentile                                         |                       | 0.0414                  | 0.0483                 | -0.0142                      |
| Partial Correlation<br>conditional on state FEs            |                       | -0.0944                 | 0.0686                 | 0.2041                       |
| $R^2$                                                      | 0.95                  | 0.95                    | 0.95                   | 0.95                         |
| Observations                                               | 42548                 | 42208                   | 42440                  | 41900                        |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the (standardized) vote share for the AfD (relative to eligible voters) in the 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025 federal elections. Sample is a panel of municipalities observed in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025, in all German states apart from city states (Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen), and the Saarland. All regressions include state times year and municipality fixed effects. Column 1 reports our baseline specification as in Table 2. Column 2 adds interactions with the share of 2016 refugees, calculated based on labour statistics ("Erwerbsfähige Leistungsberechtigte im Kontext von Flucht und Migration"). The Trade Shocks in column 3 are defined as in Dauth, Findeisen, and Südekum (2014) and are calculated by subtracting a measure of export competition from import competition, both over the periods 2008-1998. The average share of expellees in 1940-50s (column 4) is 21.3%, with minimum 1.75% and maximum 53.7%. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historic municipalities/counties. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

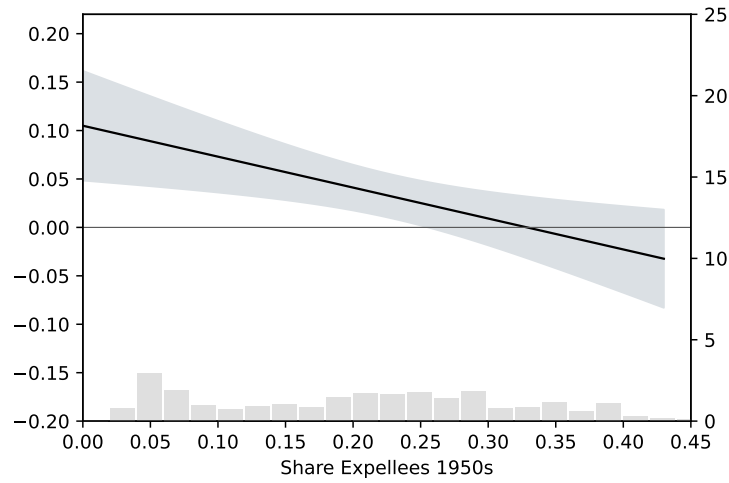
might have turned the local populations more sympathetic to the plight of refugees and more open to outsiders.

In fact, the interaction effect of the presence of expellees after 2015 is positive and significant. This is consistent with the observation that there is a positive correlation (0.2041) between areas of historical Nazi support and areas where expellees were allocated, but also that expellees have traditionally supported more conservative parties. However, we also estimate a large, negative, and significant triple interaction term, suggesting that more expellees weaken the historical persistence of right-wing voting. This effect is also quantitatively important. Communities at the 90th percentile of the distribution of expellee presence witness almost no effect of NSDAP voting on AfD results (point estimate: -0.0142). Figure 4 displays the marginal effect of historical NSDAP support at different levels of expellee presence.

The presence of expellees also helps explaining the areas of the electoral map of Germany in which little or no persistence occurred. Areas with a very strong influx of expellees, especially the North (Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg) and Bavaria, where many of the Sudeten Germans were relocated, display the lowest degree of persistence (see Appendix Figure B.3). This is also visible in Figure 2: the areas northeast and south of Hanover, where electoral results are not correlated across time (grey hexagons in Panel C), are also the ones with the highest shares of expellees among post-war

population (Panel D).

**FIGURE 4: PERSISTENCE, DEPENDING ON 1950S EXPELLEES SHARE**



*Notes:* The graph shows a marginal effect plot of the (standardized) NSDAP 1933 vote share on AfD gross vote shares for different shares of 1950s expellees. Code courtesy of Matt Golder.

## 5.4 A Long-Term Perspective

Thus far, we have compared the electoral results of the AfD in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025. Our interpretation rested on the premise that the “reinvention” of the AfD as a populist right-wing party in 2015 represented a shift in the supply of political platforms in Germany: for the first time, a rather respectable and plausibly effective right-wing party was available in the electoral menu. Yet even before 2015, German voters had the option of choosing one of the other far-right parties on the ballot, such as the NPD or the *Republikaner*. These parties, however, had a more extreme image than the AfD, with clear neo-Nazi fringes. Moreover, none of these parties had a realistic chance of passing the 5% threshold required to enter the federal parliament, so that a vote for those parties was purely expressive, protest voting. Voting for these parties thus was very “costly:” in terms of social image, and in terms of an arguably lost vote.

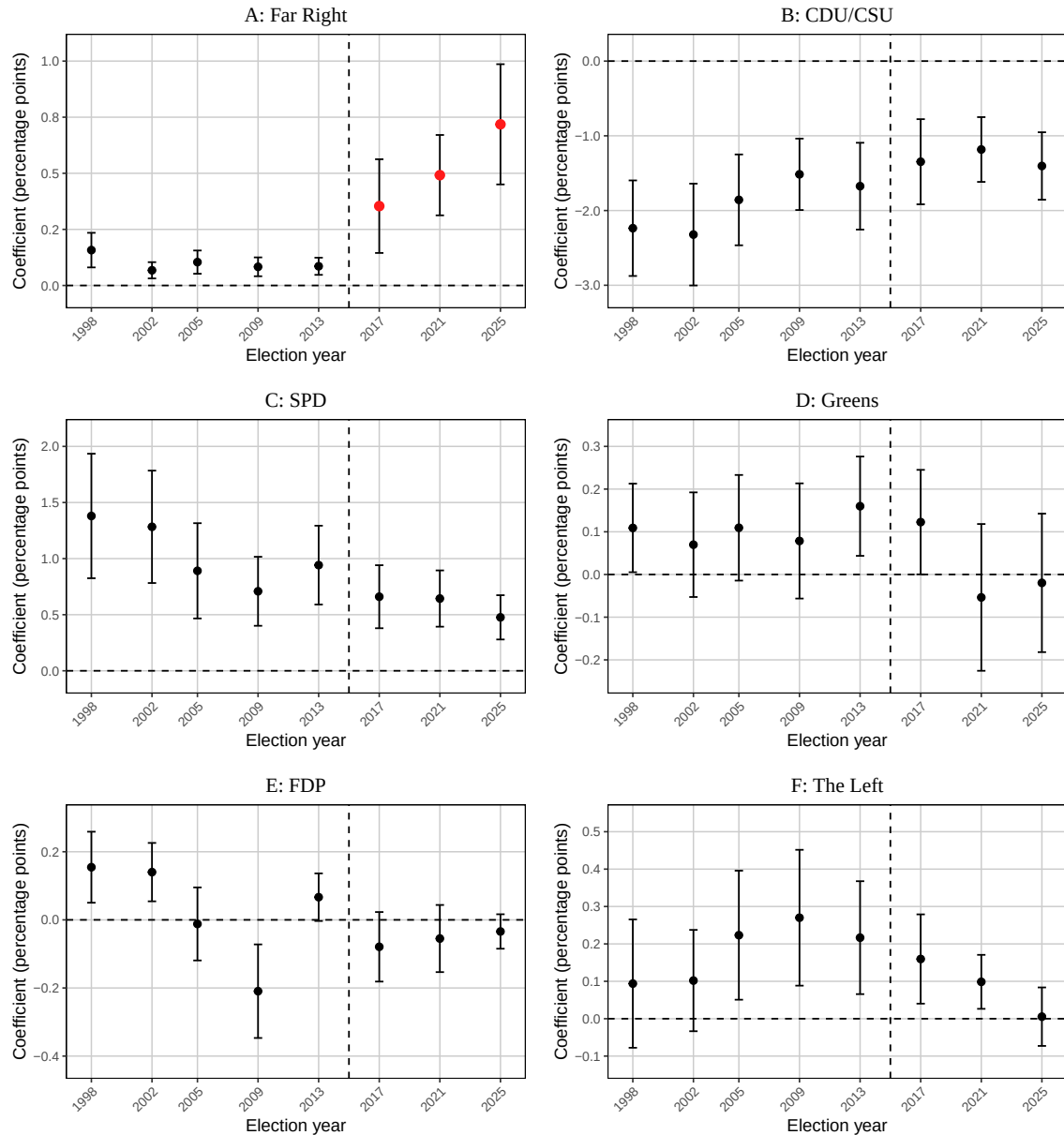
We analyze the correlation between historical Nazi vote shares and the electoral results of these parties in all federal elections from 1998 until today. For every election, we calculate the share of votes going to all parties explicitly to the right of the CDU: NPD, DVU, *Republikaner*, and *Die Rechte*. From 2017 onward, we add the AfD vote share once to the far-right total. We then study the correlation of aggregate far-right vote share with the historical vote share of the NSDAP in 1933, following the baseline regression setup of equation (1), only using this more encompassing measure of right-wing support as the dependent variable.

Figure 5 displays point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for these regressions, run separately for every election year and party family. The correlation between NSDAP vote share and far-right vote shares is positive and significant in all years, but experiences a major jump in the election of 2017, when the AfD is included. In 2013 and prior years, one standard deviation higher NSDAP vote is associated with approximately 0.1 percentage points higher vote shares for far right parties, whereas



this coefficient rises to 0.35 in 2017, 0.49 in 2021, and 0.72 in 2025. The remaining panels show that no other major party exhibits a comparable upward discontinuity in 2017.

**FIGURE 5: PERSISTENCE FOR MAJOR PARTIES**



*Notes:* Each panel shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from separate election-year regressions of the indicated party or party family's gross vote share on the standardized NSDAP vote share in March 1933. The far-right family comprises NPD, DVU, Republikaner, and Die Rechte, plus the AfD from 2017 onward. Red points mark elections in which the AfD is included. All regressions include state fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of the historical vote shares. The sample includes modern municipalities in all German states apart from city states (Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen), and the Saarland. Municipalities are projected to 2015 borders using population-weighted raster techniques (see A.2 for more detail).

## 6 Survey Results

### 6.1 Data and Empirical Setup

So far, we have documented that municipalities with stronger support for the Nazi party in 1933 now have a stronger vote base for the AfD. Our interpretation of this finding is that the AfD, by expanding the electoral platform and representing a respectable and viable political option, has “activated” an existing demand for right-wing ideology and channeled it into manifest voting actions. An alternative to this supply-side interpretation would be that an overall rightward shift in public sentiment, i.e. a shift in attitudes, led to the persistence we find. In this section, we seek to rule out this alternative by confirming our third hypothesis, that the ideological beliefs of localities which demonstrate NSDAP-AfD voting correlation are highly stable during the change in the party’s electoral success.

To generate the patterns that we have observed so far, such a demand-side interpretation would require that municipalities with a history of Nazi support turned more right-wing in recent years. For example, these municipalities could be “bellwether” regions, turning to the extreme earlier than others when confronted with the shocks, both in history and today. We thus ask: did a simultaneous change in attitudes occur in areas with historical Nazi support after 2015?

We analyze this question using the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) from the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (GESIS). The ALLBUS provides rich data on attitudes and political opinions in Germany, and is conducted every two years as a repeated cross-section. To link our historical electoral results with the ALLBUS data, we obtained access to the restricted-use ALLBUS with municipality indicators. We successfully matched 1,273 municipalities in the survey sample, with 39,999 individual observations (across all waves from 1996 until 2018).

