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A Crisis of Masculinity: The Rise of the AfD and the East German Man

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By Chandler B. Molpus

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion

Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies

Croft Institute for International Studies

Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

The University of Mississippi

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**Abstract:**

In this thesis, I examine how a crisis of masculinity in the former German Democratic Republic has contributed to the rise of the far-right party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). In the first chapter, I argue that east German men feel left- behind politically, economically, and demographically. In the second chapter, I compare results from the 2017 Federal Bundestag election to demonstrate that east German men are more likely to vote for the AfD than any other demographic group in Germany.



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### **Introduction:**

In February 2020, the leader of the governing Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Chancellor Angela's Merkel successor, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, stepped down as party leader as regional politics in the east German state of Thuringia sent shock waves throughout the national political landscape.<sup>1</sup> All of the major German political parties had entered a pact not to cooperate with the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), but the Thuringian CDU voted with the AfD to elect the new governor of the state.<sup>2</sup> With Kramp-Karrenbauer's leadership questioned, she had no option but to step down, and the growing power of the AfD was apparent. While the AfD may never be the ruling party in Germany, the message is clear— they are here to stay.

Far-right parties across Europe have achieved great electoral success in recent years. Parties such as the National Front in France and the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria have been mainstays in national and European politics respectively. However, the new far-right AfD has been enjoying success in Germany- a country with little to no relevant far-right populist parties since the end of the Second World War. The far-right has been on the rise in Germany since the 2017 Bundestag elections in which the right-wing Alternativ für Deustchland (AfD) won 12.6% percent of the vote, becoming the leading opposition voice in the German Parliament. The AfD, founded in 2013, has been successful in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), especially Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia. Twenty-eight percent of east German men voted for the far right AfD showing that the key to the party's growing success is influenced by the east

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<sup>1</sup> Katrin Bennhold, "Merkel's Chosen Successor Steps Aside. The Far Right Cries Victory," *The New York Times* (February 10, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



German man's attraction to the far-right party.<sup>3</sup> In the 2019 European Parliament elections the AfD finished no lower than second place in any of the five East German states (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, and Saxony) and received 11% nationally in Germany.<sup>4</sup>

While much of the rise of the German far-right can be attributed to the 1 million asylum seekers entering Germany in 2015, such anger has additional origins in the east. After German Reunification in 1990, many east German women sought work in the west and never returned, and west German elites took over powerful roles in east Germany. The changing demographic imbalance in terms of male-female ratio, the economy, and lack of political voice has created a situation in which east German men feel ignored and left-behind by western Germans, east German women, and even the asylum seekers. They are unable to find meaningful relationships or work, and they desire to be heard. The cause of AfD's ascendance as a power player in German politics lies beyond hatred for foreigners and Muslims. Why have east German men voted disproportionately for the AfD, and how does the east German man's view of masculinity in post-reunification Germany shape this voting pattern? I argue that the AfD's support stems from a "forgotten" generation of east German men who see a country and its women that have left them behind economically, politically and demographically, and created a crisis of masculinity in the states of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Even though AfD, founded in 2013, originally served as a Eurosceptic party, the young party has evolved to appeal to east German men.

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<sup>3</sup> Katrin Bennhold, "One Legacy of Merkel? Angry East German Men Fueling the Far Right," *The New York Times* (November 5, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, "Sachsen Ergebnisse 2019," *Bundeswahlleiter* (2019).

## Literature Review:

The gap between male and female voters in support of populist right-wing parties in Europe has been studied extensively. However, the reasons for such a gap have been debated. Tim Immerzeel asserts that support for populist right-wing parties is due in large part to anti-immigrant attitudes.<sup>5</sup> Pippa Norris argues that voters who have lower levels of trust in political institutions tend to support right-wing parties.<sup>6</sup> Another sentiment found in previous literature is the tendency for young, less educated men to espouse ideas more in line with populist right-wing beliefs because these men are often in direct competition for work with migrants and foreigners.<sup>7</sup> Many of these findings can be applied to the East-German case and the AfD as Germany's right-wing party finds its support base among undereducated and underemployed men who oppose Chancellor Merkel's decision to allow over 1 million migrants into the country in 2015.

Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove assert that the difference in socio-economic position between males and females and anti-immigration and "law and order" attitudes can account for the gap in the gendered support of right-wing parties.<sup>8</sup> This is to say that men who are employed in more labor-intensive jobs are more likely to feel threatened by globalization and immigration. However, to build upon their research and explain the gender gap, Spierings and Zaslove focused on both populist right-wing parties and populism as a larger concept. Using Cas Mudde's research, they define populism as a "thin-centered ideology" meaning that populist parties have

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Immerzeel et al, "Explaining the Gender Gap in Radical Right Voting: A Cross-National Investigation in 12 Western European Countries," *Comparative European Politics* 13:2 (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Pippa Norris, *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, "Gendering the Vote for Populist Radical Right Parties," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49:1-2 (2015), 138.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 140.

to depend on other ideologies whether right or left for the content of their platforms and beliefs.<sup>9</sup> General populist beliefs, they argue, include a “people-centered” ideology, and emphasis on the people versus the elites, and high levels of antagonism.<sup>10</sup> Their study showed that a gender gap still existed even between populist right and left parties, with less of a gap in support for populist left-wing parties.<sup>11</sup>

Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser mirror Spiering and Zaslove’s definition of populism. Like Spierings and Zaslove, Mudde and Kaltwasser define populism as a “thin-centered ideology,” however, they state that “populist actors do not operate in a cultural or ideological vacuum.”<sup>12</sup> That is to say that the “gendered characterization” of populism depends on the “cultural setting” and ideological” features to which the populist party adheres to such as nationalism and nativism.<sup>13</sup> Mudde and Kaltwasser also emphasize the fact that right-wing populist parties operate within “highly emancipated” societies in Northern Europe in terms of gender.<sup>14</sup> Their findings show that in terms of female representation of right-wing populist parties in national and supranational parliaments is low, and lower than the national average in many Northern European countries.<sup>15</sup> Mudde and Kaltwasser assert that while right-wing populist parties do not necessarily reject beliefs such as gender equality, views on family policy are more conservative and traditional. For example, Northern European right-wing populist parties tend to stress the importance of families and the traditional roles of men and women.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, “Gender, Populist Attitudes, and Voting: Explaining the Gender Gap in Voting for Populist Radical Right and Radical Left Parties,” *West European Politics* 40:4 (2017), 824.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 824.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 839.

<sup>12</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Vox Populi or vox masculini? Populism and Gender in Northern Europe and South America,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 49:1-2 (2015), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

However, views on gender change in the context of immigration, they argue. Under the threat of what right-wing populist parties call “Islamization,” the traditional image of women as “vulnerable” and a “potential victim” is used.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the right-wing’s fight against immigration and Islamization is expressed as a struggle for Western values. These Western values stress the “liberal equality of men and women as a national value.”<sup>18</sup>

Using the scholarly literature on the gender gap and the gendered approach of right-wing populist parties, my goal is to show how east German male voters share the features of other populist right-wing voters such as underemployment, unemployment, lack of education and an overall sense of resentment of elites of the current power structure in the Federal Republic of Germany. As one AfD voter stated, “[AfD voters] are often citizens who no longer feel represented.<sup>19</sup> With regards to right-wing populist parties’ gendered approach, I strive to prove that the use of the AfD’s strong emphasis on German family values and anti-immigration platform have further increased the AfD’s appeal to East German men during their crisis of masculinity.

### **Ideological Transformation and Leadership Changes of the AfD:**

The AfD has not always been a far-right and anti-immigration political party. After the party’s founding in 2013, the AfD promoted “soft-Euroscepticism,” economic liberalism, and socially conservative policies.<sup>20</sup> Originally, many of the founding members of the AfD were professors, lawyers, doctors, and former politicians.<sup>21</sup> Many of the AfD’s initial members had

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<sup>17</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Vox Populi or vox masculini? Populism and Gender in Northern Europe and South America,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 49:1-2 (2015), 33.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “German Elections Reveal, and Deepen, a New East-West Divide,” *The New York Times* (August 31, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, “How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013-2017,” *Electoral Studies* 60:102040 (2019), 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

been members of Chancellor Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). According to Kai Arzheimer and Carl Berning, the AfD's candidates for the 2013 Bundestag Election were "more market liberal but no more authoritarian" than their counterparts in the center-right CDU/CSU.<sup>22</sup> However, 2015 represented a watershed moment for party structure and ideological transformation. The former was the change of party leadership in July 2015, and the latter was Chancellor Merkel's suspension of the Dublin Regulation and refugee crisis in September 2015.

In July 2015, Frauke Petry took over party leadership of the AfD from Berndt Lucke, and under her leadership the party began to become more xenophobic, populist, and radical. Charles Lees states, "the AfD took advantage of the disconnect between the normally politically astute Merkel and her core electorate by shifting their own political message away from a technical critique of the Euro Crisis to a more aggressive attack on immigration."<sup>23</sup> Petry came to power with the support of the most radical factions of the party, and she even made headlines by saying that refugees could be shot at the border.<sup>24</sup> She was a staunch opponent of Merkel's refugee strategy, and the AfD distanced itself from its roots as an economically liberal and soft-Eurosceptic party. However, Frauke Petry stepped down from party leadership before the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election. She was replaced by the "classical liberal" Alice Weidel and the far-right leader of Brandenburg's AfD state party, Alexander Gauland. This new combination shows that the AfD was aware that its radical and right-wing stance on immigration needed to be paired with a softer, more market liberal approach at the party's roots. Weidel and Gauland led the AfD

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<sup>22</sup> Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013-2017," *Electoral Studies* 60:102040 (2019), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany': The Rise of Right-Wing Populism at the Heart of Europe." *Politics* 38:3 (2018), 301.

<sup>24</sup> Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013-2017," *Electoral Studies* 60:102040 (2019), 3.

to unexpected success in the 2017 election, and solidified the AfD's role as the far-right populist voice in Germany.

