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# MECHANISMS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT FOR POPULAR, FAR-RIGHT, AND ANTI-IMMIGRATION PARTIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF AfD IN GERMANY AND SD IN SWEDEN

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*European politics are changing constantly. Moreover, the changing demography of Europe have had far-reaching effects on these. In reaction to the immigrant inflow, political parties across Europe changed their policies. Further, new political movements, generally with a far-right stance, formed at a dizzying rate, each offering increasingly radical policy solutions. These parties' impact is frequently larger than their small vote totals would imply, allowing them to influence more popular parties' policies. To understand what these far-right populist parties can do, one can take a closer look at the circumstances in Germany and Sweden. In Germany, AfD has had surprising and evocative effects. Sweden also has its own example through Sverigedemokraterna (The Sweden Democrats). This article attempts to understand the potential motivations behind the rising electoral support towards various anti-immigration and political parties throughout Europe by analyzing the changing dynamics in Germany and Sweden through their respective prominent far-right political movements.*

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**MECHANISMS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT FOR POPULAR, FAR-RIGHT, AND ANTI-IMMIGRATION PARTIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF AFD IN GERMANY AND SD IN SWEDEN**

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The shifting demographics of Europe have had far-reaching political consequences. In response to the influx of refugees into Europe, established political parties throughout the continent had to change their stances. Further, new political movements, often with a far-right position, emerged at a breakneck pace, each proposing increasingly extreme policy solutions to the problems posed by this development. The impact of such political parties has often been greater than tiny vote totals would indicate, allowing them to sway the policies of more popular parties. To fully grasp what these far-right populist parties are capable of, it is necessary to address this vital role. The rise of anti-immigrant parties in European politics is a complex topic, but fortunately we have strong instances from Germany and Sweden to shed light on the topic.

***Setting the Scene***

Politicians in Germany who oppose multiculturalism in all its forms—from European integration to welcoming newcomers—have found a home in the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD).<sup>1</sup> Since its founding in 2013, the AfD has shown surprising and evocative results in elections to the Bundestag:

**Table 1) The Electoral Performance of AfD in Bundestag Elections**

Year	Share of Total Votes	Change
2013	1.9 percent	<i>New Party</i>
2017	11.5 percent	+9.6 percent
2021	10.1 percent	-0.6 percent

Surprisingly, in the third federal elections in which AfD has participated, the party seems to have lost the impetus it earned during the Refugee Crisis. The party's meteoric surge between 2013 and 2017 was noteworthy, and so is this period of stasis if it is not a fall. It seems to reason that a lot may change, or disappear, in just four years. Thus, it may be more fruitful to search for AfD's involvement in other kinds of elections throughout those years. Examining the outcomes of *Landtag* elections is a good alternative to actually doing it. Particularly illuminating is a look at the states that formerly belonged to East Germany, where AfD has been the most successful in building a base of support. With this viewpoint as its foundation, the analysis proposed in this study should prove fruitful.

On the other hand, Sweden has also witnessed the rise of Sverigedemokraterna (The Sweden Democrats). This relatively mature yet active political group advocates for stricter anti-immigrant legislation and further steps to curb the influx of undocumented people. From this angle, one of their most prominent criticisms emerges: the idea that Sweden's open-borders policy would ultimately lead to the country's demise and instability, and that only those willing to assimilate into Swedish law and culture should be permitted to move there.<sup>2</sup> Since 2010, the

<sup>1</sup> Susanne Beyer and Jan Fleischhauer, (30 March 2016). "AfD Head Frauke Petry: 'The Immigration of Muslims Will Change Our Culture'," *Der Spiegel*. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/interview-with-frauke-petry-of-the-alternative-for-germany-a-1084493.html>

<sup>2</sup> Sverigedemokraterna. (2021). [https://ratatosk.sd.se/sd/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/13092823/sarskilt\\_yttrande\\_migrationskommitten-1.pdf](https://ratatosk.sd.se/sd/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/13092823/sarskilt_yttrande_migrationskommitten-1.pdf)

Sweden Democrats have had a representative in *Riksdag*, and in most elections since then, they have done rather well:

**Table 2) The Electoral Performance of Sweden Democrats in Riksdag Elections**

Year	Share of Total Votes	Change
2010	5.7 percent	+2.8 percent
2014	12.9 percent	+7.2 percent
2018	17.5 percent	+5.4 percent

The lengthier political history of Sweden's Democratic Party is an intriguing contrast to AfD. In addition, the party had over 10 percent of the vote even before the 2015 Refugee Crisis heightened debates over immigration and asylum. The key notion of this comparative problem is that understanding such a mechanism would allow us to explain the variations between the electoral triumphs of our case studies. Therefore, this study asks, "How does Sweden Democrats do better in the elections than AfD does, despite these nations sharing relatively comparable traits in terms of their respective refugee and immigration policies?"

### ***Methodology and Expectations***

The political climates of Germany and Sweden will be analyzed in this study by asking numerous key questions about both countries. This will involve the usage of four independent variables. The first two will examine the repercussions on a national scale. In contrast, the other two independent variables will investigate the geographical process that influences voters' preferences for a populist, far-right, anti-immigration party in elections. The dependent variable, or result, of this investigation will be the cumulative interpretation based on these explanatory factors.