Right-wing ideology might comprise a large spectrum of different attitudes. We therefore want to capture broad changes in attitudes that are only imperfectly measured by any single survey question, while addressing concerns about multiple hypothesis testing. For this purpose, we construct standardized indices for different categories of attitudes pertaining broadly to right-wing ideology.

We first identify all pertinent questions and categorize them into nine broad categories: (i) xenophobia, (ii) Islamophobia, (iii) Nationalism (pride to be German), (iv) antisemitism, (v) disenchantment with politicians, (vi) gender attitudes, (vii) left-right self-evaluation, (viii) anti-democratic attitudes, and (ix) ethnic nationalism. As not every question in the ALLBUS is asked in every wave and to every participant, we split up the categories xenophobic attitudes and gender attitudes into two subcategories, based on the survey cycle in which the questions are asked.

In a second step, we recode all questions into variables between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating more right-wing attitudes. Within every (sub)category, we create an index following Anderson (2008): each component is standardized, and then all z-scores are added up to a summary index (which is, in turn, standardized), weighting each component by the inverse of the covariance matrix of the standardized components.<sup>16</sup>

When a category consists of only one survey question (disenchantment with politicians, pride to be German, and left-right self-evaluation) we simply standardize the outcome. Finally, we also construct a summary index of all our outcome indices.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Since the resulting index is standardized as well, it allows for easy comparison of the estimated magnitudes. This weighting maximizes the amount of information captured by the z-score index. We show that our results are robust to using an equally-weighted index in Appendix Table D.3 and Table D.4.

<sup>17</sup>Appendix Table D.5 shows that these indices are correlated with stated voting intentions for the AfD. In Table D.6, we focus on the question about left-right self-evaluation (which is asked regularly in every wave), and show that a more right-wing self-

We analyze changes in attitudes through a simple regression setup:

$$\text{Attitude}_{ijt} = \varphi_{s(j)t} + \beta \cdot \text{NSDAP}_j + \gamma \cdot \text{NSDAP}_j \times \text{Post 2015}_t + x'_{it}\xi + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (3)$$

where  $\text{Attitude}_{ijt}$  are index values (or standardized responses) as described above, pertaining to individual  $i$  in municipality  $j$ , in wave  $t$ .  $\text{NSDAP}_j$  is the municipal-level Nazi vote share in 1933,  $\varphi_{s(j)t}$  are state-times-year fixed effects and  $\text{Post 2015}_t$  is an indicator for survey waves after 2015 (namely, 2016 and 2018). Standard errors are clustered at the level of variation of  $\text{NSDAP}_j$ .

If municipalities that supported the Nazi party in 1933 exhibit persistent right-wing ideology, this will be reflected by a positive point estimate on  $\beta$ .<sup>18</sup> Crucially for our hypothesis, we expect the interaction coefficient  $\gamma$  to be indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that no significant shift in attitudes occurred after 2015 in those municipalities with a history of Nazi support.

## 6.2 Results: Right-Wing Attitudes

Table 4 summarizes our results. First, we focus on the estimates of  $\beta$ , i.e. the time-invariant effect of past NSDAP support. Throughout the (sub)categories, we find that a history of Nazi support is positively, sometimes significantly, correlated with more right-wing attitudes today, after more than half a century. The effect is particularly pronounced for attitudes towards immigration, towards islamic religious teaching in public schools, and disenchantment with politicians. Consistent with the evidence in Appendix Table C.2, we find a positive but small and insignificant effect on antisemitic attitudes (column 6).<sup>19</sup> Higher levels of Nazi support are also only weakly correlated with attitudes towards women, a generic left-right self-evaluation, anti-democratic attitudes, or ethnic nationalism (columns 8–12).

Our summary index of the indices (column 13) captures the broad thrust of findings: people living in historically Nazi supporting areas have more right-wing attitudes today. In panel B, we introduce individual-level controls such as age, gender, education, income levels, or citizenship. The inclusion of controls reduces magnitude and significance of most estimates; yet all cases,  $\beta$  remains non-negative. The estimate on the global index of column 13 suggests that an increase in historical NSDAP support by one standard deviation is associated with approximately 1.3% of a standard deviation more right-wing attitudes.

We now consider the estimates of  $\gamma$ , i.e. the interaction term between NSDAP voting and a 2016 indicator, to investigate whether there is a *shift* in attitudes after 2015 for those municipalities with strong Nazi support in 1933. Our evidence in Table 4 shows that almost all interaction terms are insignificant. A single exception, but with a negative coefficient, are xenophobic attitudes in context of marriage and neighbours. The global index in column 13 also suggests that, if anything, those municipalities turned less right-wing in recent years, although the estimate is not significant.

To conclude, we find no evidence of a sharp and localized demand-side shift that could explain our findings on electoral outcomes. Historical Nazi support is positively associated with all categories of far-right attitudes which we capture in the ALLBUS data, yet not with a rightward shift after 2015.

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evaluation in the ALLBUS is predictive of AfD voting intentions in 2016, but *not* in 2014.

<sup>18</sup>To the extent that some sensitive questions, such as those about antisemitic or xenophobic attitudes, will be affected by social desirability bias, our estimates will be biased downward.

<sup>19</sup>Note that our finding complements Voigtländer and Voth (2015), who find that anti-Semitic attitudes are particularly pronounced only for ALLBUS respondents who grew up under the Nazi regime.

TABLE 4: SURVEY RESULTS: ATTITUDES

| Dependent variable:                                | Xenophobia<br>(Immigration, Assimila-<br>tion, Equal Rights) | Xenophobia<br>(Marriage, Neighbour) | Xenophobia<br>(Anti-Immigration) | Islamophobia<br>(No Teaching at School) | Nationalism<br>(Pride to be German) | Antisemitism       | Disenchantment<br>with politicians | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 1 | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 2 | Left-Right<br>Self-Evaluation | Anti-Democracy      | Ethnic Nationalism<br>Index | Summary<br>Index      |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                                    | (1)                                                          | (2)                                 | (3)                              | (4)                                     | (5)                                 | (6)                | (7)                                | (8)                         | (9)                         | (10)                          | (11)                | (12)                        | (13)                  |
| Panel A: <i>individual level, without controls</i> |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                    |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                  | 0.0068*<br>(0.0041)                                          | 0.0077<br>(0.061)                   | 0.0154*<br>(0.0089)              | 0.0107***<br>(0.0035)                   | 0.0147*<br>(0.0077)                 | 0.0096<br>(0.0080) | 0.0105***<br>(0.0038)              | 0.0091<br>(0.0066)          | 0.0027<br>(0.0038)          | 0.0032<br>(0.0029)            | 0.0036<br>(0.0048)  | 0.0012<br>(0.0012)          | 0.0159***<br>(0.0058) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                           | 0.0019<br>(0.0086)                                           | -0.0277**<br>(0.0105)               | -0.0092<br>(0.0082)              | 0.0041<br>(0.0062)                      | -0.0077<br>(0.0110)                 | 0.0077<br>(0.0110) | 0.0107<br>(0.0109)                 | 0.0018<br>(0.0109)          | -0.0009<br>(0.0085)         | 0.0033<br>(0.0044)            | 0.0006<br>(0.0080)  | -0.0004<br>(0.0020)         | -0.0095<br>(0.0115)   |
| Observations                                       | 7660                                                         | 7740                                | 6244                             | 39999                                   | 18147                               | 6786               | 29535                              | 3191                        | 37489                       | 37489                         | 6328                | 6054                        | 4689                  |
| Panel B: <i>with individual-level controls</i>     |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                    |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                  | 0.0039<br>(0.0034)                                           | 0.0056<br>(0.0053)                  | 0.0085<br>(0.0078)               | 0.0082**<br>(0.0035)                    | 0.0091<br>(0.0066)                  | 0.0048<br>(0.0071) | 0.0027<br>(0.0037)                 | 0.0124*<br>(0.0069)         | -0.0005<br>(0.0041)         | 0.0018<br>(0.0029)            | 0.0035<br>(0.0045)  | 0.0001<br>(0.0014)          | 0.0130***<br>(0.0047) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                           | 0.0124<br>(0.0092)                                           | -0.0274**<br>(0.0107)               | -0.0066<br>(0.0080)              | 0.0032<br>(0.0060)                      | -0.0207<br>(0.0157)                 | 0.0070<br>(0.0102) | 0.0120<br>(0.0104)                 | 0.0003<br>(0.0107)          | 0.0036<br>(0.0085)          | 0.0038<br>(0.0045)            | -0.0011<br>(0.0074) | -0.0001<br>(0.0021)         | -0.0132<br>(0.0108)   |
| Observations                                       | 5951                                                         | 6053                                | 5279                             | 32332                                   | 14310                               | 5394               | 24106                              | 2750                        | 12019                       | 30678                         | 5367                | 5151                        | 3744                  |

Notes: Controls include age, gender, marriage status, education, party membership, income, Germany citizenship, and whether the respondent lives in former Eastern Germany. All regressions include state times year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historical vote shares. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

## 7 Discussion of Results

We have argued that a hitherto unexplored historical persistence of right-wing ideology is a determinant of electoral outcomes in Germany. As an existing party, the Alternative for Germany, moved to the right end of the political spectrum and espoused a nationalist, xenophobic platform, a historical pattern emerged: municipalities that supported the NSDAP during the Weimar republic started to vote proportionally more for the AfD. This historical correlation, “activated” by an expansion of the supply of (respectable) political platforms, is positive, significant, and comparable in magnitude to several other determinants of populist right-wing voting. We rule out an alternative interpretation of our findings as stemming from a demand-side shift, i.e. a shift in attitudes, occurring at the same time in municipalities with higher support for the Nazis in 1933.

Understanding the precise mechanisms of this persistence is a corollary challenge. Whereas cultural persistence in other domains has been extensively studied in the social sciences literature, ours is the first study, to the best of our knowledge, to link historical far-right voting from before 1945 to present-day electoral outcomes. To explain cultural persistence, social scientists have often relied on models of from evolutionary biology, studying the vertical transmission of traits from parents to children (Bisin and Verdier, 2001). Our results show an instance in which political inclinations are persistent across generations.

This raises the question whether this inclination was transmitted vertically from parents to children, over 80 years. Several studies in the political science literature have discussed the intergenerational transmission of political preferences (Beck and Jennings, 1991; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers, 2009), also specifically for the context of right-wing ideology (Avdeenko and Siedler, 2017).<sup>20</sup> Appendix Table E.1 provides evidence in support of this hypothesis: using the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), we show that in Germany the left-right self-evaluation of children is highly correlated with that one of their parents.

An additional important conclusion is that, even as underlying attitudes are stable or move only slowly, electoral results can change suddenly and sharply when the political landscape experiences idiosyncratic shocks, such as the creation of a new party or the emergence of a new, charismatic leader. Political systems and institutions — such as the impediments posed by the German constitution to the rise of extremist parties — play an important role in mediating and translating shifts in attitudes into electoral successes. Our finding rationalizes the observation by political scientists that it is hard to square the recent “wave” of right-wing populism with a concurrent shift in attitudes (Bartels, 2017; Bonikowski, 2017).<sup>21</sup> The experience of Germany may thus be considered as representative for many other European countries, where populist right-wing parties have emerged successfully in the last decades, while attitudes have remained broadly constant.

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<sup>20</sup> Another literature considers the genetic origins of political ideology: see Alford, Funk, and Hibbing (2005), Hatemi and McDermott (2012).

<sup>21</sup> See also Hatton (2016). In emphasizing the interaction between demand and supply factors explaining the rise of right-wing populism, our research is in line with the theoretical framework by Mudde (2007) and Arzheimer (2009).