### **Far-Right Populism and the AfD's Supporter Base in the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election:**

The AfD's transformation into an ideologically far-right party could have diminished its success in the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election. Instead, the party gained 92 seats in the Bundestag, in spite of receiving less than 5% of the national vote in 2013. Charles Lees asserted, "the AfD became the third largest party grouping because and not despite the party's increasing radicalism."<sup>25</sup> Arzheimer and Berning used the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) to measure the attitudes of AfD supporters between May 2013 and September 2017. Their findings show a clear shift in AfD voter attitudes by July 2015. The greatest indicator of support was favoring a restrictive position on immigration.<sup>26</sup> By 2017, an anti-immigration attitude was the clearest separation between AfD voters and other voters even though it had no discernible effect in 2013.<sup>27</sup> Attitudes favoring higher taxes and more welfare benefits had a weak negative effect.<sup>28</sup> The importance of immigration on AfD voter attitudes clearly shows a shift in the party's ideology, and shows that the party now relies on Germans who are more xenophobic than economically liberal. For example, the 2017 AfD manifesto contains only 3 of 76 pages dedicated to the Eurozone.<sup>29</sup> The party has become the bastion of anti-immigration sentiment, not economic and Eurozone reform.

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany:' The Rise of Right-Wing Populism at the Heart of Europe," *Politics* 38:3 (2018), 297.

<sup>26</sup> Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013-2017," *Electoral Studies* 60:102040 (2019), 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany:' The Rise of Right-Wing Populism at the Heart of Europe," *Politics* 38:3 (2018), 306.

The demographic makeup of AfD voters is also necessary to understand its rise in German politics. Men, especially men from the former GDR, were much more likely to support the AfD than other voters.<sup>30</sup> Also, Catholics were much less likely to vote for the AfD than Protestants in the east, but Catholics were more likely to vote for the AfD than Protestants in the west.<sup>31</sup> However, Arzheimer and Berning found that non-religious voters were substantially more likely to support the AfD than religious ones. This could be a result of those in the east being less religious because of the GDR's stance on atheism. The AfD appealed to voters (30-44 years of age) more than any other age group.<sup>32</sup> These voters had lived most of their lives in a unified Germany. These Germans demonstrate the disappointments with a reunification favoring the west.

AfD voters tended to be less educated than other voters. For example, Lees classifies the three main groups of AfD voters into 3 social groups: Precariat, the respectable middle class, and traditionalists. The Precariats were the most likely to vote for the AfD.<sup>33</sup> Lees defines Precariat as someone in part-time employment, temporary employment, or unemployed.<sup>34</sup> The group of Precariats are the losers of globalization and reunification. They have witnessed failed promises since reunification, and they struggle to keep meaningful employment. When paired with the fact that 35% of AfD voters in 2017 did not vote in the 2013 elections, one can see this frustration and desire for change in German politics.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013-2017," *Electoral Studies* 60:102040 (2019), 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany': The Rise of Right-Wing Populism at the Heart of Europe," *Politics* 38:3 (2018), 304.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 303.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 303.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 302.

**Methodology:**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will focus on factors that drive east German men to vote for the far-right AfD. I use a more qualitative approach analyzing masculinity in the former GDR while also using the German Federal Government's "Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity," and opinion polls from the German think-tank Allensbach Institute. I also examine how the mass emigration of east Germans and particularly women contribute to the east German identity as the "loser" of reunification. The chapter ends with a discussion on how the AfD's campaigns to appeal to these east German men using anti-immigration strategies. The first chapter serves as the basis to explain why east German men are dissatisfied with the political, economic, and demographic status quo, and how the AfD uses this discontent to gain support. With the drivers of the AfD support explained, I then determine that the AfD were more likely than the other major German political parties to receive support from east German men in the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election— and future elections— in chapter 2.

The second chapter of the thesis will have a quantitative approach. Using results from the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election, I first compare the male and female proportion of AfD first and second votes in each of the 16 federal Länder (states) and Berlin. I then compare the likelihood of an AfD vote in 2017 with the CDU/CSU, Social Democratic Party (SPD), Grüne, and Die Linke for east German men, east German women, west German men, and west German women. This quantitative test does more than record past patterns, but it can serve to predict German voting patterns in future elections. I hope to determine that the AfD's support among east German men is disproportionate compared to the other mainstream parties and other demographic voter bases.



## **Chapter 1: Why Is the AfD So Popular with East German Men?**

In this chapter, I hope to find out the factors that drive east Germans, and specifically east German men, to vote for the far-right AfD. I will examine masculinity, east German identity and attitudes, possible economic factors and demographic shifts. My goal is to understand why east German men feel left behind since the reunification of Germany and determine why the party is so popular in the former GDR. The east German man's attraction to the AfD lies in their lack of political and economic opportunities and is further strengthened by the emigration of women out of east Germany. When paired with the influx of Muslim migrants and perceived west German domination, the "left-behind" feeling of east German men makes them susceptible to the far-right ideology of the AfD.

### **More Than Economics: Economic Realities of the Former GDR**

To understand why some east Germans— especially men— feel left behind, one must first understand the economic realities of east Germany. Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove determined that uneducated and underemployed men are more likely to vote for populist radical right parties like the AfD, so grasping the economy of east Germany is key.<sup>36</sup> Since reunification in 1990, the former GDR's Länder have made great advances in becoming equal to former West Germany; however, economic growth is still lagging in east German states. In 1991, industrial production of the former GDR was only 17% of that in the west, but that number increased to 52% by 2016.<sup>37</sup> While this growth is very promising, the economic situation in the east is no *Wirtschaftswunder*. Overall, the GDP per capita in the former GDR is only 73.2% of the GDP

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<sup>36</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, "Gendering the Vote for Populist Radical Right Parties," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49:1-2 (2015), 138.

<sup>37</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, "Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity," (2018), 18.

per capita in the west in 2017.<sup>38</sup> The GDP per capita in western German states was €40,301 compared to just €29,477 in east German states excluding Berlin.<sup>39</sup> The poorest east German state was Mecklenburg-Vorpommern with a GDP per capita of €24,454 while the richest east German state was Saxony with €28,497. Interestingly, AfD support was the greatest in 2017 with east German men in the three richest states of the former GDR (Saxony, Thuringia, and Brandenburg) as discussed later in Chapter 2.<sup>40</sup>

Unemployment in the east is greater than that in the west. In 2017, unemployment in east Germany was 7.6% compared to 5.3% in west Germany.<sup>41</sup> However, the unemployment rate for women in east Germany was lower than that for men. 8.1% of men in the former GDR were unemployed while only 7.0% of women were.<sup>42</sup> Those figures were 5.5% and 5.0% in the west respectively.<sup>43</sup> The high unemployment of men could be one factor attracting them to far-right populist parties like the AfD as scholars like Spierings and Zaslove postulate for other populist far-right parties.<sup>44</sup> In particular, the east German states have a shortage rate for skilled labor. For example, Thuringia has a skilled labor shortage rate of 81% in 2017.<sup>45</sup> The lack of skilled labor in east Germany means that east Germans workers are not trained and educated enough for many skilled job positions. This shortage could also explain the striking wage gap between the east and the west. The average gross monthly wage of a full-time east German employee is only 81% of a

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<sup>38</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, "Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity," (2018), 16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, "Gendering the Vote for Populist Radical Right Parties," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49:1-2 (2015), 139.

<sup>45</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, "Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity," (2018), 35.

western full-time employee (€2,690 and €3,330 respectively).<sup>46</sup> These economic disparities between east and west could account for the perceived lack of success of reunification. While strides have been made in the east German economy, western Germany remains the dominant force in Germany.

Citizens of east Germany also lack accessibility to positions of power, both economically and politically, when compared to their western counterparts. There are no east German companies listed on the DAX-30, the leading stock exchange in the country.<sup>47</sup> As Holger Brandes discusses, western German masculinity and men dominated that masculinity in the east following reunification as westerners took positions of power from their east counterparts. This trend continues today. For example, only one in five leadership positions in east Germany are held by an easterner.<sup>48</sup> East Germans hold only 1.7% of the “top jobs in politics, the federal courts, the military, and business” even though easterners make up 17% of the total German population.<sup>49</sup> The underrepresentation of east Germans further adds to the sense of frustration and humiliation that they have, especially for men. Economic progress has been made in the east, but east Germans understandably feel like losers of reunification. Without opportunities to lead, many east Germans feel like second class citizens. Far-right populist parties like the AfD attract voters by placing emphasis on the “people vs. the elites.”<sup>50</sup> In the case of east Germany, this strategy is easy because east German men feel dominated and left behind by their counterparts.

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<sup>46</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, “Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity,” (2018), 46.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Tobias Buck, “Lingering Divide: Why East and West Germany Are Drifting Apart.” *Financial Times* (2019).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, “Gender, Populist Attitudes, and Voting: Explaining the Gender Gap in Voting for Populist Radical Right and Radical Left Parties,” *West European Politics* 40:4 (2017), 824

## Exodus from the East: Gender Imbalance and an Ageing East Germany

Between 1990 and 2017, 3,681,649 easterners left the former GDR to move to the more prosperous western states.<sup>51</sup> This massive exodus from east Germany since reunification has caused the former GDR to have a severe demographic crisis that will continue to get worse in the future. The first major migration occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 1989 and 1990, more than 800,000 people left the east states as factories were closing down, and unemployment was “skyrocketing.”<sup>52</sup> The next series of mass migration occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as many women, young people, and well-educated people left the former GDR to find a better life in the west.<sup>53</sup> These migrations created an aging east German society and a gender demographic imbalance.