The political traditions of each nation will serve as the study's first independent variable. As a precaution against another unfortunate period of authoritarian or totalitarian rule, countries that foresaw such a time in their history may have set constitutional or institutional limits on the operation of political parties. Restricting a populist, far-right movement in this way can make it more difficult to win over a large voting bloc. Limits on resources and political maneuvering ability may not always preclude a populist party from turning this treatment into political agitation to attract more voters. This might end up being a major factor in people's decision not to support that political party.

The relationships between political parties in the nation are the subject of the second independent variable. Finding out how much political clout a far-right, populist, anti-immigrant party has, especially in terms of kingmaking potential, may be ascertained by inquiring into its ability to take part in the process of formulating a coalition, whether it a regional or national one. Therefore, it's important to pay more attention to interparty interactions after the emergence of political movements like these, when even a small percentage of the vote may legitimize an otherwise insignificant political party's claims to power. By increasing the likelihood that voters' ballots will not be wasted and may potentially play a significant role in

reshaping the political balance, kingmaker ability directly affects how many people cast ballots for the extreme right, populist, anti-immigrant party.

In order to conduct a regional analysis, this research will focus on two important independent variables. The third metric will assess the region's economic health in relation to the national average. Here, the figures of nominal GDP per capita will play a major part in illustrating the specialness of the area under study. The research predicts that the popularity of a far-right, populist, anti-immigrant political party would fall as nominal GDP-per-capita values rose.

On the other hand, the fourth independent variable will focus on the demographic aspects of the case region by checking the ratio of foreign nationals<sup>3</sup> living in the case region. An expected outcome of having more foreign people in a region would be people's being more likely to vote for the far right, populist, anti-immigrant party.

### ***Populism, Far Right and Electoral Behavior***

Before diving headfirst into the murky seas of populist movements, it would be helpful to lay out how most people understand this crucial concept. Cas Mudde created a popular theory on populism by arguing that it pays the greatest attention to the three key features of a political movement: anti-establishment sentiment, authoritarianism, and nativism.<sup>4</sup> The first of these, anti-establishment, has become nearly classic, and some authors have even gone farther by concentrating on the promise of populist movements to become the voice of the "unheard/silent people," against bad and corrupted elites.<sup>5</sup> While the first assumption of Mudde is generally accepted, the extent to which the second premise, authoritarianism, must be at the heart of a populist movement, is the subject of great disagreement. Authoritarian regimes often gain support early on by promising security for the populace, and this pattern often continues. Examples of governments where similar pledges have led to the establishment of a ruthless authoritarian rule are Vladimir Putin's Russia and Nicolas Maduro's Venezuela.

Nonetheless, there are scholars who argue that this shift is not necessary, and that a populist movement may thrive outside of challenging the democratic norms of society.<sup>6</sup> Mudde's third assumption provides a window onto new opportunities; they play a crucial part in painting a picture of the context in which the independent variables in this study were developed. Avoiding post-modernist ideals like cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, nativism seeks to create a "united people".<sup>7</sup>

A different way of looking at populism emphasizes three key features of such movements: appealing to the dissatisfied masses with constant "enemy conceptualizations," playing on people's fears, and prioritizing short-term gains over long-term planning for political support.<sup>8</sup> What makes Guiso and his followers stand out among academics is their argument that populist

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<sup>3</sup> The reason why "Foreign People" is being used instead of Immigrants or Refugees to illustrate "the bigger picture", which will tell us more about the influence of being exposed to foreigners in a specific region, rather than limiting ourselves to the definitions of immigration and refugees.

<sup>4</sup> Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Routledge: Oxford, 2007)

<sup>5</sup> Y. Margalit, "Economic insecurity and the causes of populism, reconsidered." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2019), p. 152-70.

<sup>6</sup> B. Bugaric, "The two faces of populism: Between authoritarian and democratic populism." *German Law Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2019), p. 391.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash," Harvard Kennedy School RWP16-026 (2016), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Guiso & Helios Herrera & Massimo Morelli & Tommaso Sonno, "Demand and Supply of Populism," EIEF Working Papers Series 1703, Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance (EIEF), (revised Feb 2017), p. 3.

movements are only concerned with the short term, rather than formulating long-term plans for social change. The electoral stalling of AfD in Germany and the steady development of Sweden Democrats in Sweden provide a potential test of this notion.

The first and third premises of Mudde's argument have solid theoretical grounding from which to build. It's arguable that both the AfD in Germany and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden are operating outside of the mainstream political movements and promoting themselves as credible alternatives to the existing political equilibrium. They do not engage in a battle against democracy, however, which puts them within the bounds of democratic life; for this reason, the perspective of democratic populist movements introduced by Bugarcic is preferable to Mudde's second argument. Lastly, it's worth noting that both parties may consider nativism as their future because of their emphasis on cultural and national values and their fight against post-modernist notions like cosmopolitanism.