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# Supplementary Appendix: For Online Publication

## A Data Description

### A.1 Sources and definitions of Variables

| Variable                                           | Description and source                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AfD vote share (gross)                             | AfD vote share in the 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025 federal elections, relative to eligible voters.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| NSDAP vote share, March 1933                       | NSDAP vote share, March 1933. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| NSDAP vote share, Sept. 1930                       | NSDAP vote share, September 1930. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| NSDAP vote share, May 1928                         | NSDAP vote share, May 1928. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| DVFP vote share, April 1925                        | DVFP vote share, April 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| DNVP vote share, April 1925                        | DNVP vote share, April 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Log population, 1933                               | Logarithm of population in 1933, if missing 1925. Municipalities in the "remainder of the county" are assigned the population count of that remainder divided by the number of modern municipalities assigned to it. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990) and DESTATIS. |
| Log population, 2015                               | Logarithm of the 2015 population count. Source: DESTATIS.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Share employed in industry and manufacturing, 1925 | Share employed in industry and manufacturing, 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Share employed in trade and commerce, 1925         | Share employed in trade and commerce, 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Share employed in administration, 1925             | Share employed in administration, 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Share unemployed, 1933                             | Unemployment share from the 1933 census, matched to 2015 municipality boundaries. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Share unemployed (contemporary)                    | Total of unemployed people in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025, respectively, divided by the corresponding election-year eligible-voter count. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Federal Employment Agency and the Federal Returning Officer.                                                         |
| Share of white collar workers, 1933                | Share of white collar workers ("Angestellte" and "Beamte") amongst working population, 1933. If missing, replaced by 1925 share of white collar workers among population. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                          |
| Share of workers with university degree, 2015      | Share of workers with university degrees. Variable defined at <i>Kreis</i> (county) level. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: INKAR                                                                                                                                                              |
| Share Catholic, 1925                               | Share Catholic, 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hännisch (1990)                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

*Continued on next page*

| Variable                           | Description and source                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Share Jewish, 1925                 | Share Jewish, 1925. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Falter and Hänisch (1990)                                                                                                                                      |
| Share Catholic, 2011               | Share Catholic, 2011. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: DESTATIS.                                                                                                                                                    |
| Share other/no religion, 2011      | Share other/no religion, 2011. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: DESTATIS.                                                                                                                                           |
| Share refugees, 2016               | Share of people eligible to benefits in the context of flight and migration (" <i>Erwerbsfähige Leistungsberechtigte im Kontext von Flucht und Migration</i> "), 2016. Source: Federal Employment Agency.                                |
| Share unemployed, 2025             | Total of people unemployed in 2025 matched on 2015 municipality borders, and divided by 2015 population. Source: Federal Employment Agency.                                                                                              |
| Trade exposure, $\Delta$ 2008-1998 | Import Competition minus export competition. Variable defined at <i>Kreis</i> (county) level. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Dauth, Findeisen, and Südekum (2014)                                                 |
| Population growth rate, 2015-1930  | Growth rate of population 2015 - 1933 (1925 if missing), both periods matched to 2015 municipality borders. Source: Falter and Hänisch (1990) and DESTATIS.                                                                              |
| Share expellees, 1940-50s          | Share of expellees in 1940-50s. Variable defined at <i>Kreis</i> (county) level. Data matched to municipality borders of 2015. Source: Data for Eastern Germany stems from: Seraphim (1954); Western Germany: Braun and Kvasnicka (2014) |

## A.2 Matching electoral data to 2015 municipality borders

We generate transition matrices to trace population shares within changing municipalities' borders. Each matrix uses 2015 as reference year, and represents the population of a municipality in year 2015 as a sum of shares of populations of municipalities existing in year  $t$ .

**Step 1:** First, we approximate the spatial distribution of the population in municipalities based on a raster dataset (100m grid) of the 2011 Census<sup>1</sup>, using shapefiles for German municipalities between 1998 and 2017 from the Service Center of the Federal Government for Geo-Information and Geodesy (*Dienstleistungszentrum des Bundes für Geoinformation und Geodäsie*).<sup>2</sup>

**Step 2:** In the next step, we overlay administrative borders for both timestamps and calculate population in areas which changed municipalities. Based on those values we generate a transition matrix, which indicates to what degree the population from a given municipality in the first comparison year contributes to the population residing in municipalities in 2015.

**Step 3:** Finally, we multiply the (transposed) transition matrix with the 2025 vote and eligible-voter counts to project them onto the 2015 municipality boundaries. We calculate vote shares only after aggregating the projected counts.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.zensus2011.de/DE/Home/Aktuelles/DemografischeGrunddaten.html>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.geodatenzentrum.de/geodaten/gdz\\_rahmen.gdz\\_div](http://www.geodatenzentrum.de/geodaten/gdz_rahmen.gdz_div)

### A.3 Matching contemporary and historical election data

We match present-day electoral outcomes to the Weimar era party support in two steps:

**Step 1:** First, we identify the boundary of each county with electoral data in the Falter and Hännisch (1990) dataset, using the county name to match counties to polygons in the shapefile provided by the Census Mosaic project.<sup>3</sup> We then identify coordinates for each Weimar era municipality (to the best of our knowledge, no shapefiles of municipalities in the period are available): for each municipality, we first use OpenStreetMap’s Nominatim API to search for modern administrative centers, villages, towns, cities or suburbs sharing a name with the historic municipality. We overlay the returned coordinates on the county map and discard any results which lie outside the boundary of the county to which the historic municipality belongs, according to the Falter and Hännisch (1990) data. In this way, we obtain valid latitude and longitude coordinates for around two thirds of the Weimar era municipalities. For municipalities which return no valid matches, for example because of name changes between the Weimar era and today, we manually search for coordinates. To do so, we use a combination of sources including gov.genealogy.net, a database of historic geographies, and Wikipedia. We check the manual lookups for validity by ensuring that the coordinates lie within the boundaries of the county to which the municipality belongs, again according to the Falter and Hännisch (1990) data.

**Step 2:** In this step, we match contemporary municipalities to a Weimar era geography for which the Falter and Hännisch (1990) dataset provides electoral data. If a modern municipality’s coordinates (provided by DESTATIS) are within 2.5 kilometers of the coordinates of a municipality identified in Step 1, we match the contemporary district to the electoral data from that historical municipality. Otherwise, we overlay the coordinates of the modern municipality on top of the shapefile of counties and assign the electoral results for the “remainder of the county” to the modern municipality. Because electoral geography is not constant between 1924 and 1932, a modern municipality can be matched to different entities for different election years.

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.censusmosaic.org>. Electoral geography changes between the years 1924 and 1932, the result of counties being merged or split and other boundary changes. We thus match counties to boundaries separately for each of the 1924, 1928, 1930 and 1932 elections. In a very small number of cases, we make changes to the county shapefiles in order to better match the county/municipality hierarchy provided by the Falter and Hännisch (1990) dataset.

## **B Electoral maps**

The following three maps show electoral results in 1933, in 2017, and a visual representation of persistence patterns for all 10,963 municipalities in our analysis. Cf. the description of Figure 2 for further detail. Note that the state of Rhineland-Palatinate (in the far West of Germany) is “exploded” in the maps and presented separately because of its large number of municipalities.

FIGURE B.1: NSDAP 1933

**ELECTORAL RESULTS**  
for the NSDAP

Standardized average of the results  
of 1928, 1930, and 1933 elections  
Each hexagon represents a single municipality

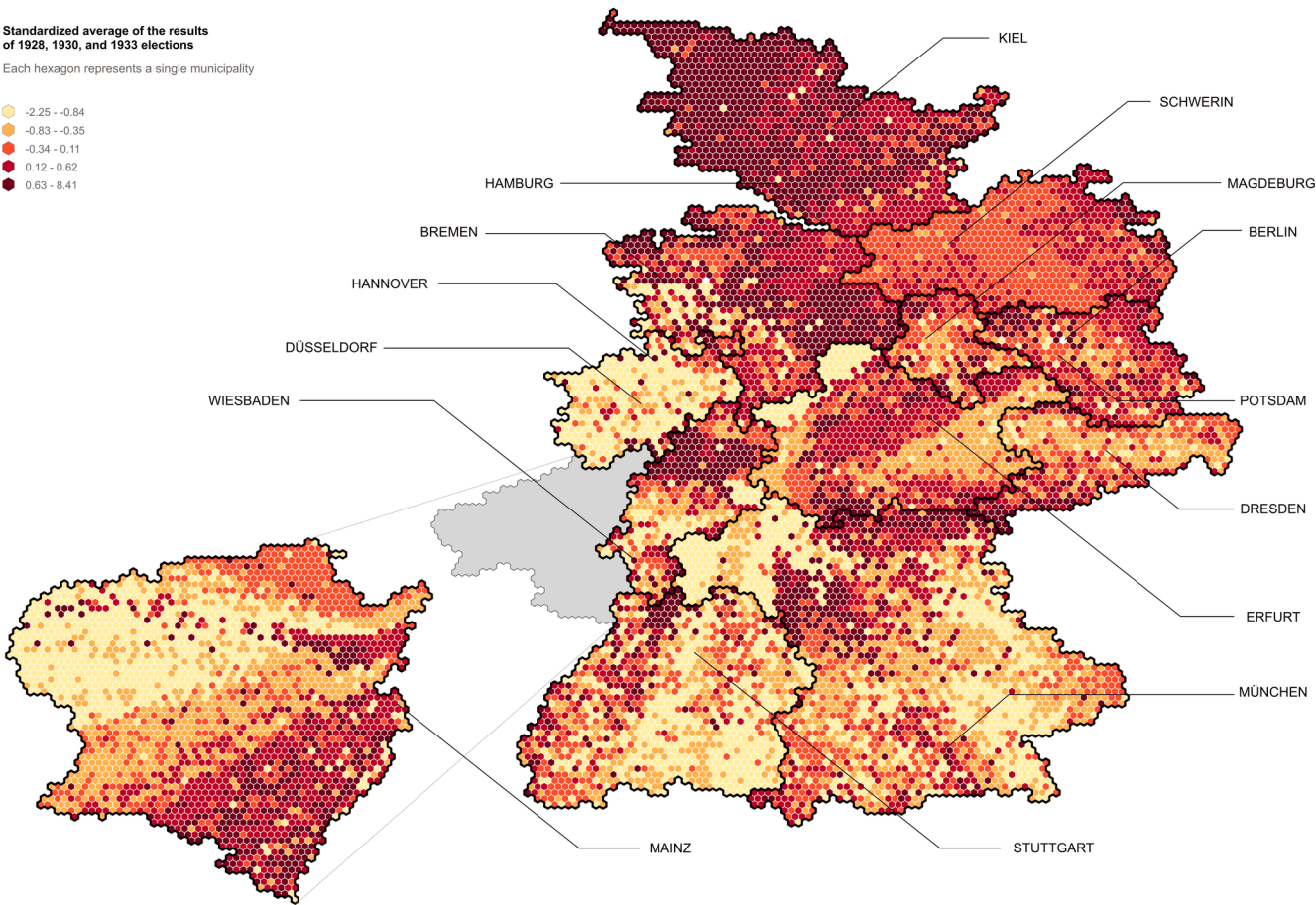


FIGURE B.2: AfD 2025

**ELECTORAL RESULTS**  
for the AfD (2025 A2)

Gross vote share of the 2025 federal election  
(A2 postal-vote allocation)