To understand the current demographic and political situation of east Germany, one must know the history and importance of women’s roles in the GDR, and why women decided to leave. Before reunification, female employment in East Germany was 91.2%.<sup>54</sup> Women in the GDR held high-standing, and employers were even “obliged to enter into contracts with women, guaranteeing employment according to qualifications gained during training periods and quotas were set in all branches of industry.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, over 90% of women held vocational qualifications, and there were a high number of women in management posts.<sup>56</sup>

After reunification in 1990, women's employment in the east began to decline as the new political and economic systems were implemented in the east. Due to anxiety and

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<sup>51</sup> Christian Bangel, Paul Bickle, Elena Erdmann, et al., “The Millions Who Left.” *Zeit* (2019).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Vanessa Beck et al, “Resilience and Unemployment: A Case Study of East German Women,” *German Politics* 14:1 (2005), 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

unemployment, the birth-rate for east Germany dropped by over 60 percent in the first 3 years following reunification.<sup>57</sup> Such a large decline in birth rate is an explaining factor of the growing divide between men and women in east Germany. The birth rate in east Germany has risen since to levels exceeding that of the west, but that birth rate is not sufficient to stop the long-term decline in the rate of annual births.<sup>58</sup> Another contributing factor is the migration of women from east to western Germany. Less women than men came from the west to the east.<sup>59</sup> The majority of women who migrated to western Germany were women between the ages of 18 and 25.<sup>60</sup> Current literature suggests that most women are leaving the east due to “deficient employment opportunities.”<sup>61</sup> The differences in education levels have also been posited as possible factors for migration to the west. Most east Germans have gone to western Germany to receive vocational training, or go to the less technical focused universities in the west.<sup>62</sup>

The lack of women in the east could explain the levels of resentment currently found in the former GDR. East German men possibly look at any new refugees or foreigners as threats to their already small number of women. Also, once again the domination of west over east is present. These women have bought into the hegemonic masculinity that Holger Brandes discusses, and abandoned east German men for “better” opportunities and men in west Germany. Once again, the identity of the loser east German man is perpetuated, and frustration and resentment grow.

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<sup>57</sup> Dinah Dodds, “Ten Years After the Wall: East German Women in Transition,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 10:3 (2003), 262.

<sup>58</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, “Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity,” (2018), 58.

<sup>59</sup> Johannes Stauder, “(Why) have Women Left East Germany More Frequently Than Men?,” *HDJBO* 3:5 (2018), 74.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Ralf Mai, “Die altersselektive Abwanderung aus Ostdeutschland,” *Raumforschung und Raumordnung* 5 (2006), 356.

<sup>62</sup> Johannes Stauder, “(Why) have Women Left East Germany More Frequently Than Men?,” *HDJBO* 3:5 (2018), 78.

The emigration of women and young people from the former GDR also meant that east German states created less tax revenue which resulted in a breakdown of “social infrastructure,” which meant that schools, hospitals, and other institutions closed.<sup>63</sup> This breakdown of the social fabric of the east caused many to lose confidence and hope for the future. In a poll conducted by Emnid, in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, more than one-third of east Germans felt they were “no longer needed in society.”<sup>64</sup> The mentality of easterners as “left-behind” and forgotten is largely true. Many in the east were, in fact, left behind by their friends and family that moved to the west.

73 out of the 76 eastern regions lost residents to the west.<sup>65</sup> No state has experienced as much emigration as the city Suhl in the east German state of Thuringia. The city lost more than 38% of its population between 1991 and 2017.<sup>66</sup> With east German states and cities like Suhl losing so many women and young people to the more prosperous west, an ageing population was inevitable. For example, in 1991, 23.9% of Suhl’s population was under the age of 18. By 2017, only 12.3% of the population was under the age of 18.<sup>67</sup> With east German states and cities like Suhl losing so many women and young people to the more prosperous west, an ageing population was inevitable. For example, only 10.5% of Suhl’s citizens were over the age of 65 in 1991.<sup>68</sup> However, by 2017, that number had increased to 31.5%.<sup>69</sup> Suhl is the perfect representation of east Germany’s future problems. The Federal Government of Germany projects

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<sup>63</sup> Christian Bangel, Paul Bickle, Elena Erdmann, et al., “The Millions Who Left.” *Zeit* (2019).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

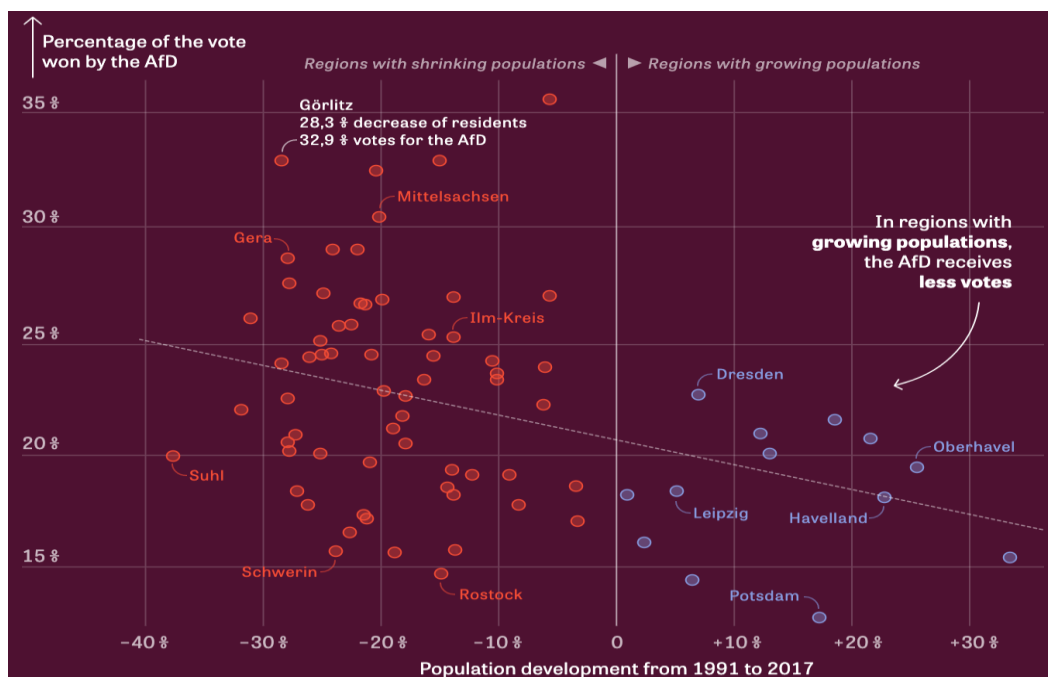
<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

that by 2030 only 51.6% of the east German population will be of working age (18-64).<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, the population of east Germany over the age of 65 is expected to be 31.5%, the same as Suhl in 2017.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 1: Percentage of the vote won by AfD compared to Population development between 1991 to 2017 (Source: Zeit, “The Millions Who Left”)**

The demographic crisis and emigration have also contributed to the rise of the far-right AfD in east Germany. The AfD has done particularly well in the regions of east Germany that experienced some of the highest rates of population loss. As figure 1 shows, cities like Görlitz that lost 27.3% of residents, voted for the AfD more than regions with less population loss with 32.9% for the AfD. Voting results where there is a stark gender imbalance are also favorable to the AfD. According to the Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft (Institute of the German Economy),

<sup>70</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, “Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity,” (2018), 58.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 58.

there are 9 women for every 10 men in the former GDR.<sup>72</sup> The small Saxonian cities of Chemnitz and Glaubitz there are gender imbalances of 8 women for every 10 men and 1 woman for every 4 men respectively.<sup>73</sup> In 2017, the AfD received 24% of first votes, and 24.3% of second votes in Chemnitz.<sup>74</sup> In Glaubitz, which is in the voting district of Meißen, the AfD received 31% of first votes and 32.9% of second votes.<sup>75</sup> It is clear that the emigration of easterners has resulted in the rise of far-right voting patterns. The young and well-educated populations of these cities have been decimated since reunification, and it is understandable why east German men look for alternatives to their current situation through voting for the AfD.

### **The East German Identity and the “Second-Class” Citizen**

The reunification of Germany resulted in much more than the domination of West German hegemonic masculinity in the former GDR. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, those in east Germany still struggle to feel “German.” In the 2019 Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity, 57% of east German citizens said that they felt like “second-class-citizens.”<sup>76</sup> In the same poll, 38% of east German’s said that reunification was a success while only 20% of those under 40 years of age said reunification was a success.<sup>77</sup> This statistic is particularly important as the AfD was most successful with those aged 30-44 as discussed in the introduction. While one of this report’s key limitations is that it does not separate respondents by gender, these findings show that there is disillusionment in east Germany with both men and women. In response, many east Germans have turned to fringe

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<sup>72</sup> Wido Geis and Katrin Orth, “Geschlechterverhältnisse und Geburten in den deutschen Regionen,” *Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft* (October 26, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “One Legacy of Merkel? Angry East German Men Fueling the Far Right,” *The New York Times* (November 5, 2018).

<sup>74</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestag Election 2017: Results (Chemnitz, Sachsen),” (October 2017).

<sup>75</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestag Election 2017: Results (Meißen, Sachsen),” (October 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, “Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity,” (2019), 13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 13.



parties like the AfD and even the far-left Die Linke because the mainstream parties such as the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) have failed to recognize the east German frustration.

Other studies also strengthen the assertion that east Germans do not feel like a thriving population in unified Germany. In a recent study conducted by the German think-tank Allensbach Institute, many east Germans again made clear they did not feel that reunification was a success. When asked, “If you look at the developments in East Germany since Reunification: would you say the economic development is a success or failure?,” only 36% of east Germans believed that the “Wiedervereinigung,” or reunification, was successful.<sup>78</sup> 26% of easterners called the development unsuccessful while 38% were undecided.<sup>79</sup> These results mirror the findings of the Federal Government’s Annual Report on the Status of German Unity. When asked if east Germany would “develop well in the next few years,” 48% of east Germans responded “weniger gut/gar nicht gut,” or less well/not well at all.<sup>80</sup> These results show that almost half of the east Germans polled do not have much faith for the future of their economic development.