More information is needed before we can confidently identify these parties as the apex of the political right's value system. There has been a growing body of research on the rise of far-right parties in Europe, and many of the more fascinating new publications have focused on the anti-immigrant sentiments that sprang out of the 2015 Refugee Crisis.<sup>9</sup> These studies contend that the influx of people from nations and cultures that Europeans traditionally view as a threat to their cultural norms and standards sparked xenophobic tendencies in Western civilization. This is a great application of "New Nationalism" theory, which explains how the refugee crisis altered previously held views on nationalism in light of new circumstances. An intriguing theory suggests that New Nationalism is the result of the coming together of populism and nationalism through the promotion of national sovereignty, the limitation of immigration, the prioritization of national interests, and the portrayal of old elites as the puppets of those who seek to compromise national purity in favor of the multicultural values of a post-material world.<sup>10</sup>

Now is the time to go more deeply into the literature on electoral backing for populist groups by examining the many populism-derived alternatives. Among them, economic uncertainty and cultural reaction are two common concepts that might be used in this study. Both frameworks look for an opponent that populist agitators may blame for their movements' lack of support in the voting booth.

The first strategy analyzes the impact of the current economic climate on the rising popularity of populist groups in the polls. Some fascinating and critical thinkers argue that the separation of contemporary markets from society has led to widespread social upheaval and the mobilization of economically insecure masses.<sup>11</sup> In light of this line of thinking, several academics have begun investigating the economic reasons that contribute to the surprising popularity of populist movements. Scholars that focus on this topic in depth often discuss how globalization might help individuals who do not share in the current economic order's prosperity.

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<sup>9</sup> Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, "What is New and What is Nationalist about Europe's New Nationalism? Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Europe," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 2019); Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, "When Economic and Cultural Interests Align: The Anti-Immigration Voter Coalitions Driving Far Right Party Success in Europe," *European Political Science Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (November 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, (April 2019), p. 411.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Beacon Press, 2001).

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Anti-establishment political parties are perceived as more attractive to economically disadvantaged people as a result of globalization shocks.<sup>12</sup> This perspective also clarifies the wide variety of populist political groups that exist, each responding to the unique economic conditions of its own nation. Another argument in favor is that we can learn a lot about the local success of a populist movement from macro-economic statistics.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars who study economic insecurity as a motivating factor for supporting anti-establishment political movements like AfD and Sweden Democrats believe that general mistrust to Western economic institutions, which fail to bring a sufficient solution to the affected parts of society from economic crises, motivates people to look for alternative, and in most cases populist, solutions.<sup>14</sup> The economic betrayal argument corroborates this view by proposing that people who are economically insecure as a result of the inefficiency of established economic systems are more likely to support populist, far-right political parties.<sup>15</sup>

The second approach is the "cultural backlash" theory, which focuses on building a cultural bridge between populist politicians and their voters, who feel threatened by the sudden and growing post-material lifestyle. Scholars that stress the importance of this paradigm argue that ideas like cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism precipitated a sea change in our culture, which in turn sparked a "counter-revolutionary nostalgia effect".<sup>16</sup>

Scholars contend that the cultural reaction in Europe reflects the fundamental distinctions between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, much as economic instability may vary greatly depending on the contextual economic elements of nations. An intriguing explanation for these variations is that, because of their troubled past with an oppressive central authority like the Soviet Union, people in Eastern Europe are more likely to view the cosmopolitan principles that come with the European Union as the larger threat. Western Europeans, on the other hand, appear to be increasingly depending on the media and the related "fake news" idea as a weapon against immigration and refugees. In Western Europe, populist agitators are skilled at appealing to communities' fears to get votes. In this case, social media appears to play a major factor in the rise of populist politicians. In fact, recent research found that social media users continue to put stock in the claims made by populist politicians despite evidence to the contrary.<sup>17</sup>

The third assumption of Muddle, nativism, may have a significant relationship to the rise of cultural conservatism.<sup>18</sup> Literally, the books tell us that when populist leaders are given the power of communication technologies like social media, they may have a very strong footing in society. One of the primary causes of the emergence of populist groups in Europe seems to be the European Union's aim to enhance its capabilities over the member states by directing them how to respond in the recent migration crisis. Economic inequality and other divisive issues might increase the continent's potential voter pool for populist, far-right political parties.

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<sup>12</sup> Dani Rodrik, "Why Does Globalization Fuel Populism? Economics, Culture and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism," *Annual Review of Economics*, Vol. 13 (2021), p. 133-170.

<sup>13</sup> S. Guriev, "Economic drivers of populism." in *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 108 (2008), p. 200-203.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Dustman, Barry Eichengreen, Sebastian Otten, Andre Sapir, Guido Tabellini, and Gylfi Zoega, *Europe's Trust Deficit: Causes and Remedies* (CEPR Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Rafael Di Tella and Julio J. Rotemberg, "Populism and the Return of the 'Paranoid Style': Some Evidence and a Simple Model of Demand for Incompetence as Insurance against Elite Betrayal," Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 17-056 (2016).

<sup>16</sup> Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2016), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Luis M. Romero-Rodriguez and Santiago Tejedor Calvo, "Populist Attitudes and Perceptions of Public Opinion and the Media: A Comparative Correlational Study between Spain and Colombia," *Revista Latina de Comunicacion Social* (2021).