Each hexagon represents a single municipality

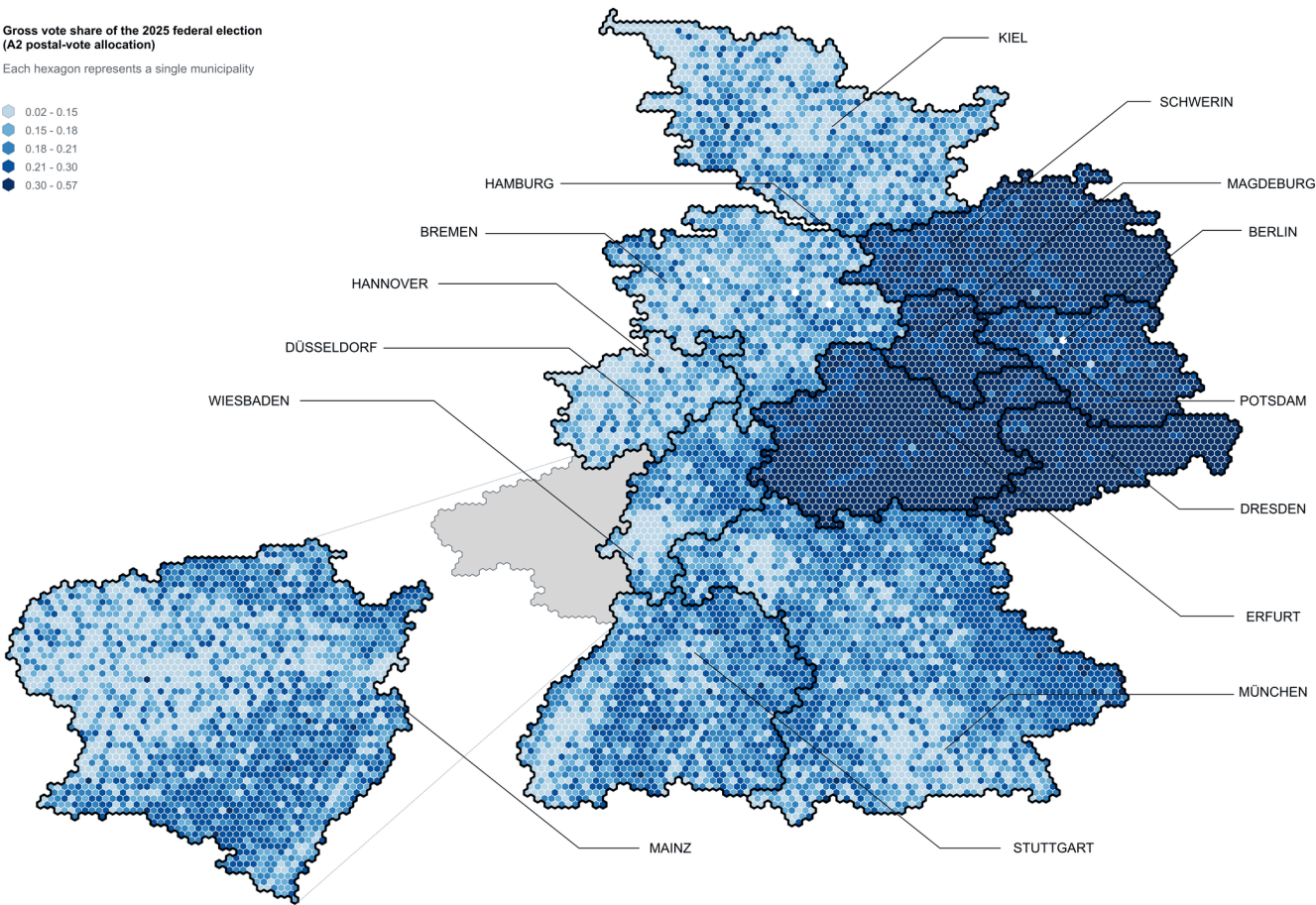
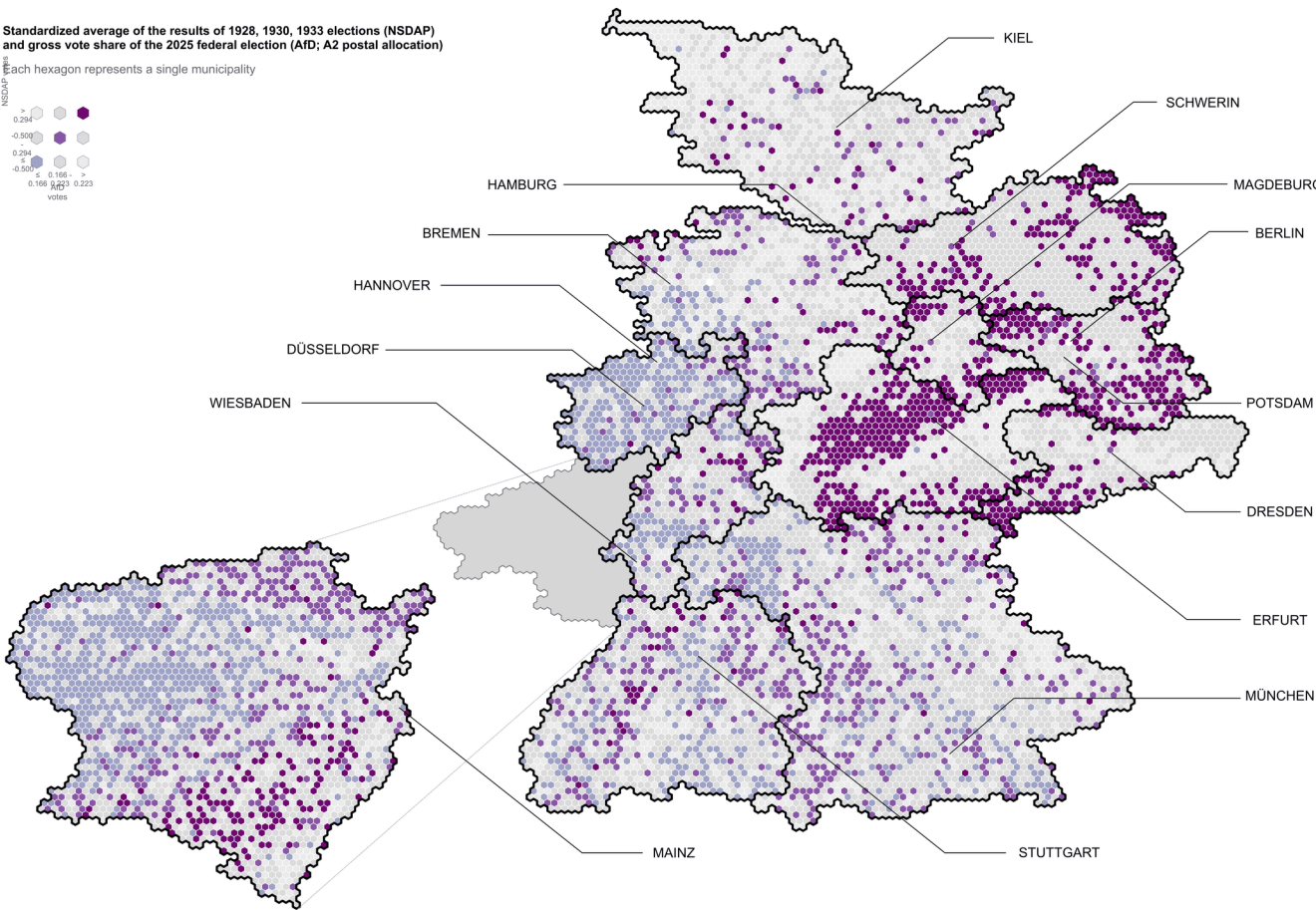
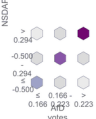




FIGURE B.3: PERSISTENCE

**ELECTORAL RESULTS**  
for the NSDAP and AfD (2025 A2)

Standardized average of the results of 1928, 1930, 1933 elections (NSDAP)  
and gross vote share of the 2025 federal election (AfD; A2 postal allocation)  
Each hexagon represents a single municipality



## C Additional Results, Electoral Analysis

In this section we conduct additional analyses regarding our electoral results, examining the robustness of our baseline correlations to the inclusion of further control variables, to the use of alternative definitions of the explanatory variables, or alternative samples.

**Gauging the magnitude of effects** In Table C.1, we compare our finding to the correlations between AfD vote shares in 2025 and three other variables of interest: unemployment levels, the increase in trade exposure (the difference between import competition and export competition), and the allocation of refugees in municipalities. These correlations are presented in columns 1–3 of Table C.1 in terms of standardized beta coefficients; it is important to emphasize that these coefficients should not be seen as *causal* estimates of the effects, as clearly there is no claim to the exogeneity of the spatial variation of these variables with respect to AfD support.

For two variables — trade exposure and the allocation of refugees — we find a negative point estimate: surprisingly, AfD support is higher in regions where trade exposure *decreased* or where there is a lower share of refugees. In the case of unemployment levels (column 1), the correlation is positive, as one would have plausibly expected. The beta coefficients in Table C.1 are in a similar range of magnitude (1–4% in absolute terms) as the beta coefficient relating to the NSDAP vote share (7.9%, reported in column 4 for reference). Our magnitudes are also comparable to the effect of import competition on far right voting in France in 2007–2012, estimated at 8.98% as a standardized beta coefficient (Malgouyres, 2017).

A comparison of the partial  $R^2$  values of these explanatory factors (bottom of Table C.1) leads to similar conclusions: the cultural persistence factor “explains” a comparable share of the variance of the outcome (about 1.8%) as the other factors (whose partial  $R^2$  vary between 0.06% and 0.64%). This simple variance decomposition thus suggests that, while historical persistence clearly is only one among many factors associated with the rise of populist right-wing parties, the magnitude of the correlation is comparable to other factors often mentioned in the literature.

**Antisemitism or right-wing attitudes?** When evaluating the historical legacy of Nazism, an assessment of the role of antisemitism, one of the NSDAP’s defining features, is crucial. The seminal work by Voigtländer and Voth (2012, 2015) has shown how antisemitism is a persistent feature of certain regions in Germany. In Table C.2 we argue, however, that antisemitism is not what explains the success of the AfD in more recent years. In each one of the columns, we vary the definition of the explanatory variable, while the dependent variable is the standardized AfD gross vote share in the 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025 municipality panel; each historical proxy is interacted with Post-2015. Again, all coefficients can be interpreted as standardized beta coefficients.

We first compare the correlation between AfD results and the vote shares of the NSDAP in two other elections, 1930 and 1928.<sup>4</sup> In 1928 the NSDAP was still a fringe party, virulently antisemitic, obtaining only 2.6% of the votes at the national level; in 1930, after having toned down its antisemitic rhetoric and with messages trying to appeal to a broader public, it obtained 18.3% of the votes. As the results in Table C.2, columns 1 and 2, show, electoral support for the NSDAP in 1928 and in 1930 is also correlated with today’s successes of the AfD. However, the largest correlation obtains with the results in 1933, when the NSDAP is less openly antisemitic than in 1928 and 1930, and is closer to a big-tent right-wing populist party appealing to varied constituencies, eager to take (absolute) power.

The *Reichstag* election of 1924 provides a convenient experiment to discriminate between persistent antisemitism and persistent right-wing ideology. Two right-wing parties were on the ballot: the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP) and the *Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei* (DVFP). The DNVP was the main conservative party of the Weimar era, before the emergence of the NSDAP: nationalist, reactionary, monarchist. The DVFP was split off the DNVP, as some of its members thought it should be more explicitly antisemitic. As the results in columns 3 and 4 show, the electoral success of the AfD is highly correlated with the staunchly conservative party in the Weimar era (the DNVP), but not with its antisemitic spin-off (the DVFP).