The Allensbach Institute also included respondents from AfD supporters in its study. When asked the question: “The other day someone said: ‘I have a feeling that many others are getting better and better, but not me. I am one of those who are left behind.’ How do you see yourself: Do you feel that way or not?,” 40% of AfD supporters answered that they felt left-behind.<sup>81</sup> 70% of east German respondents answered the same way.<sup>82</sup> These results show that

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<sup>78</sup> Renate Köcher, “Große Herausforderungen im Osten.” *Allensbach Institute* (July 24,2019).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

many east German AfD supporters felt left-behind by the current government. Whether this sense of alienation has resulted from economic struggles or migration is not clear, but dissatisfaction with the status-quo in the east is. The most striking finding by the Allensbach Institute shows that 62% of eastern AfD supporters feel more “East German” than “German,” compared to 47% of all east Germans.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, 71% of respondents living in former West Germany identify more as “German” than “West German.”<sup>84</sup> Only east German Die Linke supporters come close to sharing this sentiment with AfD supporters. 59% of east German Die Linke supporters feel more “East German” than “German.”<sup>85</sup> Once again, this finding shows that both far-right and far-left parties attract east Germans who do not feel fully integrated into the Federal Republic of Germany. Like the Report on the Status of Germany Unity, the Allensbach Institute’s findings do not separate the respondents by gender. However, the findings speak to the sense of east German identity that has formed since reunification.

Faith in the German government and democracy is also lagging in the east. In the former GDR, 47% of east Germans are dissatisfied with how things are going in Germany, and the support for Germany’s democracy is not much better.<sup>86</sup> Only 55% of east Germans are satisfied with how Germany’s democracy is working, compared to 66% in west German states.<sup>87</sup> The Federal Government of Germany even recognizes the struggles of democracy stating, “What is clear is that many in the new federal states, in a similar way to other transformation regions in the former Soviet Union, have a different view of democracy and market economies to that of

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<sup>83</sup> Renate Köcher, “Große Herausforderungen im Osten.” *Allensbach Institute* (July 24, 2019).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> John Gramlich, “How the Attitudes of West and East Germans Compare, 30 Years after Fall of Berlin Wall.” *Pew Research* (October 18, 2019).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

their compatriots in the west.”<sup>88</sup> Those two important cornerstones of Germany have not been as much of a “success story” in the former GDR.<sup>89</sup> This lack of faith in democracy by east Germans is concerning considering the region’s outlook on the future, and hints that frustration could continue to grow. East German optimism for the future is lagging behind optimism in the west. Only 42% of east Germans believe that their children will be “better off” financially than their parents.<sup>90</sup> If this pessimism comes to fruition, leaders in Germany should take notice. If east Germans continue to feel left-behind, the grip of far-right populism will continue. As long as these attitudes persist, the AfD will continue to thrive in the former GDR.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity in East and West Germany**

Understanding masculinity in the former GDR is key to gaining insight into why the AfD is so popular with men from east German states. Before the reunification of Germany occurred, there were two separate forms of masculinity in the communist East and capitalist West. In Holger Brandes’ article “Hegemonic Masculinities in East and West Germany (German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany)” sets up how these masculinities compared to one another and competed. These contrasting forms of “hegemonic masculinity” are key to understanding how east German masculinity has been shaped and dominated. Brandes defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”<sup>91</sup> Brandes

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<sup>88</sup> Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, “Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity,” (2018), 13.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>90</sup> John Gramlich, “How the Attitudes of West and East Germans Compare, 30 Years after Fall of Berlin Wall.” *Pew Research* (October 18, 2019).

<sup>91</sup> Holger Brandes, “Hegemonic Masculinities in East and West Germany (German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany).” *Men and Masculinities* 10:2 (2007), 179.

goes on to describe the hegemonic masculinity of West Germany as one shaped by “transnational business masculinity” shaped by “increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties, and a declining sense of responsibility for others.”<sup>92</sup> This form of masculinity is opposed by the predominant “proletarian-petty bourgeois lifestyle” in the former GDR.<sup>93</sup> That is to say that these lower middle-class men from the GDR shared a more egalitarian and working class society unshaped by the likes of a central feminist movement than their richer West German counterparts. At the same time, masculinity as a social topic in the GDR was “totally repressed.”<sup>94</sup>

To shape his assertions, Brandes interviewed men who grew up in the GDR about their feelings on masculinity. His findings provide insight into how masculinity is viewed in east Germany, and how this socialization in the GDR shapes attitudes. One of the interviewees, a 26 year old trained forester, stated that “the Westman is maybe more strongly shaped by outside influences than the Eastman,” and in the GDR “the influential focuses of the man were more the home of his parents, friends, work collective—uhm, later on your wife and family.”<sup>95</sup> While this man cannot be assumed to be an AfD voter, his assertion that the east is less influenced by global openness and diversity, shows that this mindset could still be relevant today. The same interviewee also believes that since reunification German masculinity has become “more ruthless.”<sup>96</sup>

The ruthlessness can also be seen in the domination of West German masculinity over its counterpart in the former GDR since 1990. In 1995, 99.2% of East-West marriages were

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<sup>92</sup> Holger Brandes, “Hegemonic Masculinities in East and West Germany (German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany).” *Men and Masculinities* 10:2 (2007), 179.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

connections between eastern women and western men; also, leadership positions in the former GDR “in politics, the economy, culture, and science are and continue to be occupied by men who either come from the West or at least conform to the Western pattern of masculinity.”<sup>97</sup> The continuous marginalization of the so-called “Eastman” in favor of western domination in all parts of society may hint to the AfD’s popularity with men from the former GDR.

I hope to use Brandes’ findings to show that these attitudes about masculinity still shape thought in the east today. Brandes demonstrates that the more business-minded and competitive West German masculinity supplanted the more egalitarian East German one. While his study focuses on masculinity before reunification, I believe that these core attitudes remain relevant especially as some east German men now feel like second-class citizens. They must live under the more open-minded expectations of the new, unified Germany while looking back on their former masculinity with nostalgia. Even though some east German men— young and old— see life in the former GDR as far from perfect, it was a time where men felt stability and control. As east German men see a post-reunification Germany dominated by western values and masculinity, they yearn for the option to take back control of their own destinies both politically and economically. Through the AfD, these men have been presented with a political alternative to their roles as afterthoughts in German society. Now, the east German man does not have to lose and forfeit their identity.

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<sup>97</sup> Holger Brandes, “Hegemonic Masculinities in East and West Germany (German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany).” *Men and Masculinities* 10:2 (2007), 193.

## East German Men's Attitudes and the AfD

The attitudes and disillusionment of east Germans with the state of reunification shown in the Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity and the Allensbach Institute study clearly demonstrate pessimism and the opportunity for a far-right to fill the void. However, how have these attitudes actually amounted to growing AfD support among east German men? As established, many east Germans view the reunification as a failure because of an unequal economy and political landscape. These factors combined with emigration from the east and foreign migration into Germany further add to these frustrations. In many ways, these short fallings of reunification have affected the masculinity and hopes of the men of the former GDR. One of the AfD's most prominent and vitriolic members Björn Höcke said, "The big problem is that Germany and Europe have lost their masculinity. I say: we have to rediscover our masculinity! Because only when we rediscover our masculinity will we become manly. And only when we become manly do we become defensive. And we have to be defensive, dear friends!"<sup>98</sup> For east German men to regain their masculinity, Höcke suggests that the AfD is the answer. Cas Mudde believes that there are three reasons that men are more likely to join far-right movements and parties. The first is that these parties often describe or explain the personal situation that these men feel.<sup>99</sup> That is to say that you are unemployed or single because "others" took your job or possible spouse. The second is the use of masculinity to "problematize the other" by saying that they are too effeminate or animalistic.<sup>100</sup> This is used through the demonization of Islam by the AfD. These tools are used to sway male voters to feel like the AfD gives them a voice.

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<sup>98</sup> Henry Bernhard, "Männlichkeit, Gewalt und weißer Machtanspruch," *Deutschlandfunk* (October 3, 2018).

<sup>99</sup> Cas Mudde, "Why is the Far Right Dominated by Men?," *The Guardian* (August 3, 2018).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

The sense of frustration among east German men creates a starker image than displayed in the findings by the Allensbach Institute. Most of this male dissatisfaction centers on immigration, female companionship, and the economy. One east German man, Frank Dehmel, stated, “I didn’t risk my skin back then to become a third-class citizen. First there are western Germans, then there are asylum seekers, then it’s us.”<sup>101</sup> This quote mirrors the findings of the 2019 Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity where 47% of east Germans felt like second-class citizens. Another east German man said, “the Government is throwing money at refugees, while native pensioners cannot afford a new pair of glasses.”<sup>102</sup> While yet another unsatisfied east German man complained, “They have built these pretty buildings, and yet you still have people sleeping on the streets.”<sup>103</sup> Even though the economic situation of the former GDR has improved since reunification, there is clearly a sense of dissatisfaction as the safety-net in east Germany has eroded. East German men do not necessarily miss life in the former GDR, but they miss the sense of economic security that communist state provided. In the GDR, citizens enjoyed more economic equality than what is present in the more ruthless, western-dominated reunified Germany. As one east German man stated, “you knew where you were, you had a good life.”<sup>104</sup> Mario Tiesies, another east German man, complained, “We all gained freedom when the wall came down, but lots of people here lost their economic security. There is a widespread feeling of distrust, a feeling that plenty of Westerners came here

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<sup>101</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “One Legacy of Merkel? Angry East German Men Fueling the Far Right.” *The New York Times* (November 5, 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Philip Oltermann, “‘Revenge of the East?’ How Anger in the Former GDR Helped the AfD,” *The Guardian* (September 28, 2017).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> James Bloodworth, “The Far-Right’s Appeal to Resentful Germans,” *Unherd* (May 29, 2019).

just to make easy money.”<sup>105</sup> The freedom gained by east German men came at a cost, however. Freedom meant the loss of stability and the domination of the west.

East German men are also frustrated with their lack of female partners. This threat to women by women by the “other,” is one of the main drivers of far-right support as Mudde postulates. When compounded with east Germany’s demographic imbalance, the desire to stem immigration and xenophobic attitudes are more likely to be present. One member of the far-right Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against Islamization), wrote to Petra Köpping, the integration minister for Saxony, “if you get me a wife I will stop marching for Pegida.”<sup>106</sup> Pegida has had close ties with the far-right AfD, and held a joint protest march in Chemnitz, Saxony in 2018. Oliver Klingholz is a 37-year-old east German, who desires to start a family, and find a wife. He stated that he does not know anyone “who did not vote for the AfD,” and that “it’s hard to meet someone [a woman] in town.”<sup>107</sup> He goes on to say that “All they [men] know is that they have trouble finding a partner.”<sup>108</sup> The AfD uses this dissatisfaction with life and love in the former GDR, and capitalizes on this frustration to attract east German men to vote for the party. By voting for the AfD, these men feel like they are solving their crisis of masculinity.