<sup>18</sup> A. Noury and G. Roland, "Identity politics and populism in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 23 (2020), p. 435.

With these critical takeaways from the literature in mind, we can dive into our examination of the causes of the unexpected rise to power of populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe.

### *Alternative Für Deutschland*

Understanding AfD's potential and strengths requires a two-tiered paradigm that accounts for differences in the party's performance at the national and state levels. Our first independent variable, which seeks to explore the links between broad restrictions and political support, may be evaluated on a national scale thanks to this expanded viewpoint. Also, we can test our second independent variable, which has to do with the democratic inclusion or exclusion of a populist far-right party, by looking at Germany from this vantage point. Yet, regional analysis will try to figure out how the party's current level of electoral support came to be. During this process, we will be able to see how the economic and demographic characteristics of the regions that support AfD more or less strongly affect electoral support, two of our other major independent variables.

### *Haunting Past*

The troubled history of Germany, which has haunted any political party in the nation since World War II and makes it even difficult for a populist party like AfD to develop, should be the starting point of any study on AfD. While fascist movements arose in a number of nations during the interwar period, possibly none of them had as long-lasting an impact on the politics of their nation as Nazi Germany did after WWII ended. The victors were satisfied with only removing Nazi rule from the nation, and they may have gone so far as to prevent the formation of any political parties sharing that ideology.<sup>19</sup> Even the postwar German political elite, who adopted a "militant democracy" strategy of preventing the rise of any Neo-Nazi or ultra-nationalist party through the establishment of institutional restrictions, may have supported this position.

The idea that any anti-establishment group that threatens the essential elements of democratic life should be prevented from utilizing a tolerant political environment to climb to power and abolish democratic life for good is a good fit with Karl Loewenstein's conception.<sup>20</sup> It's not hard to see why German authorities have adopted this stance against AfD; the party has been the subject of multiple legal challenges based on allegations that its funding, ties, and policies violate the country's fundamental principles.<sup>21</sup> The ongoing conflict between AfD and the establishment gives us a chance to examine the first independent variable, which is the impact of the past on the current party structure. It's obvious that the party is up against formidable institutional hurdles in a bastion of military democracy. As a result, the party's lack of electoral progress and breakthrough can be partially explained by these factors.

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<sup>19</sup> Emily Schultheis, "Germany is treating a Major Party as a Threat to its Democracy," *The New York Times Opinion*, (19.02.2021). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/opinion/afd-germany-ban.html>

<sup>20</sup> Karl Loewenstein, "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (June 1937), p. 417-432

<sup>21</sup> DW, "Germany's AfD party fined over €400,000 for illegal campaign financing," (16.04.2019). <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-afd-party-fined-over-400000-for-illegal-campaign-financing/a-48356587>; DW, "German Court Suspends Surveillance of Far-Right AfD, For Now," (05.03.2021). <https://www.dw.com/en/german-court-suspends-surveillance-of-far-right-afd-for-now/a-56785125>

*Interparty Relations: Solid Cordon Sanitaire*

The interparty relationships of AfD with other major actors in German politics also contribute significantly to the party's overall image in the country. In fact, despite the fact that they may have significant disagreements on other policy issues, all of the mainstream German parties agree that they should not work with AfD.<sup>22</sup> This populist and far-right movement is up against isolation at the national and local levels.<sup>23</sup> AfD's capacity to be a kingmaker is limited by its inability to engage in coalition discussions. Furthermore, the mainstream and minor parties can effectively sideline AfD so far because there is no actual case in German politics where all the other parties are unable to build a government and no situation where it is no longer possible to ignore the widespread electoral support AfD enjoys across the country. In light of this, it is reasonable to view the AfD as a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant party without any genuine political bargaining power. It would appear that AfD does not meet our second independent variable.

To conclude this part, one may claim that AfD faces two major hurdles in national politics that limit its political movement possibilities. German institutions view this populist and far-right anti-immigration party as an enemy because they are committed to a militant democracy that is sensitive to the need to avoid the rise of ultra-nationalist and anti-establishment parties like the Nazis. The public's perception that a vote for AfD may be "a wasted vote" is exacerbated by the reluctance of other significant political players to incorporate AfD into statewide and regional government. However, regional dynamics are more nuanced, and AfD electoral support appears to fluctuate according to the unique economic and demographic characteristics of different regions.