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<sup>4</sup>In 1924, the NSDAP did not present a separate list for the *Reichstag* election, but supported the *Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei* (DVFP). The electoral results of 1932 were not published at the disaggregate level.

These findings suggest that what persisted between the Weimar era and today, and determines the AfD's electoral success, is not antisemitism but a broadly conservative, right-wing ideology.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the common ground between the NSDAP in 1933 and the AfD in its post-2015 incarnation is more likely to be found in nationalism, outgroup hatred, and xenophobia.

In columns 5–7 of Table C.2 we extend our antisemitism analysis by limiting it to the 796 cities that are featured both in our dataset and in the seminal work by Voigtländer and Voth (2012) on persistence of antisemitism. In column 5, we first confirm that our baseline estimate of Table 2 can be replicated, with broadly similar results, within those 796 cities. In column 6 we then regress the AfD's electoral fortunes on the composite measure created by Voigtländer and Voth (2012): a z-score index encompassing six measures of antisemitism in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>6</sup> The correlation is positive, but smaller and only marginally significant. Lastly, in column 7 we use the indicator variable for the occurrence of pogroms in the wake of the Black Death of 1348. The correlation between medieval hatred of Jews and AfD support is in fact *negative* and significant.

**Adding historical covariates.** In Table C.3, we start with our same preferred specification of Table 2, column 5, using the standardized AfD gross vote share in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025 as the dependent variable. We then successively add covariates measured historically, each interacted with the Post 2015<sub>*t*</sub> indicator; these are variables that may explain the predominance of NSDAP voters in the 1920s and 1930s. Column 1 first presents the baseline estimate (without controls) as a benchmark. In the following columns, we add variables related to population, employment structures, education, and religion.

Column 2 considers the domain of “population”: we control for the (log) size of the municipality in the 1920s/30s. The baseline estimate is not modified substantially. Column 3 considers another major set of determinants of voting behavior: the occupational structure and economic conditions. We control for shares of employed in industry and manufacturing, employed in trade and commerce, and employed in administration (with agriculture and “other sectors” as the omitted category), all measured in 1925, as well as the unemployment share in 1933. Including these controls does not affect the baseline correlation between historical Nazi support and contemporary votes for the AfD (if anything, the correlation becomes stronger). The same conclusion holds true when one considers controls for historical educational levels (column 4). Our education control is the historical share of white-collar workers (“Angestellte und Beamte”). Column 5 adds the historical shares of Catholics and Jews.

**The role of religion** As opposed to the variables presented so far, religion is arguably a deeply seated cultural trait: the denominational map of Germany has been set in the 16th century and barely changed since. The role of religion is examined in Table C.4. Column 1 repeats the baseline analysis, but excludes those localities for which data on religious affiliation data is unavailable (with little effect on the results). Column 2 then adds a control for the historical share of Protestants in each locality. The addition of this variable reduces the magnitude of estimated coefficient of interest substantially, although not entirely; however, we do not believe this result offers much additional insight. Rather than Column 2 suggesting that Protestantism *itself* is driving AfD support, we believe that Protestantism is instead simply highly correlated with broader cultural conservatism. Religion is a well-known driver of electoral behavior (see, e.g., Spenkuch and Tillmann, 2018), with Protestantism serving as a highly effective predictor of NSDAP vote share in 1933. This is further demonstrated by the negligible change in  $R^2$  value between Column 1 and Column 2.

To disentangle the effect of Protestantism from that of broader conservative cultural persistence, Column 4 repeats the baseline analysis but removes from our sample those localities which are most heavily Protestant (roughly one third of the observations, using a threshold of 90% Protestant identification). The results are relatively unchanged from the baseline, with a slightly higher magnitude of effect. We believe this suggests that strong Protestant identification should not be conflated with the broader conservative persistence driving our results. Rather, we believe that these results suggest that

<sup>5</sup>In fact, the AfD is so far publicly bent on keeping antisemitism out of its official policy platforms and taking an explicitly pro-Israel stance; its religious animus is clearly more directed against Islam. At the same time, however, several elected officials of the AfD have expressed antisemitic attitudes.

<sup>6</sup>This index included measures for: pogroms in the 1920s, the share of DVFP votes 1924, the share of NSDAP votes 1928, letters to the *Stürmer* (an antisemitic newspaper), deportations per 100 Jews in 1933, and an indicator variable for whether a synagogue was destroyed (or damaged).

certain communities, often (but not exclusively) characterized by a Protestant religious majority, nurture a consistently conservative social environment. When a corresponding political option is on the electoral menu, as during the Weimar republic and then again after 2015, this right-wing ideology is also expressed in electoral results.

**Regional heterogeneity** In Table C.5 we investigate whether the persistence effect is stronger in certain areas than in others. Level effects, such as the much higher electoral success of the AfD in former East Germany, are already captured by the full set of municipality (*Gemeinde*) fixed effects included in all regressions, yet there may still be differences between states in the gradient of historical correlation between the 1930s and today. As a first take, we divide Germany into four regions, corresponding to the post-war Allied occupation zones. The regression shows that persistence was essentially nil in the US occupation zone (the omitted category) and in the UK zone; that is, in the north and in the south of (former) West Germany. At the other extreme, persistence is highest in the former Soviet occupation zone ("East Germany", or the former German Democratic Republic), and is also high in the French occupation zone (in the south-west). These correlations are consistent with historians' take on the effectiveness of Denazification (Biddiscombe, 2007; Taylor, 2011).

TABLE C.1: ECONOMIC VS. HISTORIC DETERMINANTS OF AfD 2025 VOTE SHARE

|                                    | (1)                   | (2)                    | (3)                    | (4)                   | (5)                    |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Unemployment, 2025 [std.]          | 0.0200***<br>(0.0064) |                        |                        |                       | 0.0395***<br>(0.0066)  |
| Trade Exposure, Δ 2008-1998 [std.] |                       | -0.0128***<br>(0.0048) |                        |                       | -0.0194***<br>(0.0050) |
| Share Refugees, 2016 [std.]        |                       |                        | -0.0421***<br>(0.0056) |                       | -0.0459***<br>(0.0059) |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                  |                       |                        |                        | 0.0787***<br>(0.0054) | 0.0771***<br>(0.0055)  |
| Partial $R^2$                      | 0.0013                | 0.0006                 | 0.0064                 | 0.0179                |                        |
| $R^2$                              | 0.742                 | 0.742                  | 0.743                  | 0.746                 | 0.749                  |
| Observations                       | 10525                 | 10525                  | 10525                  | 10525                 | 10525                  |

Notes: Standard errors are clustered at the standardized 2025 AfD gross vote shares. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

TABLE C.2: RIGHT-WING IDEOLOGY VS. ANTISEMITISM

| <i>Explanatory Variables:</i> | (1)<br>NSDAP<br>1930<br><br>× Post 2015 | (2)<br>NSDAP<br>1928<br><br>× Post 2015 | (3)<br>DVFP<br>1924<br>(Antisemitic)<br>× Post 2015 | (4)<br>DNVP<br>1924<br>(Conservative)<br>× Post 2015 | (5)<br>NSDAP<br>1933<br><br>× Post 2015 | (6)<br>1920s-30s<br>Anti-<br>semitism<br>× Post 2015 | (7)<br>Medieval<br>Black Death<br>Pogroms<br>× Post 2015 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|                               | 0.0316**<br>(0.0124)                    | 0.0268***<br>(0.0096)                   | -0.0209<br>(0.0143)                                 | 0.0649***<br>(0.0167)                                | 0.0637***<br>(0.0150)                   | 0.0177<br>(0.0128)                                   | -0.1145***<br>(0.0347)                                   |
| Observations                  | 42496                                   | 42344                                   | 41680                                               | 41680                                                | 3064                                    | 3064                                                 | 3064                                                     |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the (standardized) vote share for the AfD (relative to eligible voters). Column headers indicate explanatory variables which are interacted with a post-2015 dummy in a panel of four election years (2013, 2017, 2021, 2025). The table reports coefficients and standard deviations of those interaction terms. All specifications include municipality and state-times-year fixed effects. All variables (explanatory and dependent) are standardized (before interaction with the post-2015 dummy in case of regressors), except the indicator variable for Black Death Pogroms in column (7), which has a mean of 0.251. Columns (5-7) restrict the sample to municipalities matching towns used in Voigtländer and Voth (2012). Standard errors are clustered at the level of historic municipalities/counties. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively. See main text for further details.

**TABLE C.3: RESULTS INCLUDING INTERACTED CONTROLS**

|                                 | (1)<br>Baseline       | (2)<br>Population     | (3)<br>Employment     | (4)<br>Education     | (5)<br>Religion      |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post | 0.0488***<br>(0.0130) | 0.0463***<br>(0.0138) | 0.0501***<br>(0.0181) | 0.0354**<br>(0.0171) | 0.0309**<br>(0.0149) |
| Observations                    | 42548                 | 42276                 | 31168                 | 36392                | 39780                |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the (standardized) vote share for the AfD (relative to eligible voters) in the 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025 federal elections. Each column adds a different set of interacted historical control variables. The explanatory variable across all columns is the 1933 NSDAP vote share (standardized) interacted with a post-2015 dummy variable. Population controls interacted with post-2015 are the log population size in 1933. Employment controls are shares of employed in industry and manufacturing, employed in trade and commerce, and employed in administration (agriculture and “other sectors” are the omitted category), all measured in 1925, as well as the unemployment share in 1933. Religion controls are the historical shares of Catholics and Jews. Education controls are the historical share of white-collar workers (“Angestellte und Beamte”). Sample is a panel of municipalities observed in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025, in all German states apart from city states (Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen), and the Saarland. All regressions include state-by-year and municipality fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historical municipalities/counties. One, two, and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

**TABLE C.4: RELIGION ANALYSIS**

|                                                        | (1)<br>AfD            | (2)<br>AfD           | (3)<br>AfD            | (4)<br>AfD            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post 2015                   | 0.0507***<br>(0.0136) | 0.0297**<br>(0.0150) | 0.0476***<br>(0.0138) | 0.0534***<br>(0.0137) |
| Historical Share Protestant<br>$\times$ Post 2015      |                       | 0.1079*<br>(0.0556)  |                       |                       |
| Contemp. Share Other/No Religion<br>$\times$ Post 2015 |                       |                      | -0.3683**<br>(0.1819) |                       |
| State-Year FE                                          | ✓                     | ✓                    | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Municipality FE                                        | ✓                     | ✓                    | ✓                     | ✓                     |
| Below 90th percentile<br>historically protestant       |                       |                      |                       | ✓                     |
| Observations                                           | 39780                 | 39780                | 39232                 | 35520                 |
| R2                                                     | 0.95                  | 0.95                 | 0.95                  | 0.95                  |

*Notes:* Standard errors are clustered at the level of historic municipalities/counties. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

**TABLE C.5: OCCUPATION ZONES ANALYSIS**

|                                                              | (1)                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post 2015                         | 0.0137<br>(0.0148)    |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post 2015<br>$\times$ Soviet Zone | 0.1440***<br>(0.0407) |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post 2015<br>$\times$ French Zone | 0.0669**<br>(0.0329)  |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.] $\times$ Post 2015<br>$\times$ UK Zone     | -0.0014<br>(0.0196)   |
| Observations                                                 | 42548                 |
| R2                                                           | 0.96                  |

*Notes:* One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.