### **The AfD’s Gendered Appeal and Anti-Immigration**

The AfD uses anti-immigration and pro-family messaging to appeal to east German men. However, the AfD is very strong in areas of east Germany that have low numbers of migrants and people with migrant backgrounds. For example, in Görlitz where the AfD received 32.9% of

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<sup>105</sup> Stephen Beard, “East Germany Still Reeling from the Economic Aftermath of the Berlin Wall,” *Marketplace* (November 8, 2019).

<sup>106</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “One Legacy of Merkel? Angry East German Men Fueling the Far Right,” *The New York Times* (November 5, 2018).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



the vote, the foreign-born population is only 3.5%.<sup>109</sup> In Meißen, the population is only 2.7% foreigners.<sup>110</sup> Why is there such a fear and resentment of immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, in areas that are so heavily German born? This resentment could stem from the fact that many east Germans do not feel integrated into modern German society themselves. Petra Köpping says, “People say to me: ‘You and your refugees! You should integrate us first!’”<sup>111</sup> She goes on to state that “the way they saw things: there’s money for them but not for us.”<sup>112</sup> The east German people feel left-behind again, this time by refugees.

The AfD also uses certain language to stoke up fears of immigration and Islam. In the 2017 AfD manifesto, the party states, “Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values.”<sup>113</sup> This language demonstrates how the AfD demonizes Islam as incompatible with German society and culture. For east Germans and especially men, this fight against Islam is perceived as protecting women both Muslim and German. The AfD writes, “The headscarf as a political-religious symbol of Muslim women’s submission to men negates integration efforts, equal rights for women and girls, and the unimpeded development of the individual.”<sup>114</sup> Because the large gender imbalance already exists in east Germany, any threat to German women is taken even more seriously by east German men.

The AfD’s 2017 manifesto also addresses the role of family and mothers in German society. The party stresses the role of the family as the bedrock of Germany, and as a way to

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<sup>109</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestag Election 2017: Results (Görlitz, Sachsen),” (October 2017).

<sup>110</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, “Bundestag Election 2017: Results (Meißen, Sachsen),” (October 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Tobias Buck, “Lingering Divide: Why East and West Germany Are Drifting Apart,” *Financial Times* (2019).

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> AfD, “Manifesto for Germany,” (2017), 48.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

fight population decline and Islamization. The manifesto states, “Greater political support for parental work, as well as education and family policies which are focused on the needs of families and young couples wanting to start a family, will once again lead to birth rates at a self-sustaining rate in the medium to long-term.”<sup>115</sup> The AfD claims that this strategy will counteract the current solution of the governing political parties who “support mass immigration, mainly from Islamic states, without due consideration of the needs and qualifications of the German labor market.”<sup>116</sup> For east German men who want a wife and children, this strategy has to be effective in garnering votes for the party.

After the success of the AfD in the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election, the party has introduced a new campaign strategy to attract east German voters. In the 2019 regional elections, the party used the campaign “Wende 2.0.” The word Wende refers to the peaceful revolution that brought down the communist GDR.<sup>117</sup> This strategy uses grievances against the west since reunification and the governing CDU to gain votes. Chancellor Merkel and political correctness have been equated to the former East German secret police, the Stasi.<sup>118</sup> Once again, the theme of western domination over the former GDR can be seen. The AfD perpetuates the victim identity of east Germans, and in turn, garners massive support from these “left-behind” east German men.

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<sup>115</sup> AfD, “Manifesto for Germany,” (2017), 41.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>117</sup> Damien McGuinness, “Germany’s Far-Right AfD: Victim or Victor?,” *BBC News* (September 2, 2019).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 2: Quantitative Analysis of Voting Patterns in the 2017 Federal Bundestag Elections**

### **Explanation of German Election System**

The 2017 Federal Bundestag Election in Germany was an inflection point for the country. While Angela Merkel won the Chancellorship for her fourth time, her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), saw declines in its vote share, and her Grand Coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) showed signs of weakening. The CDU lost 7.3% of its vote share from the 2013 Federal Bundestag Election, and the SPD's vote share decreased by 5.2%.<sup>119</sup> There are many reasons for the decline of Merkel's Grand Coalition including her decision to accept over one million refugees in 2015, but the rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is perhaps the most important reason for Chancellor Merkel's decreasing success. The AfD increased its voter share greatly compared to the 2013 election. In 2013, the AfD missed the threshold of 5% to qualify for seats in the Bundestag with only 4.6% of the vote.<sup>120</sup> However, by 2017, the party received 12.6% of the vote, and the AfD became the third largest party in the Bundestag. The AfD's success in the former communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) made the far-right party the up and coming power player in German politics with 28% of male votes from east German states. This chapter will discuss how men from the former GDR, in particular, were much more likely to vote for Germany's first successful far-right party since the end of World War II. Throughout this chapter, I refer to east German states and west German states as East Germany and West Germany. While I know that the GDR (East Germany) and former West Germany reunified in 1990, the terms "East German" and "West German" are not anachronistic

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<sup>119</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, "2017 Bundestag Election: Final Result," (October 12, 2017).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

in this chapter. The East German states are Thuringia, Saxony, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt.

To fully understand the AfD's success in the 2017 Bundestag Election, one must first understand how federal elections work in Germany. German voters cast two votes to elect members of the Bundestag. Half of the Bundestag's seats are decided directly by Germany's 299 constituencies.<sup>121</sup> These first votes allow German voters to select individual candidates to represent their constituencies. The other half of the Bundestag's seats are decided by second votes that determine representatives by party lists.<sup>122</sup> This second vote is the primary indicator of party success within the Bundestag because the second vote determines the percentage of seats given to a party in the Bundestag. The German electoral system combines "first-past-the-post" and proportional representation, and this process makes the German party's success extremely measurable.

### **Comparison of AfD Support between German Men and Women in the 16 Federal German States and Berlin:**

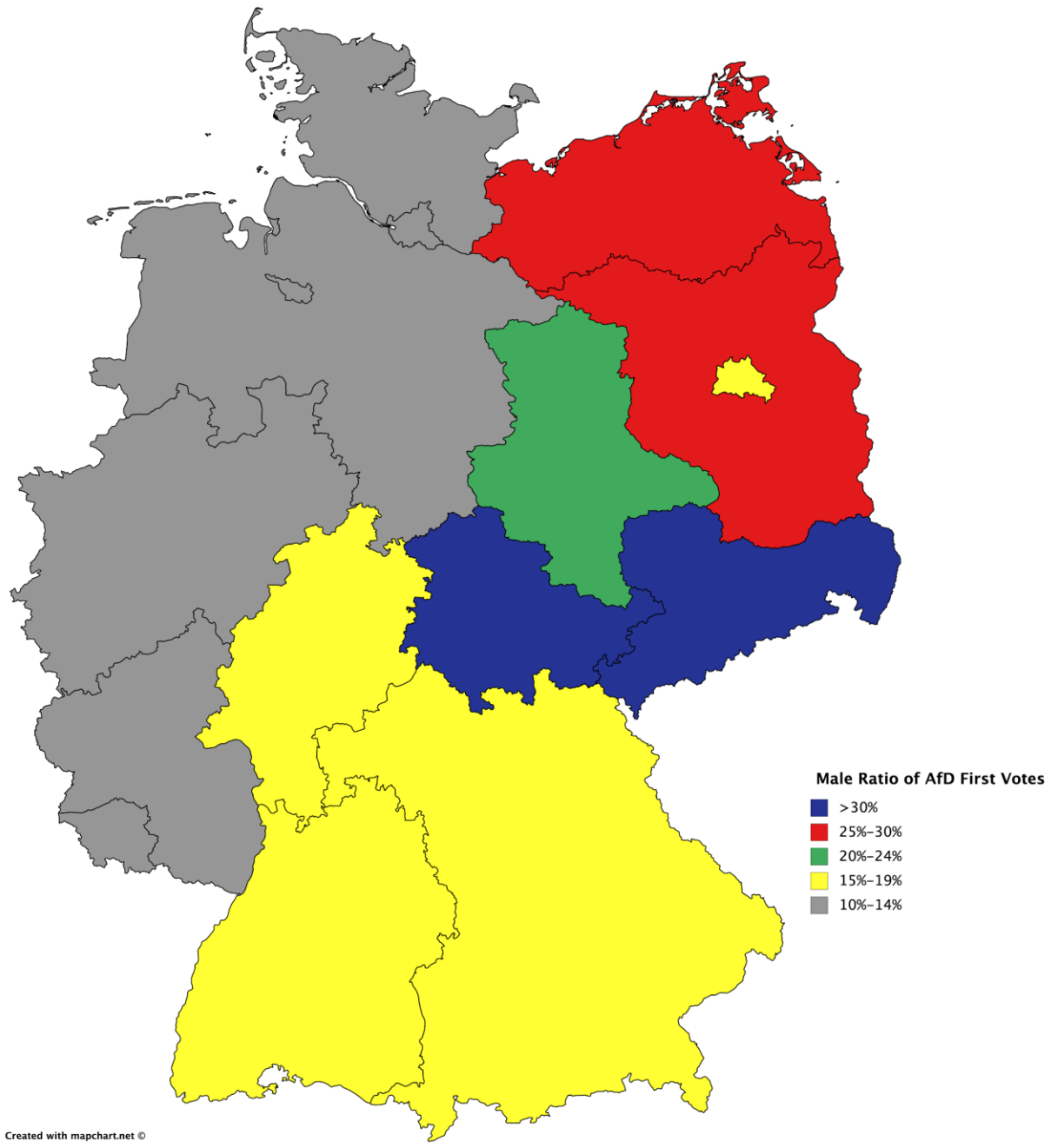
The first section of my chapter will discuss how AfD support in Germany compared among voters in West German states and East German states. I compared the first and second votes for the AfD in the 16 federal states of Germany and East and West Berlin. I had to combine and average the total vote percentages of Berlin because mpachart.net did not have a divided Berlin. I believe that a demonstration of percentages of AfD support, in terms of first and second votes, will be helpful to understand the statistical analysis that I perform in the second part of this chapter. I used mapchart.net to create the maps below. The AfD had the most support in East German states in terms of male votes. However, women in East German states voted for the far-

