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ANTI-PARTY SENTIMENTS AMONG MEMBERS IN GERMAN LOCAL PARTIES.
Conceptual Framework and Empirical Analysis

ABSTRACT
In the past decades’ local parties in German municipalities have grown up to serious competitors to nationwide parties. In some regions they even dominate the political arena. But despite widespread presence and success, party researchers widely ignored this phenomenon: Only a few case and regional studies focused on these local political actors. Up till now, empirical evidence for Germany is still missing, concerning the attitudes of their members towards nationwide established parties. So it is unknown whether the self-described picture of local parties as non-parties or even anti-parties is rooted in the beliefs of their members and manifested in the political decisions of their representatives in the local arena. Therefore, I conceptualize anti-party sentiments in a first step and plead for an analytical distinction between sentiments relating to (a) parties at the local or higher level of the political system as well as a rejection of (b) specific parties or parties in general (based on Poguntke 1996; Mudde 1996). Then I aim for analyzing the consequences of different patterns of local politics as well as individual determinants to explain the degree of anti-party sentiments among local party members. Thereby this will enhance our understanding whether local parties enrich and strengthen local democracy or promote even more party disaffection.

Regression models are used to test the hypotheses, based on a cross-sectional postal survey with responses received from over 860 members of local parties in Germany. The dataset is provided by the recently concluded project ‘Free Voters membership study 2015’, located at the Düsseldorf Party Research Institute (PRuF).
1. Introduction

In the past decades’ local parties in Germany have grown up to serious competitors to established nationwide parties, in some municipalities they even dominate the political competition (Reiser et al. 2008: 124; Holtmann 2012: 26f). In 2015, they were represented in over eighty percent of all German municipalities (Angenendt 2016: 131). Also in other European countries, local parties have been rising up in recent years (Gendźwiłł 2012; Boogers/Voerman 2010; Reiser 2008; Aars/Ringkjøb 2005; Schaffner et al. 2001).

Existing studies indicate that, despite huge organizational and programmatic differences, “[…] the notion of factual politics [i.e. practical or non-ideological politics, Author’s note] on the local level is the central characteristic of non-partisan representatives in all communities […]” (Holtmann et al. 2008: 141). According to this, their members have in common that local politics should not be dominated by ideological differences, embodied by local party branches and party politicians. Instead, they are “self-perceived […] protectionists of a factual, harmonious political style and understand themselves as non-parties or even anti-parties” (Holtmann et al. 2008: 129). But up to now, empirical evidence is missing whether the anti-party rhetoric of local parties is rooted in the beliefs of their members and anti-party sentiments are restricted to party politics at the local level or reflect skepticism towards party democracy in general.

On the one hand, the explanation of behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of local politicians is focused on contextual factors such as the type of local democracy (Holtkamp 2008, 2006) or societal characteristics of the municipality (Holtmann 2012). On the other hand, there is a widespread political science literature, trying to explain rising anti-party sentiment in most European countries (Rossteutscher et al. 2015; Norris 2011; Torcal et al. 2002; Pharr/Putnam 2000; Poguntke 1996). In consequence, my contribution is twofold: Conceptually, I combine anti-partyism and local politics literature and argue for an analytical distinction between specific and general anti-party sentiment (Poguntke 1996; Poguntke/Scarrow 1996; Mudde 1996) as well as a spatial distinction between the political level, the sentiments are related to: local or federal/national (Reiser 2012). Empirically, I demonstrate that the differentiation between these dimensions is substantial and enhance our understanding whether anti-party sentiment of local party members is best explained by contextual or individual determinants. Testing the hypotheses, I use regression models, based on a cross-sectional postal survey with responses received from over 860 members of local parties in Germany.

