

***Why do Immigrants Support an Anti-immigrant Party?
The Case of Russian-Germans and the Alternative for Germany***

Dennis C. Spies, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf

Achim Goerres, University of Duisburg-Essen

Sabrina J. Mayer, DEZIM Institute Berlin

Jonas Elis, University of Duisburg-Essen

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Reaching a vote share of 12.6% in the last federal election, the *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) recently ended Germany's rare status as a Western European polity lacking a significant Populist Radical-Right Party (PRRP). While the AfD continues to enjoy high levels of electoral support, some of this stems from a social group usually not being suspected of voting for PRRPs: immigrants. In fact, 15% of "Russian-Germans", i.e. people from the Post-Soviet Union and her successor states, reported a vote choice for the AfD in the federal election of 2017. What does these Russian-Germans, being members of Germany's biggest group of immigrant voters, motivate to support the openly anti-immigrant AfD? Theoretically, we differentiate between the well-known standard drivers of PRRP support (anti-immigrant sentiments, disenchantment with politics, class, gender, income, etc.) and variables that might be relevant only to the group of Russian-Germans as immigrant-origin voters. Analytically, we compare Russian-Germans to the group of native voters, using recent high-quality survey data for both. Our tentative results indicate that both theoretical perspectives are informative: Russian-Germans are closer to the group of native AfD supporters in many of the standard explanatory variables but are also motivated by certain immigrant-specific characteristics, most notably their level of structural and identificatory integration into German society.

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Introduction

Founded in early 2013, the *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) has not only become one of the most successful newly founded parties in Germany for decades but also ended the country's rare status as a Western European polity lacking a significant Populist Radical Right Party (PRRP). Since then, the AfD has achieved a remarkable history of election results, now being represented in the European parliament, all 16 subnational *Länder* parliaments, as well as in several local municipalities. Eventually, and notwithstanding serious internal disputes about personal and programmatic strategy, the AfD established itself on the national level gaining 12.6% of all votes in the federal election of September 2017 – the best result of any party newly entering the *Bundestag* since 1949. Naturally, this rise raised considerable interest from social scientists. While a first wave of contributions paid special attention to the party's programmatic character, trying to classify it as Euro-sceptic, populist, national-conservative, nativist, radical or even extreme right (Arzheimer 2015; Franzmann 2016; Lewandowsky et al. 2016; Niedermayer 2015), a second wave of contributions analyze the demand side factors behind the AfD's electoral success (Berbair et al. 2015; Goerres et al. 2018; Schmitt-Beck 2014, 2017). In a nutshell, these studies showed that AfD support can be explained by a set of well-known variables drawn from the literature on PRRP support in other European countries ((see the reviews in: Arzheimer 2009; Kitschelt 2007; Van der Brug & Fennema 2007), most prominently by anti-immigrant sentiments, disenchantment with politics, and authoritarian values. However, one factor behind the AfD's story of electoral success seems very special: the party receives considerable support from so-called Russian-Germans, Germany's biggest group of immigrant-origin voters¹.

Russian-Germans, ethnic Germans who immigrated from the Post-Soviet Union and her successor states, make up 2.4 out of 6.3 million German voters with an immigrant background

¹ We define immigrant-origin voters as those having German citizenship (the necessary condition to vote in national elections) but who have either immigrated on their own or who have at least one immigrant parent.

(Destatis 2017). Dating their ethnic origin back to their forefathers, who emigrated from 18th century German lands to the then tsarist Russia, most Russian-Germans immigrated back to newly unified Germany during the 1990s as so-called “resettlers”² (Aussiedler). Due to their unique immigration history, most Russian-Germans were granted German citizenship status – including the right to vote – immediately upon their arrival, soon developing a very strong party identification with the Christian Democrats (Wüst 2004). However, the general picture put forward by recent political analysts is that of a pronounced re-orientation of Russian-Germans towards the AfD, which itself spends noticeable effort in attracting this group (Goerres et al. 2020). In the last federal election of 2017, survey data reveals that around 15 percent of Russian-Germans casted their vote for the AfD – compared to 12,6 percent in official election results and compared to 10,2 percent support by native voters in a nationally representative election survey (see GLES).