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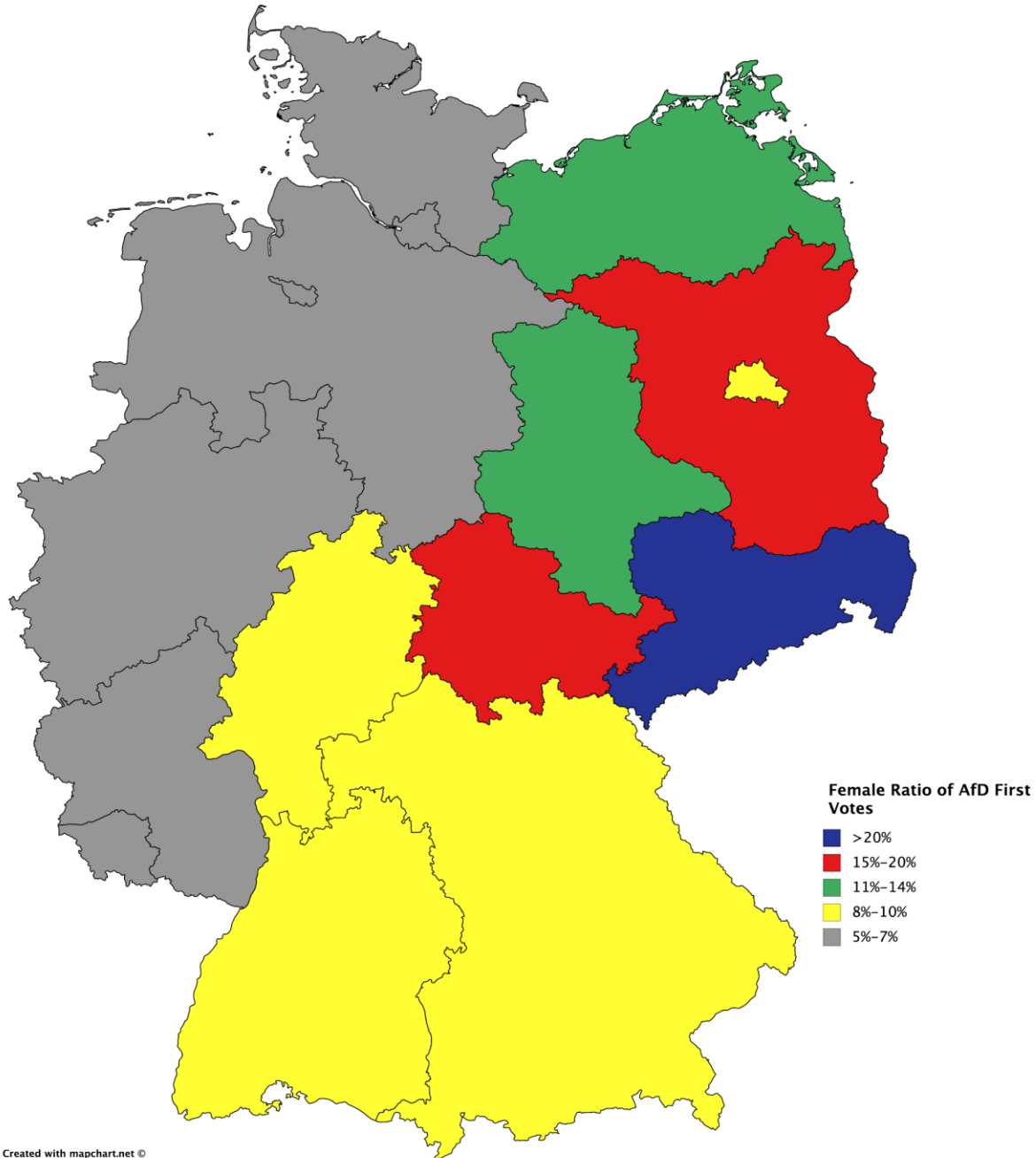
<sup>121</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, "Election of Members of the German Bundestag," (2018).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

right AfD in higher percentages than men and women in the 2017 Federal Bundestag elections. The East German states Thuringia and Saxony were the states with the highest percentage of the AfD votes with men and women. West German states lagged behind with the exception of states like Bavaria.



**Figure 2: Male Ratio of AfD First Votes (Source: Mapchart.net)**



**Figure 3: Female Ratio of AfD First Votes (Source: Mapchart.net)**

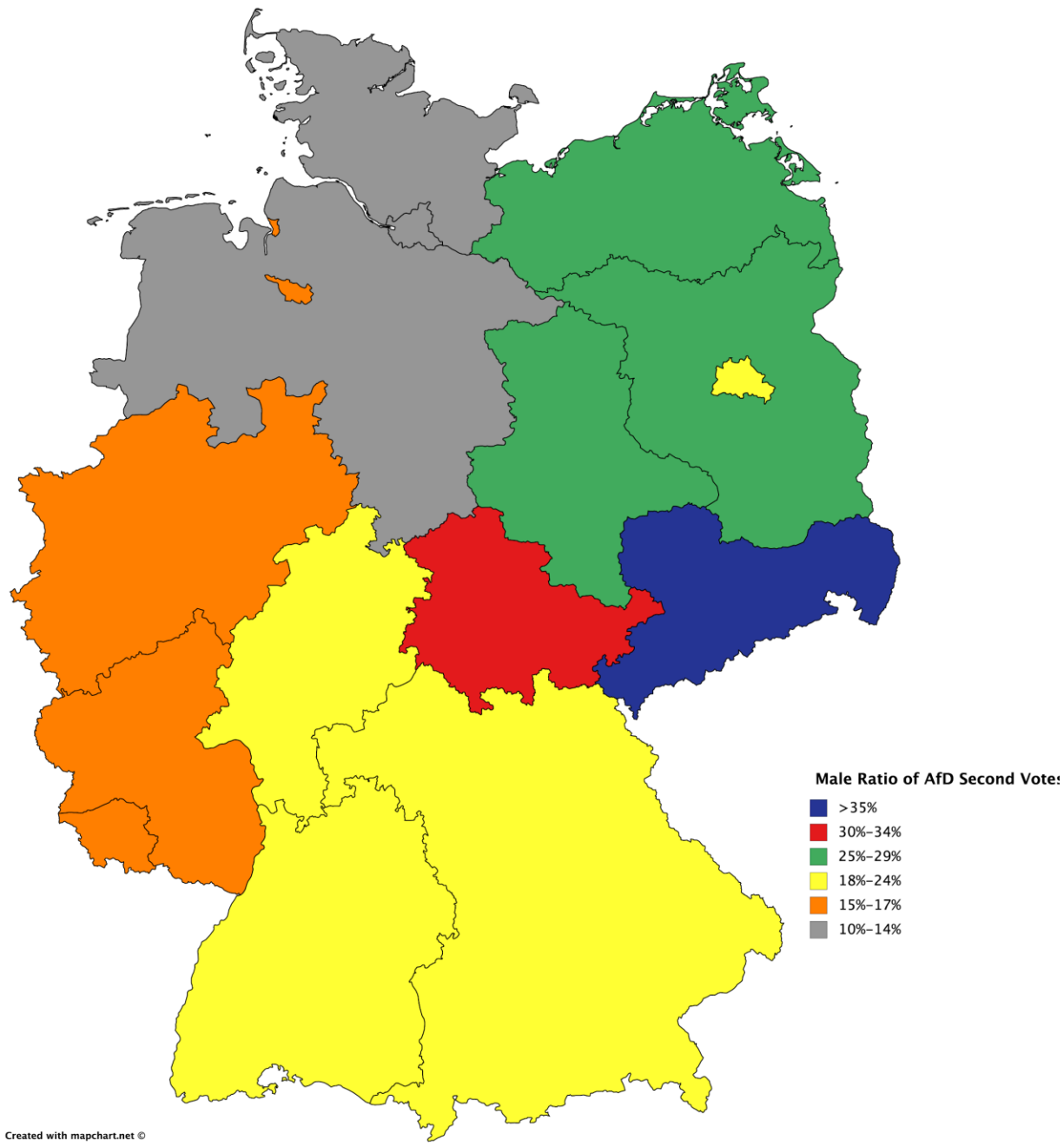
Figures 2 and 3 show the male and female ratios of first AfD votes compared to the 4 other major political parties in this chapter. Among men, the AfD enjoyed the greatest success in Saxony and Thuringia. In both Saxony and Thuringia, East German men voted for AfD candidates with over 30%. In Saxony, 34.5% of first votes were cast for the AfD, and in

Thuringia the AfD received 31.2% of first votes. Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern followed Saxony and Thuringia with 27.4% and 25.9% of first votes respectively. Saxony-Anhalt had the lowest percentage of male first AfD votes in the east; however, the AfD still received 24.4% of votes. Figure 2 shows that East German men voted in much higher numbers than other Germans for the AfD in 2017. Even though the AfD enjoyed great success with East German men in 2017, only 2 Bundestag seats were rewarded through the direct-mandate first votes.<sup>123</sup> The only West German states that had more than 15% of the male AfD vote percentages are Baden-Württemberg (16.7%), Hesse (15.9%), and Bavaria (15.5%). However, when compared with Figure 3, it is clear that the AfD had greater success among men than women in 2017.

The AfD received the most first votes among women in Saxony with 22.4% of the vote. Once again, the AfD enjoyed the second most success in Thuringia with 19.1% of votes. The other East German states all showed AfD support among women of at least 14%. However, outside of East Germany, the AfD appears to be much less popular among women. Baden-Württemberg (9.3%), Hesse (9.1%), and Bavaria (8.9%) received the most first votes in West Germany, but in heavily-populated states like North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg the AfD received as little as 6.5% and 5.6% respectively. Even when compared with their male counterparts in these states (11.7% and 12.6% respectively), Figure 3 shows that the AfD has struggled to attract West German women.