2. How to define locally restricted political groups?

In contemporary Western and Eastern European countries different kinds of groups in local politics are aiming to influence collective decision making - next to nationwide political parties. But despite an increased research interest towards local parties in recent years (e.g. Gendźwiłł 2012; Boogers/Voerman 2010; Reiser/Holtmann 2008; Aars/Ringkjøb 2005), until now no generally
accepted definition has been established of what constitutes a ‘local party’. In contrast to citizens’ initiatives and political movements, local parties aim to influence local politics directly by engaging in electoral competition (Naumann 2012: 35f.). According to their restricted sphere of activity, they are sometimes called as “town-hall parties” (own translation; Naßmacher 1996). For the German case, Holtmann et al. (2008: 128) emphasize the legal status as non-parties: “Independent local lists” are “groups participating in local elections, and being not political parties in the sense of the German party law”. For comparative studies, legal details may be less important. Therefore, the proposal is to define local parties as political groups, presenting candidates exclusively at local and/or regional elections. For the following analyses, due to the German focus, “independent local list” and “local party” are insofar exchangeable concepts.

3. Local Parties between Anti-Establishment and Politics as Usual

Over 80 percent of group chairmen from local parties agreed to the statement that “factual politics has to have priority over party politics on the local level” (Holtmann et al. 2008: 141). The statement refers to an ongoing controversy between political activists (as well as scientists): Is the local level anyway “a place to party” (Copus et al. 2012)? From a legal perspective, local politics is “outside of the political sphere, (...) purely factual and harmonic. In this view, the political sphere existed only on state and federal levels, mainly characterized by competition between political parties” (Holtmann et al. 2008: 129). According to this, an increasing party politicization in local politics would be strengthening the formation of political cartels, corruption and patronage (Holtkamp 2008: 276; Kersting 2002: 140ff.), whereby local parties are seen as adequate intermediaries between the social and political sphere, capable to activate and integrate the local citizenry. That anti-party rhetoric, expressed by local (non-) parties, may signal protest against established political parties and party democracy in general has been spreading among political scientists only since recent years (e.g. Koschmieder/Niedermayer 2015; Gendzwill/Zoltak 2014; Lütjen 2012; Danglová 2005). Nevertheless, research is focused mainly on the explanation of presence and success of nationwide anti-establishment or populist parties (e.g. van Kessel 2015; Mudde/Kaltwasser 2013). Unfortunately, the national focus entails the risk to overlook possible interconnections between political processes at the national and local level: The criticism of the ‘political cartel’ by local parties may work as a successful strategy to benefit in local elections from an increasing party disaffection towards established political parties (Reiser et al. 2008: 144). The success of the Italian protest party Five Star Movement (former: Five Star Civic List) started in local politics before their breakthrough in the general elections 2013 (Tronconi 2016: 22f.) In Germany, the anti-party party Free Voters Federal Association has a longstanding tradition in local politics (Walther/Angenendt 2016) and was able to overcome the five percent hurdle at the Bavarian Land elections in 2008 and 2013 (Landeswahlleiter
Bayern 2013; Schultze 2009). This raises the question whether anti-party sentiments among the members of local parties are indeed restricted to party politics in local or regional politics. At least a certain proportion of local party members may not only be driven by locally restricted anti-party sentiments. Instead, the effort of local parties to gain votes also at national elections may root in a disaffection of their members with established parties in general. Moreover, do they “strengthen the ideological and procedural divergences within national party systems from below” (Holtmann et al. 2011: 17)? More than 60 per cent of members from local parties want “to break up colonnaded majorities in the council” (Holtmann et al. 2011: 18), which fits well to this thesis.

Previous studies conclude that local parties indeed have the potential to interrupt local politics (Krappidel 2012), but only if right-wing populism and extremism will become predominantly in the spectrum of local parties: “On the one hand, their brand mark of a nonideological perception and mere ‘factual’ practice of local affairs makes them attractive for as well as prone to bundle up existing anti-party-affects. [...] On the other hand, nonpartisan lists are filling gaps of local political representation, especially in small local units” (Holtmann et al. 2011: 20). Thereby, it is remarkable that these “anti-party-affects” (ibid.) have not previously been associated with populism (Angenendt 2015). Populism as a communication style is in principle combinable with different ideologies (Mudde/Kaltwasser 2013) and insofar is also practical politics combinable with populist elements. Or, even more, the emphasis of practical politics may function itself as an indicator of populism in local politics (Lütjen 2012). As Schedler (1996: 293) points out, a characteristic feature of anti-establishment parties is the cleavage construction “between the political establishment and the people [...] and the opposition between the former and themselves”. According to this, the “[...] community emerges by implication: sharing a common adversary creates a common identity” (ibid.). The distinction made by local parties between local inhabitants and party politicians’, whereby the non-partisan politicians are portrayed as quasi natural advocates of the community, can be seen as manifestation of this communication style. A further component of the anti-establishment concept seems to fit: “High degrees of personalization are symptomatic of this [anti-political, authors’ note] attitude”. Indeed, local parties attach importance to a personalized communication style: Over seventy per cent of German local party councilors share the belief that personality is more important in local politics than partisanship, while every second partisanship councilor agrees (Holtmann 2012: 37). Irrespective of their legal position, “anti-political establishment parties [...] describe themselves as movements and not parties [...]” (Schedler 1996: 301). And indeed, non-partyness is also a central component for local parties throughout Europe (Reiser/Holtmann 2008).