*Regional Analysis: Saxony and Bavaria*

Among Germany's federal units, the states of Saxony and Bavaria are most suited to the task to investigate the factors contributing to the AfD's election success. During the Cold War, the state of Saxony was one of the GDR's (East Germany's) constituent states. After Germany was reunited in October 1990, this state, along with the rest of East Germany, became part of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). However, full amalgamation has never occurred. It may be argued that in terms of economic growth, former East German areas are still lagging behind their Western counterparts.<sup>24</sup> To some extent, the greater support shown for anti-establishment parties like the AfD in the former areas of East Germany may be explained by this "lagging behind" assertion. The five states in which the party did the best in the Bundestag elections in 2017 and 2021 were all once East German territories.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ben Knight, "German Election: A Guide to Possible Coalitions for the New Government," *DW*, (17.05.2021). <https://www.dw.com/en/german-election-a-guide-to-possible-coalitions-for-the-new-government/a-38756817>

<sup>23</sup> Ayhan Simsek, "Germany: Merkel rules out coalition with far-right AfD," *AA*, (02.09.2019). <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/germany-merkel-rules-out-coalition-with-far-right-afd-/1571317>

<sup>24</sup> *DW*, "Former East Germany still lags behind West," (25.09.2019). <https://www.dw.com/en/former-east-germany-still-lags-behind-west/a-50583236>

<sup>25</sup> The Federal Returning Officer. (2017). "Bundestag Election 2017." <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017.html>; The Federal Returning Officer. (2021). "Bundestag Election 2021." <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021.html>



**Table 3 – Five States AfD Acquired the Highest Vote in 2017 & 2021 Bundestag Elections**

State ( <i>Länder</i> )	Share of Votes in 2017	Share of Votes in 2021
<b>Saxony</b>	27.0 percent	24.6 percent
<b>Thuringia</b>	22.7 percent	24.0 percent
<b>Brandenburg</b>	20.2 percent	18.1 percent
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	19.6 percent	19.6 percent
<b>Mecklenburg-Vorpommern</b>	18.6 percent	18.0 percent

Given this, Saxony stands out as one of the best-case states we can use to investigate the political influence of the AfD in Germany's elections. However, to counter Saxony's strong showing in the East, it is preferable to look to the Western states, where the party does poorly in comparison to the East. With the AfD polling at just 12.4 percent in 2017 and 9.0 percent in 2021 in the state of Bavaria, it looks like the state would be a smart bet.<sup>26</sup>

Also, before we test our regional-level independent variables, it's important to note that the most recent state-parliament (*Landtage*) elections in these states yielded the following results in an attempt to provide a credible and accurate comparison with the data on elections in Sweden:<sup>27</sup>

**Table 4 – State-Parliament (Landtage) Election Results of AfD in Saxony and Bavaria**

State ( <i>Länder</i> )	Share of Votes	Election Year
<b>Saxony</b>	27.5 percent	2018
<b>Bavaria</b>	10.2 percent	2019

We may learn more about the possible links between economic performance and demographic characteristics in these states and AfD support by beginning our debate now.

### *Economic Performance*

By comparing their respective nominal GDP-per-capita numbers, we may get a sense of where each state is economically. For this indicator the most reliable source appears to be Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder. Using their numbers, we can see how the two states' GDP per resident (in Euros) stacks up against the national average:<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The Federal Returning Officer. (2017 and 2021).

<sup>27</sup> Austin Davis, "EU Election: AfD Surge in Eastern Germany sets up Clash of Cultures," *DW*, (27.05.2019). <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-election-afd-surge-in-eastern-germany-sets-up-clash-of-cultures/a-48909859>

<sup>28</sup> Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, LSN (2020). [https://www.statistik.niedersachsen.de/startseite/uber\\_uns/statistische\\_aemter/statistische-aemter-des-bundes-und-der-laender-87703.html](https://www.statistik.niedersachsen.de/startseite/uber_uns/statistische_aemter/statistische-aemter-des-bundes-und-der-laender-87703.html)

**Table 5 – Nominal GDP-per-capita (EUR) Values of Saxony, Bavaria, and Germany**

State / Country	2017	2018	2019
<b>Saxony</b>	29.900 (12 <sup>th</sup> /16)	31.000 (12 <sup>th</sup> /16)	31.453 (12 <sup>th</sup> /16)
<b>Bavaria</b>	45.800 (3 <sup>rd</sup> /16)	47.900 (3 <sup>rd</sup> /16)	48.323 (3 <sup>rd</sup> /16)
<b>Germany</b>	<b>39.500</b>	<b>40.900</b>	<b>41.358</b>

The data suggests that the same five states with the lowest nominal GDP-per-capita throughout this time are the same five states that backed the AfD in Bundestag Elections (2017-2021). Similarly, AfD support was significantly lower in states with higher nominal GDP per capita. Considering this, one may propose that the nominal GDP-per-capita figures are inversely related to the percentage of the electorate that votes for the AfD. By depicting a negative relationship between relative economic well-being of an area and the electoral support it gives for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant political party, these results match the major expectation of this research article.

### *Demographic Feature*

Examining the percentage of foreign nationals residing in an area in relation to the percentage of natives of that country can provide light on the influence of demographic characteristic on people's propensity of voting for a populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant party. Information on this metric is available from Statista's collection of data based on the sources of Germany's Central Register of Foreign Nationals as of 31 December 2020:<sup>29</sup>

**Table 6 – Ratio of Foreigner Nationals of Saxony, Bavaria, and Germany**

State / Country	Number of Foreign Nationals	Ratio of Foreign Nationals to Regional / National Population
<b>Saxony</b>	222.780	5.49 percent
<b>Bavaria</b>	1.964.285	9.09 percent
<b>Germany</b>	<b>11.432.465</b>	<b>13.73 percent</b>

This data suggests that, like Saxony, those states that strongly support the AfD have a smaller ratio of foreign nationals within their boundaries than their Western equivalents, where the AfD enjoys less electoral support. Taking this into account, one might make the case that increased contact with internationals would result in less support for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant political party like AfD at the polls. As a result, there is a negative relationship between these ideas. The fundamental hypothesis of this study was that a higher percentage of non-citizens in the population would lead to an increase in votes for populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant political groups, therefore this result comes as something of a surprise.