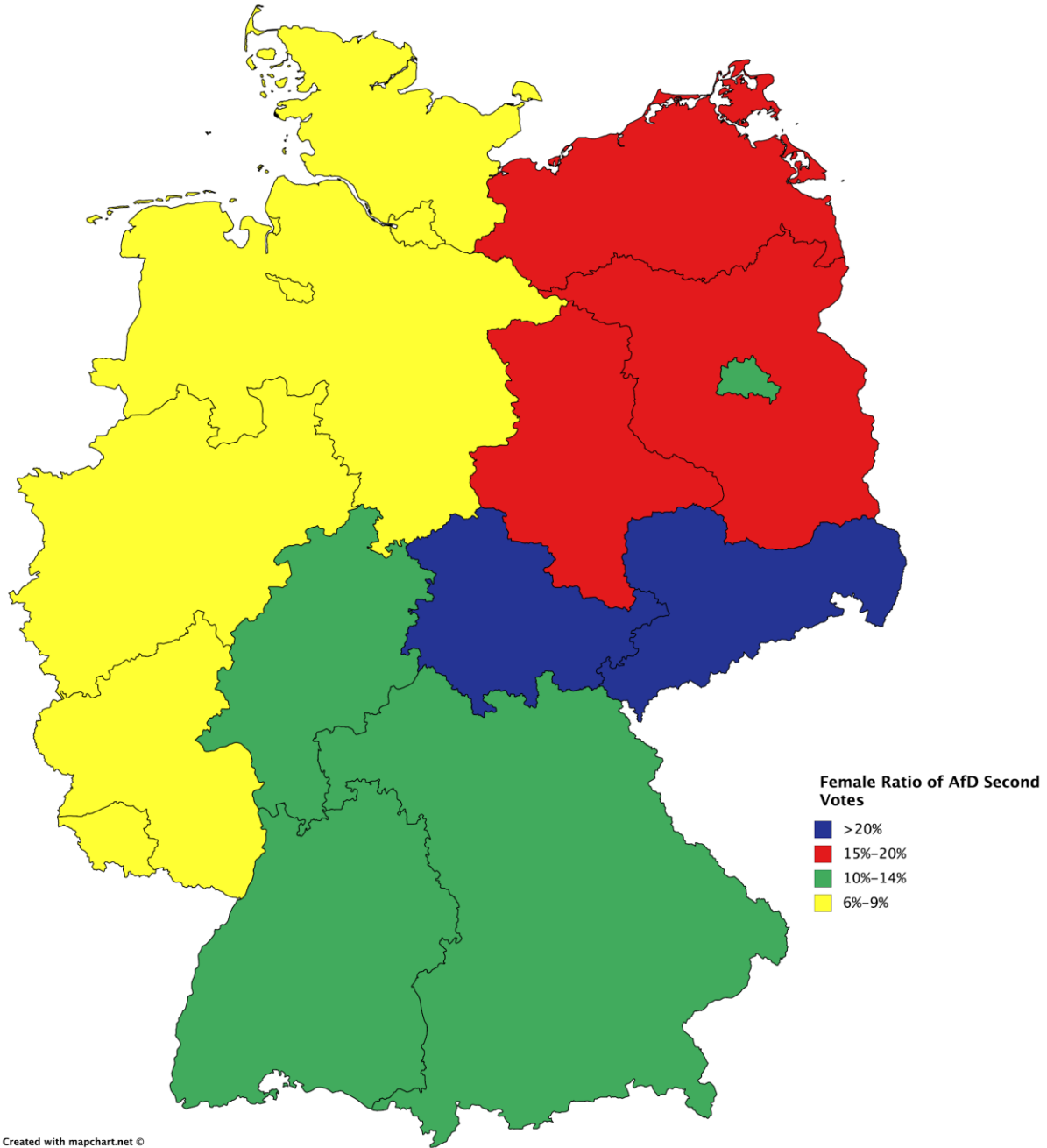
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<sup>123</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, "Distribution of Seats in the 19th German Bundestag," (January 2, 2019).



*Figure 4: Male Ratio of AfD Second Votes (Source: Mapchart.net)*





***Figure 5: Female Ratio of AfD Second Votes (Source: Mapchart.net)***

Figures 4 and 5 show the male and female ratio of second AfD votes. These second vote “Land Lists” gave the AfD 89 seats, making the party the largest non-coalition party in the 19th German Bundestag.<sup>124</sup> The AfD enjoyed the most success in Saxony with 38.8% of second votes

<sup>124</sup> Deutscher Bundestag. “Distribution of Seats in the 19th German Bundestag,” (January 2, 2019).

among men. The massive support in Saxony could be a result of men's frustration with the stark demographic imbalance. Thuringia was the other East German state where men voted for the AfD over 30% with 33.2% of second votes. The AfD also received a large portion of male second votes in the East German states of Brandenburg (29.9%), Saxony-Anhalt (29.1%), and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (27.3%).

Like the male ratio of first AfD votes, Bavaria (20.0%) and Baden-Württemberg (19.4%) had the greatest ratio of male second voters in West Germany. However, the AfD enjoyed more success among second West German male voters than the party did with first votes. In Hesse, Rhineland Palatinate, West-Berlin, Bremen, North Rhine Westphalia and Saarland the AfD received at least 15% of male second votes. This finding supports the idea that even West German men were more likely to use their second votes to voice frustration with Chancellor Merkel's Grand Coalition.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, the second votes by women were similar to female first votes. In Saxony, 24.9% of women and 20.1% of women in Thuringia voted for the AfD. Women in the East German states of Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern cast at least 15% of their second votes for the AfD with Brandenburg having the largest percentage at 17.0%. However, in West Germany female AfD support still lagged behind that in East Germany. The highest female AfD second vote ratios in West Germany were Bavaria (10.8%), Baden-Württemberg (10.7%), and Hesse (10.1%). The AfD received less than 10% of the votes in the rest of West German states.

### **Analyzing the Likelihood of Germans to Vote for the Five Major Parties Based on Gender and the East/West Divide:**

While in the previous section I compared the male and female first and second votes for the AfD in each of the German Federal States, I will determine the likelihood of Germans to vote for five of Germany's major parties based on gender and location in this section. Instead of just comparing vote percentages, I want to prove that East German men were more likely to vote for the AfD than any other party or in the 2017 election—especially when compared to other demographic groups. However, this form of statistical analysis is not simply a record of past patterns but is also predictive of the future. I chose to compare the AfD with four of Germany's largest parties. These parties are the CDU and its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria, SPD, Die Linke (The Left), and Grüne (Greens). I chose Die Linke, in particular, to see if a populist left-wing party enjoyed success in East Germany, or if the success of the populist far-right AfD was unique in the East. In order to determine the likelihood of Germans to vote for certain parties, I performed an Independent-Samples T-Test to discover the differences in mean in votes in the 2017 Federal Bundestag Elections on SPSS. I used vote totals separated by gender, Länder (states), and party from the Bundeswahlleiter (The Federal Returning Officer), and found the ratio of male and female voters per first and second votes over the number of total votes for these five parties.<sup>125</sup> For example, I divided the number of male first votes for the AfD in Brandenburg by the total number of male votes in Brandenburg, and I repeated this ratio for all 5 parties and every German state and gender combination, using 1 to represent East and male respectively, and 0 to represent West and female respectively in SPSS. The Bundeswahlleiter divided votes in Berlin by Berlin-East and Berlin-West, so I classified Berlin-East as an East

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<sup>125</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, "Stimmabgabe nach Geschlecht und Geburtsjahresgruppen in den Ländern," (2017).

German state and Berlin-West as a West German state respectively. My findings were that men from East German states were more likely to vote for the AfD than men and women from West German states and women from East German states. However, support for the AfD in the east was still strong.

**Table 1: East German Votes vs. West German Votes \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$**

Party	Mean Difference
AfD	0.11475***
CDU/CSU	-0.06477***
SPD	-0.12008***
Die Linke	0.12328***
Grüne	-0.05318***

Table 1 displays the mean difference of votes between East and West Germany for the AfD, CDU/CSU, SPD, Die Linke and Grüne. The mean difference of 0.11475 ( $t_{30.196} = 6.923$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) shows that East Germans were much more likely to vote for the AfD than their fellow Germans in the West in the 2017 Bundestag Election. 22.8% of East Germans voted for the AfD while only 11.3% of West Germans did such. This disparity hints that many East German voters are unhappy with their straggling living standards and political power. This statistically significant result is only rivaled by the mean difference of East German Die Linke votes with a mean difference of 0.12328 ( $t_{66} = 11.260$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result is not surprising, however, as the far-left Die Linke has great electoral success in the former communist GDR. For example, Die Linke is the leading party in the regional Thuringian Landtag.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Kate Connolly, "Far-Right AfD Surges to Second Place in German State Election," *The Guardian* (October 27, 2019).

The most striking differences between East and West German voters in Table 1 is the difference in support for the parties of the Grand Coalition, the CDU/CSU and the SPD. East Germans voted for the CDU and SPD far less than voters in West Germany with respective mean differences of -0.06477 ( $t_{66} = -3.871$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and -0.12008 ( $t_{66} = -10.303$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These large differences between East and West Germany can possibly serve as an explanation for both mainstream, governing parties losing seats in the Bundestag. The CDU/CSU lost 65 seats compared to the 2013 Bundestag Election, and the SPD lost 50 seats.<sup>127</sup> The environmentalist Grüne party had a slight disadvantage in the East with a mean difference of -0.05318 ( $t_{66} = -5.809$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2: Federal Male Votes vs. Federal Female Votes \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>
AfD	0.08472***
CDU/CSU	-0.06788***
SPD	0.00406
Die Linke	0.00820
Grüne	-0.02911*

Table 2 presents the mean differences between German men and women. The mean difference between German men and women for the AfD was 0.08472 ( $t_{70} = 5.650$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The AfD received 19.5% of German male votes and 11.1% of German female votes. This mean difference is closer than I expected; however, when one looks at Figures 2-5, the larger support for the AfD among men, even in West German states such as Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, trailed behind female support in East German states such as Saxony and Thuringia.