## **D Additional Results, Survey Evidence from ALLBUS**

In this section we conduct additional analyses regarding our survey results from the Allbus data. In Table D.1 we show that results are robust to collapsing the individual-level data at the municipality level and using residualized on individual-level controls. Table D.2 adds the share of expellees to show robustness. Table D.3 uses equal weights for the indices. Table D.4 both uses municipalities as unit of observation and equal weights in indices. Table D.5 shows the relationship between indices and voting intention for the AfD in 2016. In Table D.6 we show that left-right self-evaluation predicts AfD voting intention positively and significantly in 2016, but negatively in 2014. This change does not occur for the NPD, a more extreme far-right party.

**TABLE D.1:** SURVEY RESULTS: ATTITUDES REMAIN CONSTANT

| Dependent variable:                                                           | Xenophobia<br>(Immigration, Assimila-<br>tion, Equal Rights) | Xenophobia<br>(Marriage, Neighbour) | Xenophobia<br>(Anti-Immigration) | Islamophobia<br>(No Teaching at School) | Nationalism<br>(Pride to be German) | Antisemitism        | Disenchantment<br>with politicians | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 1 | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 2 | Left-Right<br>Self-Evaluation | Anti-Democracy      | Ethnic Nationalism<br>Index | Summary<br>Index      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                                                               | (1)                                                          | (2)                                 | (3)                              | (4)                                     | (5)                                 | (6)                 | (7)                                | (8)                         | (9)                         | (10)                          | (11)                | (12)                        | (13)                  |
| Panel A: <i>municipality level, without controls</i>                          |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                     |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                             | 0.0061<br>(0.0039)                                           | 0.0080<br>(0.0072)                  | 0.0159*<br>(0.0085)              | 0.0095**<br>(0.0033)                    | 0.0160**<br>(0.0069)                | 0.0048<br>(0.0083)  | 0.0106***<br>(0.0040)              | 0.0185**<br>(0.0081)        | 0.0043<br>(0.0034)          | 0.0038<br>(0.0023)            | 0.0015<br>(0.0055)  | 0.0016<br>(0.0014)          | 0.0134**<br>(0.0056)  |
| NSDAP × Post 2015                                                             | 0.0156<br>(0.0115)                                           | -0.0252**<br>(0.0114)               | -0.0117<br>(0.0079)              | 0.0070<br>(0.0074)                      | -0.0234<br>(0.0174)                 | 0.0130<br>(0.0121)  | 0.0109<br>(0.0109)                 | -0.0090<br>(0.0115)         | -0.0065<br>(0.0092)         | 0.0016<br>(0.0042)            | 0.0005<br>(0.0079)  | -0.0016<br>(0.0024)         | -0.0056<br>(0.0154)   |
| Observations                                                                  | 560                                                          | 425                                 | 289                              | 2152                                    | 1300                                | 425                 | 1427                               | 286                         | 853                         | 2145                          | 289                 | 289                         | 404                   |
| Panel B: <i>municipality level, residualised on individual-level controls</i> |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                     |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                             | -0.0005<br>(0.0027)                                          | 0.0079<br>(0.0066)                  | 0.0069<br>(0.0083)               | 0.0090***<br>(0.0032)                   | 0.0123<br>(0.0071)                  | -0.0004<br>(0.0070) | 0.0003<br>(0.0040)                 | 0.0204*<br>(0.0089)         | 0.0003<br>(0.0036)          | 0.0029<br>(0.0022)            | 0.0031<br>(0.0052)  | 0.0002<br>(0.0016)          | 0.0134***<br>(0.0045) |
| NSDAP × Post 2015                                                             | 0.0285**<br>(0.0127)                                         | -0.0301**<br>(0.0116)               | -0.0057<br>(0.0076)              | 0.0042<br>(0.0071)                      | -0.0233<br>(0.0169)                 | 0.0106<br>(0.0114)  | 0.0134<br>(0.0094)                 | -0.0072<br>(0.0118)         | -0.0007<br>(0.0090)         | 0.0016<br>(0.0045)            | -0.0023<br>(0.0077) | -0.0008<br>(0.0023)         | -0.0130<br>(0.0165)   |
| Observations                                                                  | 557                                                          | 425                                 | 289                              | 2141                                    | 1287                                | 424                 | 1427                               | 285                         | 853                         | 2134                          | 289                 | 289                         | 401                   |

Notes: Controls on which municipality means are residualised in Panel B include age, gender, marriage status, education, party membership, income, Germany citizenship, and whether the respondent lives in former Eastern Germany. All regressions include state times year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historical vote shares. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

TABLE D.2: SURVEY RESULTS: ATTITUDES REMAIN CONSTANT

| Dependent variable:                                                     | Xenophobia<br>(Immigration, Assimila-<br>tion, Equal Rights) | Xenophobia<br>(Marriage, Neighbour) | Xenophobia<br>(Anti-Immigration) | Islamophobia<br>(No Teaching at School) | Nationalism<br>(Pride to be German) | Antisemitism        | Disenchantment<br>with politicians | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 1 | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 2 | Left-Right<br>Self-Evaluation | Anti-Democracy       | Ethnic Nationalism<br>Index | Summary<br>Index    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
|                                                                         | (1)                                                          | (2)                                 | (3)                              | (4)                                     | (5)                                 | (6)                 | (7)                                | (8)                         | (9)                         | (10)                          | (11)                 | (12)                        | (13)                |
| Panel A: individual level, with controls and interaction with expellees |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                     |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                      |                             |                     |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                       | 0.0008<br>(0.0030)                                           | 0.0018<br>(0.0047)                  | 0.0022<br>(0.0074)               | 0.0059*<br>(0.0030)                     | 0.0006<br>(0.0062)                  | 0.0022<br>(0.0069)  | 0.0011<br>(0.0039)                 | 0.0109<br>(0.0090)          | -0.0024<br>(0.0044)         | -0.0024<br>(0.0024)           | -0.0002<br>(0.0045)  | -0.0006<br>(0.0014)         | 0.0075*<br>(0.0058) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                                                | 0.0131<br>(0.0095)                                           | -0.0256**<br>(0.0109)               | -0.0054<br>(0.0078)              | 0.0037<br>(0.0060)                      | -0.0184<br>(0.0155)                 | 0.0083<br>(0.0103)  | 0.0120<br>(0.0102)                 | 0.0017<br>(0.0117)          | 0.0032<br>(0.0083)          | 0.0044<br>(0.0043)            | -0.0009<br>(0.0075)  | -0.0001<br>(0.0022)         | -0.0117<br>(0.0108) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Share Expellees 1950s                                    | 0.0042<br>(0.0044)                                           | -0.0100*<br>(0.0053)                | -0.0019<br>(0.0051)              | -0.0055*<br>(0.0029)                    | -0.0081<br>(0.0064)                 | -0.0046<br>(0.0075) | 0.0027<br>(0.0055)                 | -0.0056<br>(0.0072)         | 0.0035<br>(0.0033)          | -0.0011<br>(0.0022)           | -0.0087*<br>(0.0051) | -0.0008<br>(0.0013)         | -0.0014<br>(0.0062) |
| Observations                                                            | 5907                                                         | 6040                                | 5251                             | 32089                                   | 14212                               | 5380                | 23950                              | 2750                        | 11909                       | 30442                         | 5339                 | 5124                        | 3732                |

Notes: Individual survey data from Allbus. Controls include age, gender, marriage status, education, party membership, income, Germany citizenship, and whether the respondent lives in former Eastern Germany. All regressions include state times year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historical vote shares. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

**TABLE D.3: SURVEY RESULTS: ATTITUDES REMAIN CONSTANT**

| Dependent variable:                                                  | Xenophobia<br>(Immigration, Assimila-<br>tion, Equal Rights) | Xenophobia<br>(Marriage, Neighbour) | Xenophobia<br>(Anti-Immigration) | Islamophobia<br>(No Teaching at School) | Nationalism<br>(Pride to be German) | Antisemitism       | Disenchantment<br>with politicians | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 1 | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 2 | Left-Right<br>Self-Evaluation | Anti-Democracy      | Ethnic Nationalism<br>Index | Summary<br>Index     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|                                                                      | (1)                                                          | (2)                                 | (3)                              | (4)                                     | (5)                                 | (6)                | (7)                                | (8)                         | (9)                         | (10)                          | (11)                | (12)                        | (13)                 |
| <i>Panel A: individual level, without controls, Anderson indices</i> |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                    |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                      |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                    | 0.0579**<br>(0.0270)                                         | 0.0443<br>(0.0309)                  | 0.0759*<br>(0.0434)              | 0.0107***<br>(0.0035)                   | 0.0147*<br>(0.0077)                 | 0.0374<br>(0.0380) | 0.0105***<br>(0.0038)              | 0.0432<br>(0.0295)          | 0.0104<br>(0.0164)          | 0.0032<br>(0.0029)            | 0.0036<br>(0.0048)  | 0.0357<br>(0.0310)          | 0.0832**<br>(0.0341) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                                             | -0.0433<br>(0.0636)                                          | -0.1309*<br>(0.0555)                | -0.0430<br>(0.0393)              | 0.0041<br>(0.0062)                      | -0.0077<br>(0.0110)                 | 0.0363<br>(0.0516) | 0.0107<br>(0.0109)                 | 0.0085<br>(0.0495)          | 0.0005<br>(0.0377)          | 0.0033<br>(0.0044)            | 0.0006<br>(0.0080)  | 0.0046<br>(0.0464)          | -0.0234<br>(0.0695)  |
| Observations                                                         | 5687                                                         | 7740                                | 6244                             | 39999                                   | 18147                               | 6786               | 29535                              | 3191                        | 14986                       | 37489                         | 6328                | 5634                        | 4689                 |
| <i>Panel B: with individual-level controls, Anderson indices</i>     |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                    |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                      |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                    | 0.0326<br>(0.0234)                                           | 0.0363<br>(0.0273)                  | 0.0418<br>(0.0374)               | 0.0082**<br>(0.0035)                    | 0.0091<br>(0.0066)                  | 0.0186<br>(0.0345) | 0.0027<br>(0.0037)                 | 0.0542*<br>(0.0302)         | -0.0025<br>(0.0174)         | 0.0018<br>(0.0029)            | 0.0035<br>(0.0045)  | 0.0217<br>(0.0302)          | 0.0632**<br>(0.0246) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                                             | 0.0173<br>(0.0660)                                           | -0.1603**<br>(0.0570)               | -0.0281<br>(0.0382)              | 0.0032<br>(0.0060)                      | -0.0207<br>(0.0157)                 | 0.0357<br>(0.0494) | 0.0120<br>(0.0104)                 | 0.0063<br>(0.0486)          | 0.0213<br>(0.0375)          | 0.0038<br>(0.0045)            | -0.0011<br>(0.0074) | 0.0059<br>(0.0432)          | -0.0092<br>(0.0624)  |
| Observations                                                         | 4445                                                         | 6053                                | 5279                             | 32332                                   | 14310                               | 5394               | 24106                              | 2750                        | 12019                       | 30678                         | 5367                | 4825                        | 3744                 |

Notes: Individual survey data from Allbus. Indices in columns 1-3, 5, 7-8, and 11 are constructed following Anderson (2008). Controls in Panel B include age, gender, marriage status, education, party membership, income, Germany citizenship, and whether the respondent lives in former Eastern Germany. All regressions include state times year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historical vote shares. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