<sup>29</sup> Statista. "Number of Foreigners in German Federal States in 2020," (2020). <https://www.statista.com/statistics/891288/foreigner-numbers-by-state-germany/>

*Nationwide Uniqueness of Sweden Example*

As far as political history goes, Germany and Sweden couldn't be more different. To begin, it's important to note that unlike Germany, Sweden has never had a period of severe anti-democratic rule. Moreover, Sweden could remain ostensibly democratic even while most European countries switched to anti-establishment ideologies like Fascism and Communism. This reasonably stable democratic rule likely shielded the country from adopting a militant, puritanical view of democracy like that of Germany. While this may be true to some extent, it's also important to note the potential role of another mechanism in the Sweden context: the social model of democratic self-defense.

*Success of Swedish Democracy: Prevention of Social Disintegration*

It appears that the fundamental distinction that the Swedish setting presents for this research article was accidentally stated by those who formulated the social model of democratic self-defense. Scholars claimed that strengthening democratic ethos and restoring social fairness were necessary to avert societal breakdown, a key factor in the growth of far-right parties like fascism.<sup>30</sup> We may evaluate the position of Sweden Democrats in Sweden according to the first independent variable in our study by focusing on this crucial issue, even if the survival of the democratic system in Sweden has a larger context.

Sweden's relatively stable political past appears to have a major role in allowing for the emergence and open competition of political parties representing a variety of opinions. As a result of this political tolerance, relatively extreme groups like the Sweden Democrats are kept inside the bounds of the existing establishment.<sup>31</sup> When taking this into account, it may be argued that Sweden provides a negative response to the first independent variable of this study, which asks if there exists a constitutional or institutional constraint driven by a traumatic non-democratic history.

*Interparty Relations*

While some of Sweden's major political parties may have been reluctant to work with the Sweden Democrats in the past, this attitude has been shifting in recent years. Since the Sweden Democrats' founding in 1988, major political parties have refused to negotiate a coalition with them. They claim that the party's anti-immigration stance and other beliefs are incompatible with their own.<sup>32</sup> However, the current snapshot reveals that there is little evidence of a *cordon sanitaire* left in the Swedish politics.

By 2018, the Sweden Democrats have joined mainstream parties like the Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats in ruling coalitions in several municipalities, signaling the beginning

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<sup>30</sup> A. Ross, *Why Democracy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952); H. Heller, "Political Democracy and Social Homogeneity," in: A. Jacobson and B. Schlink (eds) *Weimar: A Jurisprudence in Crisis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000: 256-279); Anthoula Malkopoulou and Ludvig Norman, "Three Models of Democratic Self-Defense: Militant Democracy and Its Alternatives," *Political Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (2018), p. 444-446.

<sup>31</sup> A. Hellström and T. Nilsson, 'We Are the Good Guys': Ideological positioning of the nationalist party Sverigedemokraterna in contemporary Swedish politics. *Ethnicities*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2010), p. 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796809354214>

<sup>32</sup> Anders Backlund, *Isolating the Radical Right: Coalition Formation and Policy Adaptation in Sweden*. Doctoral Dissertation to Södertörn University, Politics, Economy and the Organization of Society School: School of Social Sciences (2020).

of this important transition.<sup>33</sup> As the Sweden Democrats' political standing rose, it became more difficult for non-cooperative parties to form a government with the present vote proportions. Sweden Democrats are now seen as a political reality by the leaders of established political parties, who can no longer choose to ignore them.<sup>34</sup> The party further demonstrated its kingmaking abilities by helping to bring down Prime Minister Stefan Lofven through a vote of no confidence in the Riksdag.<sup>35</sup>

When these factors are considered, it becomes abundantly evident that the Sweden Democrats have substantial kingmaking potential in Swedish politics. In contrast to the AfD in Germany, for instance, who lacked such a powerful advantage, they have this advantage. Consequently, the Sweden Democrats are able to convince prospective voters that their vote will not be squandered on them. For the second independent variable at play here—whether or not a populist, far-right, anti-immigration party can join a coalition government—the Sweden Democrats produce a positive response.

To conclude this section, our research suggests that two crucial characteristics of Swedish national politics create an environment favorable to the emergence of a populist, far-right, anti-immigration party. In contrast to Germany, where a violent uprising against the establishment shaped the thinking of the governing class and led to the creation of constitutional and institutional constraints, Sweden has not seen anything like. Increased voter turnout also rendered the existing reluctance, or cordon sanitaire, impractical. But the party's recent actions demonstrate its considerable kingmaking potential. A case can be made that these two things help this populist, far-right, anti-immigrant figure advance in popularity.