<sup>127</sup> Bundeswahlleiter, "Official Provisional Result of the 2013 Bundestag Election," (September 23, 2013).

The mean difference between male and female votes for the CDU/CSU mirrored the mean difference of East German and West German votes with a mean difference of -0.06788 ( $t_{70} = -4.447$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The mean difference for SPD votes in 2017 equaled 0.00406 ( $t_{70} = 0.239$ ,  $p = 0.812$ ), meaning SPD support between men and women was essentially the same. However, this result was not quite as strongly statistically significant. The same can be said for the mean differences of Die Linke and Grüne. Die Linke had a mean difference of 0.00820 ( $t_{70} = 0.488$ ,  $p = 0.627$ ), and Grüne had a mean difference of -0.02911 ( $t_{70} = -3.035$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). These results show that the greatest and statistically significant difference of this Independent-Samples T-Test was that of male and female support for the AfD.

**Table 3: East German Male Votes vs. East German Female Votes \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$**

Party	Mean Difference
AfD	0.11690***
CDU/CSU	-0.08605***
SPD	-0.00711
Die Linke	-0.00480
Grüne	-0.01894

In order to correctly prove my hypothesis, I needed to ensure that the AfD support was greater among East German men than East German women. That is to say that the rise of the far-right AfD was not just an East German phenomenon, but an East German male phenomenon. However, the mean difference displayed in Table 3 establishes this hypothesis. The AfD received 28.6% of East German male votes, while only 16.9% of East German female votes, and the mean difference equaled 0.11690 ( $t_{22} = 6.034$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This statistically significant result means that East German men were notably more likely to vote for the AfD than East German

women. This statistic shows that while men from East German states are the most likely to vote for the AfD, women from the East German states are still strong supporters of the far-right party.

East German male votes for the CDU/CSU trailed those for the AfD with 27.8% while East German female votes for the CDU/CSU totaled 36.4%, and the mean difference was -0.08605 ( $t_{22} = -3.891$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These mean differences were the only results that were strongly statistically significant. However, the mean difference for Die Linke is very important. The mean difference between East German males and East German women equaled -0.00480 ( $t_{22} = -0.221$ ,  $p = 0.827$ ). This result supports Spierings' and Zaslove's findings that the gender voting gap between populist left-wing parties were smaller than the gender gap for populist right-wing parties in Europe.<sup>128</sup> Even though East German women showed an inclination to vote for a left-wing populist party with 22.3% of votes for Die Linke, the anti-immigrant and pro-family values beliefs of the AfD did not resonate as much.

The support for the center-left SPD lagged in popularity in the East with both men and women. The SPD only accounted for 16.9% of male votes and 17.6% of female votes with a statistically insignificant mean difference of -0.00711 ( $t_{22} = -0.601$ ,  $p = 0.554$ ). With only 17.6% of votes, the SPD barely edged out the far-right AfD with female voters. The lack of support of mainstream parties like the SPD in 2017, demonstrates the East German voter's displeasure with the status quo in the former GDR. Grüne received only 4.9% of East German male votes and 6.8% of East German female votes with a mean difference of -0.01894 ( $t_{22} = -1.643$ ,  $p = 0.115$ ). This result suggests that Grüne has failed to catch on as a popular choice in East Germany for both male and female voters.

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<sup>128</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, "Gender, Populist Attitudes, and Voting: Explaining the Gender Gap in Voting for Populist Radical Right and Radical Left Parties," *West European Politics* 40:4 (2017), 824.

**Table 4: East German Male Votes vs. West German Male Votes \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$**

Party	Mean Difference
AfD	0.13936***
CDU/CSU	-0.07866***
SPD	-0.12865***
Die Linke	0.11335***
Grüne	-0.04540***

Table 4 shows the mean differences of East and West German male voters in the 2017 Bundestag Election. 14.7% of West German males voted for the AfD, and the mean difference between East and West German males equaled 0.13936 ( $t_{32} = 10.274$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result means that East German males were much more likely to vote for the AfD than their West German male counterparts. This mean difference signifies that while support for far-right populism was still popular in West Germany with male voters in 2017, the AfD's support among East German men reigns supreme. Spierings' and Zaslove's finding that a gender gap in support for right-wing populism loses its significance when one compares West German men with East German women.<sup>129</sup> As previously stated, East German women voted 17.6% for the AfD.

West German men were also more likely to support the CDU/CSU than East German men. The CDU/CSU received 35.7% of West German male votes, and the mean difference was -0.07866 ( $t_{32} = -3.950$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The two mean differences that rivaled that of the AfD between East and West male voters were those of SPD and Die Linke. The mean difference for SPD equaled -0.12865 ( $t_{32} = -7.694$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and Die Linke totaled 0.11335 ( $t_{32} = 7.464$ ,  $p <$

<sup>129</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, "Gender, Populist Attitudes, and Voting: Explaining the Gender Gap in Voting for Populist Radical Right and Radical Left Parties," *West European Politics* 40:4 (2017), 825.



0.001). This result suggests that East German men are more likely to vote for a far-left populist party than a center-left party like the SPD. The disparity in voter support for Grüne was negligible with a mean difference of -0.04540 ( $t_{32} = -4.096$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, the continued lack of support shown for Grüne in East Germany with male and female voters suggests the party would just barely make the seat requirement of 5% if the election was only held in the East with the environmental party receiving 5.8% of East German votes.

**Table 5: East German Male Votes vs. West German Female Votes \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$**

Party	Mean Difference
AfD	0.20705***
CDU/CSU	-0.13693***
SPD	-0.11862***
Die Linke	0.12841***
Grüne	-0.07990***

Table 5 displays the mean differences between East German males and West German women. West German women were less likely to vote for the AfD than any other voting group in Germany. The AfD received 7.9% of West German female votes. The mean difference between the two groups equaled 0.2075 ( $t_{11.925} = 13.069$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, this result is no surprise as Figures 3 and 5 show that AfD support was always weakest with female voters in West German states.

West German women were the most likely voting group to support Chancellor Merkel's CDU/CSU. The CDU/CSU accrued 41.5% of West German female votes. The mean difference between East German men and West German women totaled -0.13693 ( $t_{32} = -6.897$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Once again, support for Die Linke was greatest in the East. The mean difference between the two

groups equaled 0.12841 ( $t_{32} = 8.938$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with only 9% of West German women voting for the far-left party. The mean difference between East German males and West German women mirrored that of East German males and their Western counterparts, equaling -0.11862 ( $t_{32} = -7.231$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). West German women also supported Grüne more than any other German voter group casting 12.9% of votes for the party.

### **Chapter Conclusions**

The findings of this chapter clearly show that East German males supported the AfD significantly more than East German women or West Germans, and they give statistically significant validity to my hypothesis. On a state by state basis, the East German states of Saxony and Thuringia voted the most for the AfD both male and female alike. However, the other three East German states, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern still ranked above any West German states in terms of the AfD's vote share for both genders. One can also conclude that the large percentages of second votes cast for the AfD in East Germany in 2017 contributed to the party's massive increase in Bundestag seats when compared to 2013. East German men even voted in greater number for the AfD (28.6%) than the CDU (27.8%). While East German women voted in great numbers for the AfD, East German males are clearly the reason the far-right party enjoyed so much success in the former GDR, and the rise of the AfD is an East German male phenomenon.

The other major finding of this chapter was the amount of significant support for the far-left populist party Die Linke in East Germany. Both East German males (21.8%) and East German women (22.3%) voted for the party at higher rates than West Germans. This result shows that both far-right and far-left populism is very popular in East Germany. This small gender gap between East German males and females supports Spierings' and Zaslove's study

that showed that the gender gap for left-wing populist parties was smaller than right-wing populist parties.<sup>130</sup> The AfD and Die Linke's success in East Germany also hints that many East Germans are dissatisfied with their progress since reunification and Chancellor Merkel's Grand Coalition.

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<sup>130</sup> Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, "Gender, Populist Attitudes, and Voting: Explaining the Gender Gap in Voting for Populist Radical Right and Radical Left Parties," *West European Politics* 40:4 (2017), 824.

## Conclusions

When I started this thesis, I strove to answer why have east German men voted disproportionately for the AfD, and how does the east German man's view of masculinity and dissatisfaction in post-reunification Germany shape this voting pattern. While there is no single reason why these east German men have looked to the AfD for change, it is clear that many of these men feel forgotten by their fellow German citizens. East German feel left behind economically, politically, and demographically. The east German economy has improved since reunification, but it still lags behind the west. Many of Germany's top political and economic positions are dominated by west Germans and west German men. The acceptance of over one million migrants further exasperated the economic anxiety of the east as many unskilled and uneducated east German men view these migrants as competition for jobs and women. The former GDR also faces a demographic crisis. Following reunification, women fled to the west for better opportunities, and as a result there is a shortage of women and young people in the former GDR. Many eastern men cannot find romantic partners or start a family. As the losers of reunification, these east German men have looked to take back their power and identity. They no longer accept being dominated and forgotten in all spheres of German society.

The AfD has benefitted electorally from the crisis of masculinity in the east. In the 2017 Federal Bundestag Election, the AfD received 28.6% of east German male votes. In states such as Thuringia and Saxony, this vote total exceeded 30%. East German male voters were more likely to vote for the AfD than any other party including the governing Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 2017— the AfD won a plurality of east German male votes. Overall, the dissatisfaction with Merkel's Grand Coalition was even seen among east German women. While east German women were not as likely to vote for the AfD as east German men, a significant

number of women voted for the far-party and the far-left Die Linke in the last federal election. The AfD's success in 2017 is not an anomaly. The party has campaigned as the main east German party and given east German men a platform.

With the 2021 Federal Bundestag Election looming, the AfD looks like it is in prime position to maintain and possibly increase its number of seats in the Bundestag. Chancellor Angela Merkel is not seeking a new term, and her party is in the midst of a leadership crisis—largely caused by the AfD party in Thuringia. East German men, who felt left-behind now are at the center of German politics. These men have found their voice, and through the AfD they can use that voice to shape Germany for years to come. Their message is clear— east German men will be forgotten no more.

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