The short overview indicates that populist elements and the presence and success of anti-establishment parties are not restricted to national politics or nationwide parties per se. Furthermore, local parties may take a leading role as anti-establishment actors in local politics, at
least when they are able to present themselves as political outsiders and being apart from traditional forms of political organization and participation (Schaffner et al. 2001). In contrary, local party membership does not necessarily correspond with anti-party sentiments. Especially in small-sized municipalities, local party membership may be just a consequence of the absence from national party branches rather than a conscious decision against the membership in a nationwide party (Holtmann 2008: 7). If this holds true, the high proportion of local parties in small municipalities (ibid.) can be seen as a reflection of lower complexity in local politics and less conflict-driven decisions. As a result, nationwide parties are less important in local politics to “[..] structure conflict lines and give some guidance and orientation to voters [...]” (Holtmann et al. 2011: 11). According to this perspective, local parties function as surrogate for nationwide established political parties and bridging a representation gap which would otherwise have occurred. Based on the previous statements, in the following chapter I outline the analytical framework to capture the intensity of anti-party sentiments as well as the political level they are related to. Next to this I derive hypotheses and test them empirically, based on a cross-sectional survey, realized in 2015.

4. Taking the local level into account – the dimensions of anti-party sentiment

Disaffection with political parties, declining party membership and party identification occur in most European countries (Biezen/Poguntke 2014; Dalton 2004; Pharr/Putnam 2000; Norris 1999). Changes in society and a lack of political integration power by mainstream parties also favor a volatile party system and weaken the position of established political parties (Poguntke 2014; Poguntke 2011; Poguntke 2001). Declining trust in institutions and core actors of party democracy is especially seen as problematically, „‘if the parties themselves become the center of protest and if anti-party sentiments occur increasingly, [because] the core actors of representative democracy are discredited” (Rossteutscher et al. 2015: 53). Negative attitudes towards certain parties are therefore less consequential for the stability of the political system than a fundamental dissatisfaction with parties and party democracy per se (Dalton 2004: 7). Norris identifies the rise of “critical citizens” (2011: 219) and sums up that simultaneously an increasing acceptance of democratic values in combination with a rise of skepticism towards political parties, parliaments and governments is observable.

Nevertheless, it is widely discussed how anti-party sentiments can be operationalized adequately (Arzheimer 2002: 116). Unfortunately, indicators are often restricted to measure sentiments or attitudes only towards parties in parliament (Arzheimer 2002: 122). First, an appropriate measurement has taken into account the evaluation for each party in parliament separately (Niedermayer 2013: 50). This enables us to capture empirically the degree of disaffection towards specific parties. However, if the measurement is limited to parties represented in parliament, a general disaffection with existing parties does not necessarily indicate a fundamental disaffection
with parties as institution (Bélanger 2004: 1057). Therefore, an analytical distinction has to capture whether parties are considered as legitimate and necessary for the function of the political system or not (Poguntke 1996: 324). Having this in mind, I plead for a differentiation of anti-party sentiment, capturing all facets of the phenomenon. First, the object of criticism has to be defined. Are anti-party sentiments related to specific parties or towards party democracy in general? The criticism of established parties can also function as a populist communication style to gain a strategic advantage in local political competition, without being entangled with the rejection of parties per se. Second, based on the discussion about the role and function of parties in local democracy outlined above, the political level the criticism relates to has to be included. Are anti-party sentiments restricted to the sphere of local politics or include all levels of the political system? Figure 1 is summing up the differentiation:

*Figure 1: Dimensions of anti-party sentiment (own presentation, based on Poguntke 1996: 324; Reiser 2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Against existing Parties</th>
<th>Against Parties per se</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Politics</td>
<td>I Rejection of specific parties in local politics</td>
<td>II General rejection of parties in local politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Politics</td>
<td>III Rejection of specific parties in national politics</td>
<td>IV General rejection of parties in national politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dimension one involves anti-party sentiment towards specific nationwide parties in local politics. Here, disaffection is restricted to a local party branch, i.e. the “party on the ground” (Katz/Mair 1994) of a nationwide political party. Conceptually, this attitude is not necessarily entangled with dissatisfaction directed to the same party in public or central office. In contrast, dimension two calls into question the legitimacy of nationwide parties in local politics per se. According to this, parties are seen as redundant for local policy making. Disaffection with the performance of established nationwide parties in public or central office is captured by dimension three. While the former does not put into question the legitimacy of parties in general, dimension four represents a fundamental opposition to party democracy.
5. The determinants of anti-party sentiment

In the following chapter I present the theoretical framework, focusing on contextual and individual determinants of anti-party sentiments among members of German local parties. In a first step, I examine the explanatory power of (a) different patterns of local democracy as well as (b) group-level characteristics of local parties. In a second step, I focus on individual determinants. Subsequently, the empirical analysis will enhance our understanding by which of these factors the different dimensions of anti-party sentiment are best explained.

5.1 Contextual factors

German local politics is ranged between consensual and competitive decision-making processes (Holtkamp 2006, 2008, 2012). The original concept of consensual and competitive democracy, formulated by Lehmbruch (1967), was adapted by Naßmacher to local politics in 1972. In 2006, Lars Holtkamp made the concept accessible for empirical measurement. But in contrast to Lehmbruch’s conceptualization, Holtkamp does not focus on the explanation of differences between formal institutional structures. Rather he attempts to describe the attitudes and behavior of local decision-makers in the political process (Holtkamp 2006: 642). In accordance with Lehmbruch (1991: 311), the central feature of consensual local democracy is the principle of amicable settlement. Typical for this type of democracy is a low level of party politicization, including the rejection of confrontational strategies in collective decision making. Instead, council decisions are often unanimously and as a consequence party discipline is less important. In contrast, the central characteristic of competitive local decision-making is a clear distinction between the political majority and minority in the council (Lehmbruch 1975: 5). Recent empirical findings suggest that in German municipalities with consensus-type of democracy, local party councilors are more often skeptical towards party politicians from national parties and parliamentary opposition per se than in competitive-structured municipalities (Holtkamp 2015: 13). However, it is unknown whether a spill-over effect exists and the type of local democracy is also affecting attitudes of local party members towards nationwide parties more general. The concept aims to analyze and describe patterns of attitudes and beliefs concerning local political decision-making processes (ibid.). Therefore, patterns of local democracy are expected to have an influence mainly on specific and general anti-party sentiments at the local level (dimension one and two): If party coherence in voting behavior, preference aggregation and political ideology are less important, even loosely organized single-issue local lists can handle political decision making adequately. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1a: In local consensual democracies, locally restricted specific and general anti-party sentiments are stronger than in local competitive democracies (dimension I and II).
**H1b:** Specific and general anti-party sentiments towards nationwide political parties are not affected by the type of local democracy (dimension III and IV).

As earlier empirical studies on local parties suggest (Holtmann 2012; Holtkamp/Eimer 2006), the community size matters: Especially in small municipalities, local parties are considered as intermediaries between the social and political sphere, whereby interest aggregation by political parties is seen as less important (Holtmann et al. 2012: 161; Saiz/Geser 1999). In small local units the absence of nationwide parties may function as a push-factor to join a local party, enabling to organize local self-government (Holtmann 2008: 7). Furthermore, in small municipalities it is in purely mathematical terms more difficult to fill the council mandates only with members from nationwide parties: As more council mandates have to be filled in relation to the whole citizenry, the chance reduces to attract a sufficient number of partisan candidates for election (Kjaer/Elklit 2010; Klein/Spier 2011). In these municipalities, local parties may function as a mere substitute. In consequence, the ability to organize local political processes autonomously should reduce the relevance of nationwide parties in small communities.