### ***Regional Analysis***

Sweden's population is less than Germany's, and the nation is split up among several local governments. One of the nations that may be considered a unitary state, in contrast to Germany's federative structure, is Sweden. Therefore, our regional analysis will focus on two of these municipalities: Skåne<sup>36</sup> and Gotland. Taking a deeper look at the five municipal areas that gave the most electoral support to the Sweden Democrats in the 2014 and 2018 Riksdag Elections will help shed light on the potential roles of economic performance and demographic characteristic of these units.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> G. Hamidi-Nia, "Misstroendeomröstning i riksdagen mot justitieminister Morgan Johansson (S)," SVT Nyheter, (15 November 2019). <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/misstroendeomrostning-i-riksdagen-mot-justitieminister-morgan-johansson-s>

<sup>34</sup> Charlie Duxbury, "Sweden's Far-Right Takes a Step Closer to Power," *Politico* (25.03.2021).

<https://www.politico.eu/article/sweden-far-right-jimmie-akesson-election-2022-step-closer-to-power/>

<sup>35</sup> Johan Ahlander and Simon Johnson, "After Years on the Fringe, Sweden Democrats take Centre Stage," *Reuters* (24.06.2021). <https://www.reuters.com/world/after-years-fringe-sweden-democrats-take-centre-stage-2021-06-24/>

<sup>36</sup> Skåne has several electoral districts; nevertheless, for portraying the most efficient analysis, to portray a better analysis, this region will be utilized in terms of the stable electoral support it offered Sweden Democrats. While doing so, the highest and lowest share of votes in this region will be given. Specific results of the districts of municipality can be observed from: <https://data.val.se/val/val2014/slutresultat/R/rike/index.html>

<sup>37</sup> Valmyndigheten. (2014). "Val till riksdagen – Röster" (in Swedish). <https://data.val.se/val/val2014/slutresultat/R/rike/index.html>

**Table 7 - Five Districts SD Acquired the Highest Vote in 2014 Riksdag Elections**

District/Municipality	Share of Votes
Blekinge län	18.55 percent
Dalarnas län	16.79 percent
Skåne län	16.57-22.16 percent
Gävleborgs län	15.98 percent
Kronobergs län	15.58 percent
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>12.9 percent</b>

However, the Sweden Democrats' vote totals increased in every district in the 2018 Riksdag Elections, therefore the list altered only slightly. Nevertheless, as it can be seen, Skåne remained as one of the biggest strongholds of this populist, far-right and anti-immigrant party in 2018 (Valmyndigheten, 2018):<sup>38</sup>

**Table 8 - Five Districts SD Acquired the Highest Vote in 2018 Riksdag Elections**

District/Municipality	Share of Votes
Blekinge län	25.20 percent
Skåne län	22.11-28.82 percent
Västra Götalands läns norra	21.42 percent
Dalarnas län	20.76 percent
Kalmar län	20.56 percent
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>17.5 percent</b>

Our choosing Skåne comes from the region's being a stable hub of electoral support towards Sweden Democrats. On the other hand, to balance this region, it is better to take Gotland as the second case example for this study, where Sweden Democrats could obtain only 8.22 percent in 2014 and 12.71 percent in 2018 respectively.

### *Economic Performance*

Similar to what we conducted with Germany, comparing areas' nominal GDP-per-capita values is a useful technique to evaluate the success of Sweden's various economic hubs. We'll be dealing in Swedish Krona, but that's not a big deal because all we're doing is making a direct

<sup>38</sup> Valmyndigheten. (2018). "Val till riksdagen – Röster" (in Swedish). <https://data.val.se/val/val2018/slutresultat/R/rike/index.html>

internal comparison between two governmental entities. That's why SCB gives us a reliable record of these finances:<sup>39</sup>

**Table 9 – Nominal GDP-per-capita (SEK) Values of Skåne, Gotland, and Sweden**

District/Municipality	2014	2015	2017	2018
<b>Skåne</b>	347.000 (10 <sup>th</sup> /21)	362.000 (9 <sup>th</sup> /21)	397.000 (10 <sup>th</sup> /21)	409.000 (10 <sup>th</sup> /21)
<b>Gotland</b>	309.000 (19 <sup>th</sup> /21)	326.000 (18 <sup>th</sup> /21)	393.000 (11 <sup>th</sup> /21)	398.000 (11 <sup>th</sup> /21)
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>406.000</b>	<b>427.000</b>	<b>459.000</b>	<b>475.000</b>

These findings imply that a comparable pattern of electoral support for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant political party being negatively correlated with economic performance in an area cannot be observed in the Swedish environment. Skåne does better economically than Gotland, yet the Sweden Democrats still get more votes here than they can in any other district in the country. With this in mind, one may propose that the dynamics at play here are different in the Swedish setting. There might be a positive relationship between a region's economic growth and the votes cast for a party like the Sweden Democrats in national elections. This paper's major hypothesis was that regions with higher economic prosperity would be less likely to vote for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant political party, hence the findings came as a surprise.