**TABLE D.4:** SURVEY RESULTS: ATTITUDES REMAIN CONSTANT

| Dependent variable:                                                                             | Xenophobia<br>(Immigration, Assimila-<br>tion, Equal Rights) | Xenophobia<br>(Marriage, Neighbour) | Xenophobia<br>(Anti-Immigration) | Islamophobia<br>(No Teaching at School) | Nationalism<br>(Pride to be German) | Antisemitism        | Disenchantment<br>with politicians | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 1 | Gender Attitudes<br>Index 2 | Left-Right<br>Self-Evaluation | Anti-Democracy      | Ethnic Nationalism<br>Index | Summary<br>Index      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                                                                                 | (1)                                                          | (2)                                 | (3)                              | (4)                                     | (5)                                 | (6)                 | (7)                                | (8)                         | (9)                         | (10)                          | (11)                | (12)                        | (13)                  |
| Panel A: <i>municipality level, without controls, Anderson indices</i>                          |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                     |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                                               | 0.0460*<br>(0.0258)                                          | 0.0448<br>(0.0364)                  | 0.0781*<br>(0.0416)              | 0.0095**<br>(0.0033)                    | 0.0160**<br>(0.0069)                | 0.0156<br>(0.0405)  | 0.0106***<br>(0.0040)              | 0.0822*<br>(0.0358)         | 0.0172<br>(0.0152)          | 0.0038<br>(0.0023)            | 0.0015<br>(0.0055)  | 0.0292<br>(0.0289)          | 0.0585*<br>(0.0352)   |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                                                                        | 0.0621<br>(0.0781)                                           | -0.1434**<br>(0.0623)               | -0.0546<br>(0.0379)              | 0.0070<br>(0.0074)                      | -0.0234<br>(0.0174)                 | 0.0648<br>(0.0583)  | 0.0109<br>(0.0109)                 | -0.0384<br>(0.0512)         | -0.0248<br>(0.0410)         | 0.0016<br>(0.0042)            | 0.0005<br>(0.0079)  | -0.0071<br>(0.0454)         | 0.0331<br>(0.0940)    |
| Observations                                                                                    | 416                                                          | 425                                 | 289                              | 2152                                    | 1300                                | 425                 | 1427                               | 286                         | 853                         | 2145                          | 289                 | 289                         | 404                   |
| Panel B: <i>municipality level, residualised on individual-level controls, Anderson indices</i> |                                                              |                                     |                                  |                                         |                                     |                     |                                    |                             |                             |                               |                     |                             |                       |
| NSDAP 1933 [std.]                                                                               | -0.0003<br>(0.0238)                                          | 0.0465<br>(0.0335)                  | 0.0338<br>(0.0394)               | 0.0090***<br>(0.0032)                   | 0.0123<br>(0.0071)                  | -0.0015<br>(0.0345) | 0.0003<br>(0.0040)                 | 0.0879*<br>(0.0388)         | 0.0011<br>(0.0157)          | 0.0029<br>(0.0022)            | 0.0031<br>(0.0052)  | 0.0080<br>(0.0304)          | 0.0512***<br>(0.0254) |
| NSDAP $\times$ Post 2015                                                                        | 0.1284<br>(0.0834)                                           | -0.1730***<br>(0.0639)              | -0.0234<br>(0.0362)              | 0.0042<br>(0.0071)                      | -0.0233<br>(0.0169)                 | 0.0565<br>(0.0522)  | 0.0134<br>(0.0094)                 | -0.0276<br>(0.0521)         | 0.0013<br>(0.0405)          | 0.0016<br>(0.0045)            | -0.0023<br>(0.0077) | 0.0120<br>(0.0399)          | 0.0296<br>(0.1025)    |
| Observations                                                                                    | 413                                                          | 425                                 | 289                              | 2141                                    | 1287                                | 424                 | 1427                               | 285                         | 853                         | 2134                          | 289                 | 289                         | 401                   |

Notes: Controls on which municipality means are residualised in Panel B include age, gender, marriage status, education, party membership, income, Germany citizenship, and whether the respondent lives in former Eastern Germany. Indices in columns 1-3, 5, 7-8, and 11 are constructed following Anderson (2008). All regressions contain a full set of state fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the level of historical vote shares. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

**TABLE D.5:** INDICES AND AfD VOTING INTENTION, 2016, 2018, 2021, AND 2023

|                                                    | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)                   | (4)                   | (5)                | (6)                   | (7)                   | (8)                   | (9)                 | (10)                  | (11)                  | (12)                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Xenophobia (Immigration/Assimilation/Equal Rights) | 0.0805***<br>(0.0224) |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Xenophobia (Family and Neighbours)                 |                       | 0.0457***<br>(0.0076) |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Xenophobia (Anti-Immigration)                      |                       |                       | 0.0838***<br>(0.0062) |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| No Islam at School                                 |                       |                       |                       | 0.0724***<br>(0.0096) |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Pride to be German                                 |                       |                       |                       |                       | 0.0102<br>(0.0063) |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Antisemitism                                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    | 0.0663***<br>(0.0107) |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Disenchantment with Politicians                    |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       | 0.0717***<br>(0.0038) |                       |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Gender Attitudes Index 1                           |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       | 0.0108***<br>(0.0033) |                     |                       |                       |                       |
| Gender Attitudes Index 2                           |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       | -0.0013<br>(0.0102) |                       |                       |                       |
| Left-Right Self-Evaluation                         |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     | 0.3780***<br>(0.0141) |                       |                       |
| Anti-Democracy Index                               |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       | 0.1881***<br>(0.0316) |                       |
| Ethnic Nationalism Index                           |                       |                       |                       |                       |                    |                       |                       |                       |                     |                       |                       | 0.0645***<br>(0.0066) |
| Observations                                       | 349                   | 1408                  | 2928                  | 14295                 | 8033               | 1271                  | 12643                 | 7045                  | 1469                | 13802                 | 5899                  | 2680                  |

Notes: The dependent variable is an indicator of voting intention for the AfD. Individual survey data are from pooled ALLBUS cross-sections in 2016, 2018, 2021, and 2023. All regressions contain a full set of state fixed effects. Controls include a dummy for former East Germany, age, marriage status, highest obtained education, gender, and income. Robust standard errors are used in all specifications. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

**TABLE D.6:** LEFT-RIGHT SELF-EVALUATION AND AfD/NPD VOTING INTENTION, 1980-2023

|                                               | (1)<br>AfD            | (2)<br>NPD             |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Left-Right Self-Evaluation                    | 0.0069***<br>(0.0015) | 0.0249***<br>(0.0027)  |
| Left-Right Self-Evaluation $\times$ Post 2015 | 0.3885***<br>(0.0143) | -0.0146***<br>(0.0040) |
| Observations                                  | 53642                 | 53642                  |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is an indicator of voting intention for the AfD (column 1) and the NPD (column 2). Individual survey data from Allbus (pooled cross-sections every two years between 1980-2023). All regressions contain a full set of state fixed effects. Controls include a dummy for former East Germany, age, marriage status, gender, and income. Robust standard errors are used in all specifications. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.

## E Additional Results, Survey Evidence from GLES

In this section we provide detail on our analyses based on survey data from GLES. Figure E.1 shows histograms for the evaluation of the AfD on a left-right scale in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025. Figure E.2 shows similar results for all other main German parties for comparison. Figure E.4 displays “relative stigma” levels for parties from 2009 until 2025: we define stigma as the relative difference between a party’s actual electoral success and stated voting intentions. A value of 0 indicates exact correspondence between stated voting intentions in polls and actual electoral shares. A value of 1 indicates that no survey respondents declare support for the party, and that actual electoral support is entirely in excess of the expected share calculated from polls. Table E.1 shows that children’s left-right self-evaluation is highly correlated with that of their parents. This correlation is even higher in small communities.

Clearly, the change in the ideological nature of the AfD was perceived by the voters. In surveys conducted for (GLES), potential voters were asked to place parties on an 11-point left-right scale. We use component 8 of the (GLES) (Long-term online tracking), studies ZA5720, ZA5726, ZA5728, ZA5732. All studies are available through the GESIS website ([www.gesis.org](http://www.gesis.org)). As shown in Figure E.3, left panel, in 2013 voters were not sure where to place the AfD on a left-right spectrum; the modal answer is the score of 6, right in the middle of the spectrum, and the median is 7, just to the right of the center. Over the course of the following years, the public perception of the party shifted radically, and in 2017 most respondents placed the party to the far right (the rightmost answer, 11, is also the modal answer).

A popular political interpretation is that the AfD filled the void left behind on the right side of the spectrum by the CDU, who, under the leadership of Angela Merkel, had adopted a more centrist stance. However, the survey evidence in Figure E.3 shows that the CDU barely moved in the public’s perception: the two kernel densities overlap almost perfectly. The right graph of Figure E.3 shows, analogously, that the mean perception of the AfD shifted dramatically to the right between 2013 and 2017, while most other mainstream parties either stayed stable or moved only slightly. The only exception is the CSU, the Bavarian sister party of the CDU. Its leftward move seems an aberration of the 2017 survey; in all other years, the CSU is stable and slightly to the right of the CDU, consistent with its law-and-order appeal (cf. Figure E.2).

The qualitative difference between the AfD and previously existing, more extreme right-wing parties is also visible from the divergence between expressed voting intention in polls and actual electoral results. For other right-wing parties, voters are reluctant to express their support even in anonymous political surveys: in the GLES, in most waves zero respondents (or low single-digit numbers) declare support for the NPD, much lower than the figures expected from projecting electoral results to the survey sample size. By contrast, while opinion polls often underestimate true support for the AfD, the relative scope of such social stigma in surveys is much smaller than for other right-wing parties such as the NPD. In Figure E.4, we calculate “stigma shares” as the ratio of actual electoral support relative to declared support in the GLES. A ratio of 0 would indicate a perfect correspondence between electoral results and polls. For the NPD, the “stigma shares” are often equal to, or close to, 1: (almost) all of the actual support declared in electoral results exceeds the support estimated from polls. For the AfD, the share is positive, indicating a certain amount of reluctance to express support in polls, but considerably lower than for the NPD. As a term of comparison, the ratio is negative for the Greens, suggesting that people are more willing to declare support for the party than actually to vote for it. AfD stigma is high in 2013 and 2017, but insignificant in 2013; it is lower in 2021 and near zero in 2025.