**H2a:** The lower the number of inhabitants, the higher is the general rejection of nationwide parties in local politics (dimension II).

In contrast, the opportunity structure for nationwide parties to establish a local branch raises, the higher the number of inhabitants. Under these conditions, the decision to engage in a local party can be interpreted as a conscious decision against membership in a nationwide party, i.e. should rest in disaffection with existing nationwide parties. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**H2b:** The higher the number of inhabitants, the higher is the specific anti-party sentiment towards nationwide parties in local and national politics (dimension I and III).

Electoral success requires to assume political responsibility and to organize political majorities. From a theoretical point of view, two mechanisms are considered as important: To be involved in local political decision making may strengthen the acceptance among local party members towards democratic norms and procedures due to a process of political socialization (Holtmann 2012: 38). Conversely, if local parties combine moderate policy-positions, a non-populist communication style and quasi-partisan members, they might attract voters in local elections. As a consequence, electoral success of local parties should lowering existing anti-party sentiments among their members. In line with the argumentation, also a longstanding local party tradition is hypothesized to lower anti-party sentiments due to a process of socialization in the political arena. The following correlation is postulated:
H3: The greater the electoral success of local parties, the lower the anti-party sentiment among their members (dimension I-IV).

H4: Members in longstanding local parties are less skeptical towards nationwide political parties (dimension I-IV).

5.2 Individual factors

Value orientations, beliefs and resources are widely discussed in recent literature as determinants of anti-party sentiment (Dalton 2008, 2004). Therefore, for the following analyses post-materialism, self-efficacy as well as human and social capital are seen as theoretically important concepts. Following theories of societal and cultural change, rising anti-party sentiments are the consequence of a widespread change in value orientations, as individual self-expression and autonomy have gained importance for a growing number of citizens in modern Western European countries. According to Inglehart (1999), post-materialism is linked with skepticism towards politicians and political parties, while simultaneously democratic values are highly accepted: “[...] the same publics that are becoming increasingly critical of hierarchical authority, are also becoming increasingly resistant to authoritarian government [...]” (Inglehart 1999: 236). As a result, different effects on anti-party sentiments are expected: A critical stance towards parties as “the core actors of representative democracy” (Dalton et al. 2003: 3) should be manifest empirically in specific anti-party sentiments. In contrast, post-materialist values are hypothesized to strengthen the legitimacy of parties as institution.

H5a: The stronger post-materialist values are, the higher is the specific anti-party sentiment towards nationwide parties in local and national politics (dimension I and III).

H5b: The stronger post-materialist values are, the lower is the general rejection of parties in local and national politics (dimension II and IV).

Next to cultural values, individual beliefs are taken into account. The psychological concept of political efficacy has been proven in this respect (Arzheimer 2008). Political efficacy is defined as ”[...] the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change” (Campbell et al. 1954: 187). Further developments of the basic concept differentiate between internal and external political efficacy: The former refers to the belief that political processes can be influenced adequately by one’s own action; the latter based on the assumption, political parties act responsively and mostly in line with the demands of the electorate (Kaase/Marsh 1979: 42ff.; Lane 1959). The belief of being able to affect political decision-making effectively is considered as important factor to accept political decisions, made by representatives, as legitimate (Gabriel 1986: 223).
H6a: The stronger the belief of internal political efficacy, the lower the anti-party sentiments (dimension I-IV).
H6b: The stronger the belief of external political efficacy, the lower the anti-party sentiments (dimension I to IV).

Finally, social and cultural resources are taken into account: (1) Social capital theory postulates a correlation between social trust and confidence in political institutions, e.g. parties. According to Robert Putnam (1993), membership in citizens’ initiatives and associations induces political trust by the experience of tolerance and reciprocity. As a result, spill-over effects from social to political trust are expected. From a theoretical perspective, it is emphasized that spill-over effects between social and political trust should mainly arise if associations promote generalized forms of trust, i.e. if social trust is not restricted to certain social groups (Offe 1999; Granovetter 1973). In this respect, the distinction between particular and generalized forms of social trust is deemed as important: "I trust (or distrust) the people I know because I know them, and I trust (or distrust) my fellow countrymen not because I know them personally, but because I have first-hand knowledge of how society generally works" (Newton 2007: 344). While particular social trust is limited to local networks, generalized social trust is characterized as openness towards unknown fellow citizens. Thereby, generalized social trust is necessary to accept parties as legitimate institution (Newton/Zmerli 2011) – also beyond the scope of local politics:

H7a: The higher the particular social trust, the lower the anti-party sentiments towards local party politics (dimension I and II).
H7b: The higher the generalized social trust, the lower the anti-party sentiments towards party politics in general (dimension I-IV).