### *Demographic Feature*

Considering the percentage of foreign nationals residing in an area compared to the percentage of natives of that country is useful for gauging the impact of demographics on people's propensity of voting for a populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant party. The following data from the Swedish Central Statistical Board's 2022 forecast can be used for this purpose, as of 31 December 2021:

**Table 10 – Ratio of Foreigner Nationals in Skåne, Gotland, and Sweden**

State / Country	Number of Foreign Nationals	Ratio of Foreign Nationals to Regional / National Population
<b>Skåne</b>	133.456	9.63 percent
<b>Gotland</b>	2416	4.02 percent
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>880.826</b>	<b>8.51 percent</b>

<sup>39</sup> SCB, "GDP at regional level rose in most counties in 2014," (14.12.2016). <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/national-accounts/national-accounts/regional-accounts/pong/statistical-news/regional-accounts-2014/>; SCB, "GDP at regional level rose in almost all counties," (30.12.2019). <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/national-accounts/national-accounts/regional-accounts/pong/statistical-news/regional-accounts-2017/>

Interestingly, this data paints a different picture from what we saw in Germany with respect to AfD. Support for a populist, far-right, anti-immigration political party like the Sweden Democrats appears to rise in tandem with the percentage of non-Swedes living in a certain region of Sweden. This tells us that the scenario is unique from the German one. If this is the case, then it stands to reason that increased contact with non-natives could increase the likelihood of voting for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant political party. This data lends credence to the paper's central premise, which postulated a connection between the proportion of non-native-born citizens and votes cast for populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant political groups.

To conclude this section, we showed that in Sweden, a region's electoral support for a party like the Sweden Democrats is inversely proportional to its economic performance. However, there appears to be a correlation between the percentage of foreign nationals living in a certain area and votes cast for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant party. Now we can talk about what we found and what we learned from it. In addition, there are a number of alternate explanations for this puzzle that we need accept to have a whole view of the situation.

### *Findings and Conclusions*

By responding to each of the independent variables in this study, we may draw a summary of our findings and the respective inferences based on such findings. Once we have that information, we may summarize our results (dependent variable=vote total for a party that is populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant). Finally, it seems like there are two major competing theories that the researchers might use in their future studies.

#### *Independent Variable I – Constitutional or Institutional Restraints Based on Traumatic Past*

We discovered that constitutional or institutional limitations based on a traumatic anti-democratic experience prohibit a populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant party from reaching more electoral support, as was the case with the AfD in Germany and the SD in Sweden. This essential distinction helps to explain why AfD has been unable to gain traction in Germany's electoral landscape whereas SD has been able to do so. Each country's distinctive political system was used as a proxy for this independent variable.

#### *Independent Variable II – Interparty Relations / Ability to Participate in Coalition Forming*

Both the AfD in Germany and the SD in Sweden are demonstrating their kingmaking talents by actively participating in coalition formation at the regional and national/federal levels. The public's perception that casting a ballot for AfD is a "possible wasted vote" due to the party's exclusion makes it difficult for the party to gain support. But SD demonstrates that it has already crossed this threshold and is now able to recruit even more votes thanks to its portrayal of a kingmaking skill in Swedish politics.

#### *Independent Variable III – Economic Performance (Nominal GDP-per-capita)*

In Germany, a region's support for a populist, far-right, anti-immigration political party like AfD appears to be inversely proportional to its economic success. For Sweden, however, we find the opposite to be true; there is a positive association between the two ideas.

#### *Independent Variable IV – Demographic Feature (Ratio of Foreign Nationals)*

Support for a populist, far-right, anti-immigration political party like the AfD appears to be inversely proportional to the number of foreign people residing in an area in Germany. For Sweden, however, we find the opposite to be true; there is a positive association between the two ideas.

### *Conclusions*

This study is primarily concerned with, and its dependent variable is, the amount of electoral support for a populist, far-right, anti-immigration party. As can be observed from the negative association between nominal GDP-per-capita and electoral support to such parties, the data we obtained for the four independent variables show that electoral support for such parties in Germany (like AfD) are more tied to the economic uncertainties. Since this is the case, we may conclude that the literature examining the repercussions of globalization's uneven consequences and economic insecurity is more influential in Germany than it is elsewhere. On the other hand, we can argue that the cultural backlash conceptualizations are more meaningful in understanding the functioning of such parties in the Swedish context, given the positive correlation in Sweden between the ratio of foreign nationals and the electoral support to the political parties like the Sweden Democrats. At a regional level, these are the most important inferences to be drawn from the data.

Our dependent variable is a phenomena with national consequences, just as regional factors are critical to understanding it. As in Germany with the Alternative for Germany (AfD), constitutional or institutional limitations stemming from a traumatic history may play a significant role in preventing the establishment of such political groups. Contrarily, in most nations, this dynamic does not exist, making it simpler for a populist, far-right, anti-immigrant party to contact prospective voters through several means, not the least of which is the indisputable significance of social media. Finally, let's imagine that this political group may become seen as a possible kingmaker, like Sweden's SD did. This, then, presents a crucial chance for that party to increase its share of the vote.