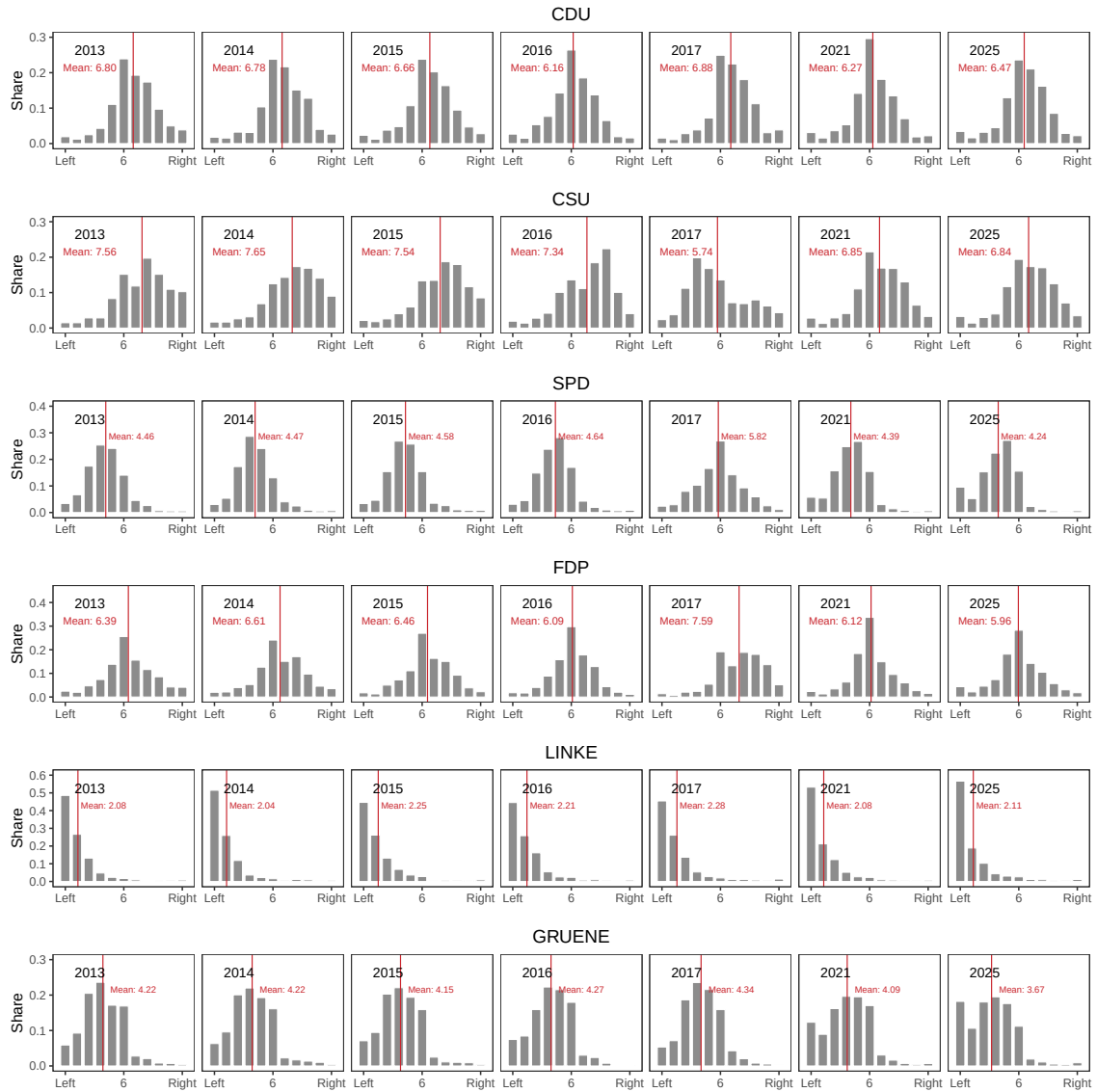


**FIGURE E.1: SURVEY EVIDENCE ON PARTY ORIENTATION**  
- AfD



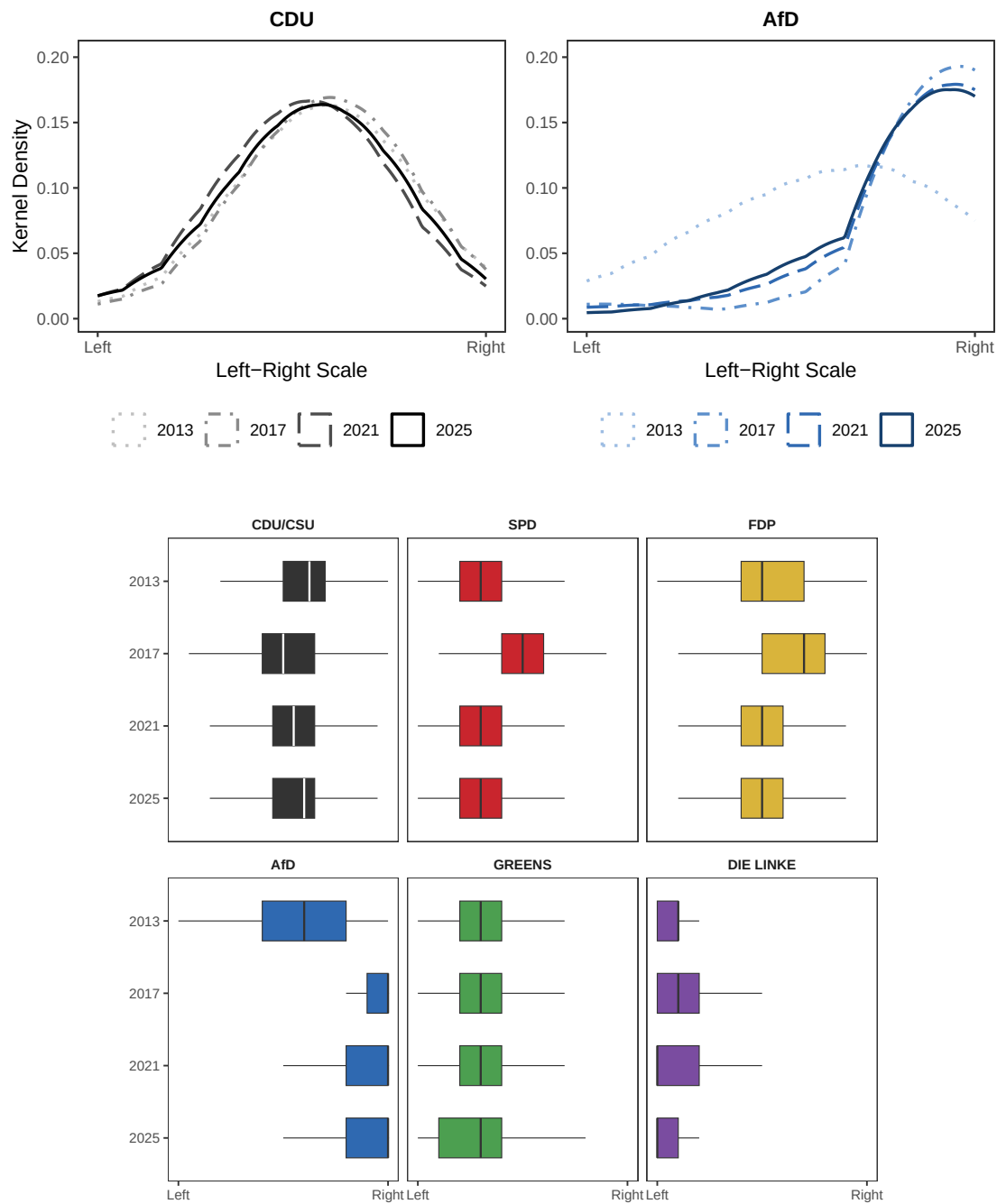
*Notes:* The graphs show where GLES survey respondents placed the AfD on the left-right spectrum. Red lines in the graph represent means.

**FIGURE E.2: SURVEY EVIDENCE ON PARTY ORIENTATION**  
- OTHER PARTIES



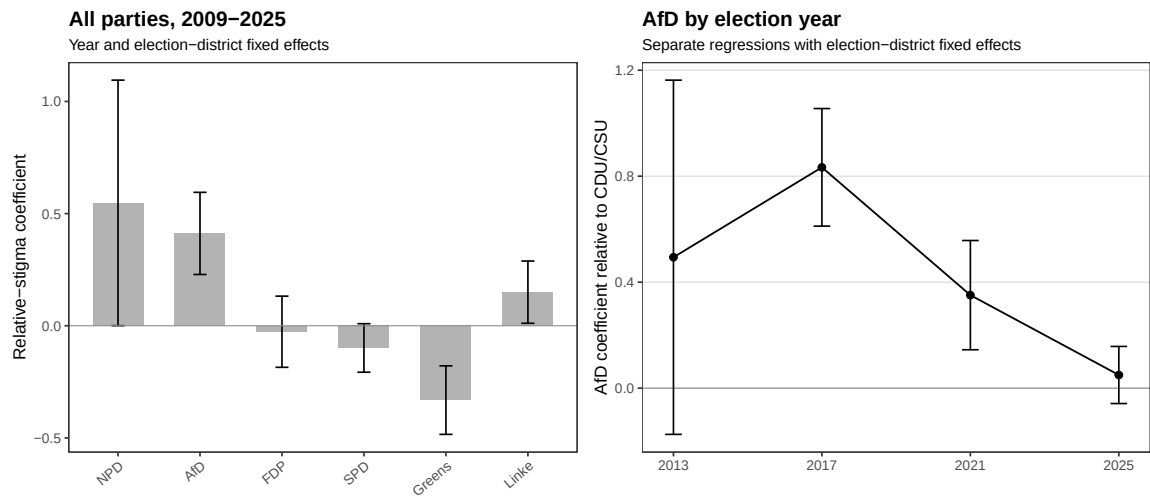
Notes: The graphs show where GLES survey respondents placed the main German political parties on the left-right spectrum from 2013 through 2025. Red lines in the graph represent means.

FIGURE E.3: PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES



Notes: The graphs show where GLES survey respondents placed different political parties on the left-right spectrum. The upper panel plots kernel density estimates for the CDU (the mainstream conservative party) and the AfD in 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025 (bandwidth = 1.5). The lower panel shows box plots of respondents' left-right assessments of the major German political parties in the same election years. See Appendix Figure E.2 for more detailed results.

**FIGURE E.4: RELATIVE STIGMA**



*Notes:* The left panel plots party coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from the pooled 2009–2025 relative-stigma regression with election-year and election-district fixed effects. The omitted category is CDU/CSU. The right panel plots the AfD coefficient and 95% confidence interval from separate regressions for 2013, 2017, 2021, and 2025, each with election-district fixed effects. Relative stigma is the difference between the actual vote share and mean stated voting intention, divided by the actual vote share. Standard errors are clustered by election district.

**TABLE E.1:** CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

|                           | Dependent Variable: Imputed Left-Right Self-Placement |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                           | Both                                                  |                     | Mother              |                     | Father              |                     |
|                           | (1)                                                   | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                 | (6)                 |
| Parent(s)                 | 0.612***<br>(0.020)                                   | 0.539***<br>(0.054) | 0.556***<br>(0.018) | 0.458***<br>(0.051) | 0.507***<br>(0.019) | 0.480***<br>(0.049) |
| Parent(s)<br>× Small Town |                                                       | 0.124*<br>(0.065)   |                     | 0.137**<br>(0.060)  |                     | 0.039<br>(0.059)    |
| Small Town                |                                                       | −0.389<br>(0.340)   |                     | −0.415<br>(0.311)   |                     | 0.146<br>(0.305)    |
| Observations              | 2,893                                                 | 1,351               | 3,270               | 1,514               | 3,410               | 1,613               |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>   | 0.265                                                 | 0.275               | 0.246               | 0.249               | 0.207               | 0.211               |

*Notes:* The table shows the results of regressing an individual's political attitude on the political attitude of her parent(s), interacted with an indicator for neighbourhood size. Political attitude is measured as imputed value on a left-right scale: based on the underlying party identification as indicated by the interviewee in the GLES, the party's corresponding left-right value (taken from Parl.gov.org) is assigned. In columns (1) and (2), the independent variable is the mean value of the political attitudes of the mother and the father; in columns (3) and (4), the independent variable is the mother's political attitude; in columns (5) and (6), it is the father's political attitude. Small Town is an indicator variable for whether the individual lives in a rural area, village, or small or medium-sized town. All regressions include an intercept (not shown). Robust White standard errors are in parentheses. One, two and three stars represent significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels respectively.