(2) Russel Dalton identifies a rising cognitive mobilization as important explanatory factor for a decline in party identification: “The expansion of education and the growing sophistication of mass publics generally are decreasing the functional value of partisan ties for some sectors of society. This cognitive mobilization is focused on a group of citizens whose greater political skills and resources enable them to be functionally independent of party cues: the better educated and politically involved” (Dalton 1984: 281). As local party members are per definition involved in political activity, a correlation between cognitive mobilization and anti-party sentiments is expected. Following Dalton’s line of argumentation (ibid.), the cause of existing anti-party feelings is therefore not a lack of self-efficacy. Contrariwise, a high cognitive mobilization encouraged citizens to handle political decision-making autonomously and in absence of hierarchical party structures – at least in local politics.

H8: The higher the cognitive mobilization, the higher the anti-party sentiments (dimension I-IV)
6. Data and Operationalization

The following analysis based on a cross-sectional postal survey with responses received from 866 members of German local parties in 2015\(^1\). Due to the fact that the overall population of local party members as well as the number of existing local parties is unknown, the sample based on a disproportional random sampling of 300 municipalities. The disproportionality takes the distribution of small, middle-sized and big municipalities into account, because in a proportional sample nearly one big municipality (>100.000 inhabitants) would have been included. In 81 per cent of the selected municipalities participated overall 453 local parties in the last local election and 189 of these groups took part in the survey, whereby answers were received from 66 per cent (125 local parties)\(^2\).

The four dimensions of anti-party sentiment are operationalized as follows: Specific local anti-party sentiment (dimension I) is measured by an index, including two variables. The respondents were asked for their assessment on a five-point scale whether (1) local branches of nationwide parties exist and promote local policies close to the political preferences of the respondent and (2) membership in a local party based on disaffection with the political practice of nationwide party branches. To operationalize general rejection of parties in local politics (dimension II) the respondents were asked to answer on a five-point scale if nationwide parties are necessary to make local politics work. Similarly, dimension IV is measured by an index, including the two statements ‘parties are necessary to make our political system work in Germany’ (Gidengil et al. 2001: 506) as well as ‘parties are needed to defend the interests of various social groups’ (Torcal et al. 2002: 263). Dimension III is based on the average value of evaluation towards each political party represented in the German Bundestag in 2015.

The type of local democracy is scaled metrically, whereas higher values indicate a rising dominance of consensual elements (according to Holtkamp 2006: 655). The municipality size is operationalized as the number of inhabitants. Electoral success includes the percentage of votes gathered by the respective local party at the last municipal election. Whether a local party is longstanding and established is measured by the duration of existence.

Post-materialism is measured by an index, combining the responses to four variables: A preference for (1) law and order as well as (2) a high standard of living indicate materialistic values whereas (3) preferences for self-realization and (4) creativity indicate post-materialistic values (based on Klages 1990). The index is computed by subtracting materialistic values from post-materialistic ones.

Internal and external efficacy are based in each case on the mean value of two variables (Campbell et al. 1954: 187f.): The former is operationalized by the statements ‘sometimes politics is so

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\(^1\) The survey is funded by the German Research Foundation DFG (DFG Grant No.: PO 370/10-1). Principal investigator is Prof. Dr. Thomas Poguntke.

\(^2\) For detailed information see Walther/Angenendt 2016.
complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on’ and ‘I consider myself to be qualified to take over political responsibility’. The latter is operationalized by the statements ‘I don’t think politicians care much about what people like me think’ and ‘In general, politicians try to represent the interests of ordinary citizens’.

The measurement of generalized social trust based on the mean value of two established and widely used indicators: ‘Most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful’ and ‘Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair’. Additionally, I measure particular social trust by the following statement: ‘Most people in your municipality try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair’. Each of the statements is measured on an eleven-point scale.

Cognitive mobilization (following Dalton 1984) is operationalized by two variables: First, the respondents were asked on a five-point scale how strong they are interested in politics. Second, the educational background is included as dummy, whereby no, lower or intermediate education is coded as ‘0’ and a high school or university degree as ‘1’.

7. Empirical Analysis

7.1 Description

A first descriptive impression of the patterns of anti-party sentiment is given in table one. The analysis confirms that there are different patterns, which is a first indicator that the four dimensions are distinct: While approximately 50 per cent of local party members are (very) strongly disaffected with party politics at the local level, the proportion varies between 4 and 30 per cent at the national level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>local level</th>
<th>national level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific (dim. I)</td>
<td>General (dim. II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very low</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>0,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>13,9</td>
<td>10,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>32,7</td>
<td>38,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong</td>
<td>35,0</td>
<td>41,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very strong</td>
<td>14,9</td>
<td>9,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>856</td>
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</table>

Locally restricted anti-party sentiments (dimension I and II) are relatively high compared with those towards parties at the national level (dimension III and IV). Therefore, the results confirm that disaffection with nationwide parties and party politics is mostly related to the local political sphere. Nevertheless, every third local party member is characterized by strong or very strong anti-party sentiments towards the established nationwide parties, represented in the German Bundestag in
2015 (dimension III). According to an alternative index construction, based on the same set of variables used to compute dimension three, the highest measured share of skeptical and frustrated sentiments towards political parties in the German population between 1994 and 2011 is approximately 50 per cent (Niedermayer 2013: 57). Using the same scale to compare local party members with the German population, six of ten local party members are skeptical or frustrated with established parties (own calculation). This brief comparison illustrates that even if anti-party sentiments are most widespread towards local party politics, also a remarkably high share of local party members is disaffected with established nationwide parties. In contrast, less than 5 per cent rejects parties as institution per se (dimension IV). All in all, German local party members are best described as disaffected with existing nationwide parties, but simultaneously characterized by a high acceptance of party democracy in general.

As table 2 shows, the dimensions are moreover entangled: Each dimension correlates significantly. Because we are dealing with different dimensions of the same concept, this is not a big surprise. However, the correlation coefficients are on a relatively low level, which strengthen the argumentation that a differentiation between the dimensions of anti-party sentiment is conceptually reasonable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tab.2: Correlations of anti-party sentiments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rejection of Specific Parties in Local Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rejection of Specific Parties in Local Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Rejection of Parties in Local Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rejection of Specific Parties in National Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Rejection of Parties in National Politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n 766 766 766

Significance: + p<0.10; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

7.2 Multivariate Analysis

The following analysis focuses on the determinants of anti-party sentiments. Contextual factors are included to examine the explanatory power of local decision-making processes and group level
characteristics as well as individual-level determinants. Therefore, the R-squared change of both subsets in comparison to the complete model is reported as well.

At first glance it is obvious that contextual factors explain less variance: The change in R² varies between 1 and 5 per cent. In consequence, group-level characteristics are less important for the explanation of anti-party sentiments. Taking the complete model into account, the explained variance rises up on a moderate level: While specific anti-party sentiment at the national level is best explained (R² = .16), general anti-party sentiment at the local level is explained on a relatively low level (R² = .10).

Tab. 3: The effects of contextual and individual factors on anti-party sentiments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local level</th>
<th>National level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific (I)</td>
<td>General (II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type of local democracy</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of inhabitants</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>electoral success</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duration of existence</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-materialism</td>
<td>-0.10**</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal efficacy</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external efficacy</td>
<td>-0.29***</td>
<td>-0.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>particular social trust</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generalized social trust</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political interest</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher-level education</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>R²-Change (Contextual factors only)</th>
<th>R²-Change (Individual factors only)</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local level</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National level</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>766</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance: + p<0.10; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001; linear regression model, effects shown in beta-coefficients; reference category for educational background: lower-level education; R²-Change in comparison to complete model.

Nevertheless, the type of local democracy influences significantly the degree of anti-party sentiments (dimension I and II). In accordance with hypothesis 1a general anti party sentiment rises up in more
consensual-like local democracies (dimension II). In contrary, specific anti-party sentiments are lower in more competitive organized local democracies (dimension I). Hypothesis 1a is therefore partly confirmed. Furthermore, there is no clear visible effect onto dimension III and IV, which confirms hypothesis 1b. The influence of the size of democracy, i.e. the number of inhabitants, astonishes. While there is no effect on local anti-party sentiments (hypothesis 2a falsified), specific anti-party sentiment towards national politics is significantly influenced by the size of local democracy (dimension III). As a consequence, local party members in bigger municipalities are characterized by stronger anti-party sentiments towards established nationwide parties than members in smaller municipalities. Hypothesis 2b is therefore partly confirmed. The same holds true for hypothesis 3: Greater electoral success goes hand in hand with significantly stronger general anti-party sentiment at the local level. Surprisingly, success lowers specific anti-party sentiments - in local as well as in national politics (dimension I and III). It seems like success strengthens the self-esteem of local party members which results in the belief to handle local political decision making without nationwide parties. Simultaneously, they accept established parties as legitimate counterparties.

Taking individual-level determinants into account, political efficacy, post-materialism, particular social trust and political interest significantly influence the level of anti-party sentiments. The analyses show that anti-party sentiments are best explained by the concept of political efficacy, or more precisely by external efficacy (hypothesis 6b confirmed): To belief that nationwide established parties respond to the needs of oneself significantly lowers anti-party sentiments in all dimensions (dimension I-IV). Opposed to hypothesis 5a/b, post-materialism reduces specific and raises general anti-party sentiment in local politics. Post-materialistic values therefore influence anti-party sentiments at the local level differentially than hypothesized. Post-materialistic local party members are more critical towards parties as institution in local politics than materialistic ones (dimension II). However, stronger post-materialistic members are significantly less disaffected with existing nationwide parties in local politics (dimension I). A higher level of trust in local citizens reduces disaffection with nationwide established parties and strengthens the legitimacy of party democracy in general. In accordance with Putnam (1993), that is how democracy works: Trust as social capital bridges the gap between the societal and political sphere. Surprisingly, this holds not true for dimension I and II of anti-party sentiments and therefore hypothesis 7a is falsified. On the one hand, as assumed, political interest leads to a more skeptical view towards established parties at the national level (dimension III). On the other hand, it reinforces the legitimacy of party democracy (dimension IV). Additionally, the educational background shows no effect. As a consequence, the influence of cognitive mobilization is only partly confirmed (hypothesis 8). Finally, the duration of existence, internal efficacy and generalized social trust show no strong or significant effects.
8. Conclusion

The contribution of this article to the slowly but steadily growing field of local party research is to examine whether local party members are characterized by anti-party sentiments and if these sentiments are restricted to local politics or express disaffection with established nationwide parties more general. In consequence, this will enhance our understanding if the (legal) status of local parties as non-parties, independent local lists or even anti-parties is rooted in the beliefs of their members. Therefore, I plead for the distinction between 4 dimensions of anti-party sentiments, taking the focus of criticism (local or national politics) as well as the intensity (rejection of specific parties or parties as institution) into account. Combining local party politics as well as anti-party literature, I refer to group-level and individual-level determinants.

The analyses confirm that indeed different theoretical concepts influence different dimensions of anti-party sentiment. This is strong evidence that mixing up focus and intensity of party-criticism blurs the analysis of anti-party sentiments, especially when beliefs and attitudes towards local political processes are the interest of research. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis reveals that anti-party sentiments among local party members are by no means restricted to local party politics. For further empirical analysis, it is of some interest whether or not these effects are transferable to the group-level. As seen, group-level characteristics and the type of local democracy are less relevant in explaining variance in anti-party sentiments in comparison to individual-level determinants, especially external political efficacy and locally restricted social capital. However, whether this also holds true for local parties as organizational entity should still be shown in further analyses.

9. Literature


Rosstutscher, Sigrid; Bieber, Ina; Scherer, Philipp (2015): Anti-party voting in Germany: the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Pirate Party. In: De Petris, Andrea; Poguntke, Thomas (eds.): Anti-party parties in Germany and Italy. Protest movements and parliamentary democracy. Rom: Luiss University Press.