Immigrants supporting a party known for its pronounced anti-immigrant agenda appears counterintuitive and calls for a proper explanation. Theoretically, we can differentiate between two perspectives. Firstly, support for the AfD among Russian-Germans might be explained by the same factors already identified for AfD support among non-immigrant, native voters. Anti-immigrant sentiments, disenchantment with politics, and other long-discussed drivers of PRRP support might as well motivate Russian-Germans to cast their vote for the AfD. The disproportionally high support among Russian-Germans might thus be explained by compositional effects, making this group more supportive of the AfD maybe because of more right-leaning political preferences as when compared to native voters. Secondly, AfD support among Russian-Germans might also be motivated by reasons special to this group and that are not relevant or even applicable to native voters. While there are only few studies analyzing the

² In contrast to ‘resettler’, which is a legal status in German law, the now more familiar ‘Russian-Germans’ is not a legal term. Resettlers who entered Germany after 1 January 1993 so after the asylum compromise of 1992, see next section are called ‘late-resettlers’ (Spätaussiedler).

vote decision for an PRRP among immigrant voters, we derive our hypotheses from the literatures on inter-minority attitude formation, realistic group conflict, and social identity theory and relate them to the few researched examples from France (Pieds-Noirs support for the National Front), Israel (Islamophobia among Soviet-origin immigrants), Switzerland (Secondos supporting immigration quotas) and the US (inter-minority attitude formation between Latinos and African-Americans). Combining these strands of literature, we hypothesize that the structural, cognitive, social, and identificatory integration of Russian-Germans into German society might affect their support for the AfD. Testing for both theoretical perspectives with representative 2017 election survey data for both Russian-German and native voters, we find that AfD support in both groups is motivated by well-known variables stemming from the PRRP literature and most notably by anti-immigrant sentiments and authoritarian attitudes. Analyzing Russian-German AfD supporters and non-supporters further, these standard factors are complemented by immigrant-specific variables.

The article is structured as follows: Section 1 contextualizes the political history of Russian-Germans as German citizens and voters. Section 2 puts forward our theoretical framework, focusing on standard drivers of PRRP support (2.1) as well as on immigrant-specific approaches (2.2). Section 3 describes our data and methods and Section 4 presents the empirical results before we summarize our main findings in the concluding section.

1. The Political History of Russian-Germans

Between 1881 and 1891, 1.5 million ethnic Germans migrated from the Soviet Union or its successor states to Germany (Hilkes and Stricker 1997). These ‘resettlers’ or ‘Russian-Germans’ are mostly the descendants of emigrants to tsarist Russia in the 18th and 19th century. The large wave of migrants back then ensued after the invitation of the Russian Empress Catherine the Great, who was herself a German-speaking princess. Once in Russia, the Germans

settled in rural villages that were religiously and ethnically homogeneous. About 90 per cent of Russian-Germans today are thought to be descendants of these initial groups of rural settlers (Stricker 1997). Villages were centred around - predominately Lutheran - churches that also ran the local schools. The inhabitants of these villages rarely intermarried with the majority population of these areas (Pinkus 1990), German was their first language, but each settlement was largely self-contained with little interaction with the other settlements. Life in these colonies was focused on maintaining an explicitly German culture and with a set of German norms (Kiel 2009).

However, the privileges of the German colonies were reduced step-by-step by the Russian Tsar at the end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, forced re-settlement of Germans from Russia's western border towards the east began after the outbreak of World War I. With Stalin's rise to power, the Germans in the Soviet Union suffered from the forced collectivisation of their farms and the prohibition of the free expression of religion - an important pillar of their identity. During World War II, ethnic Germans suffered massive deportation to the more eastern parts of the Soviet Union, the disenfranchisement to the status of non-citizens, and the reduction of their legal status to subjects with few rights in the new areas of settlement. Mandatory enrolment in labour camps with minimal subsistence plagued the majority of the working age population. The return to some kind of normality with more citizenship rights was not realised until 1955. However, German names, language and culture remained largely forbidden, forcing the families to maintain their German identity privately (Pinkus 1990; Stricker 1997).

In their historical home, post-War Germany, the groups of Russian-Germans meanwhile played a unique role. After the integration of millions of refugees from formerly German regions in the 1940s and 1950s, ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union were considered to be the last group that had to be 'taken home' to the new republic (Rabkov 2006). The relocation of resettlers to Germany was a strong objective of all post-war governments, but especially of the

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) government, which engaged in a very strong relationship with resettlers, mainly driven by the conservative notion of citizenship by descent. According to this citizenship view based on *ius sanguinis*, a person should be descended from a German family and characterised by German culture and language in order to be regarded as German. Applied to resettlers, this political idea had to imply that they were not regarded as immigrants, but rather as ethnic Germans returning to their historical home and being eligible for citizenship rights immediately upon their arrival. Not surprisingly, the CDU was the greatest beneficiary of the new resettler voters of the 1990s (Wüst 2004).

However, as a reaction to the increased inflow of resettlers and to a more critical public opinion on immigration in general, the CDU government finally changed its policy of unrestricted welcome. Already in 1992, as the result of an ‘asylum compromise’ with the Social Democrats, annual migration quotas for resettlers were introduced. In 1993, it was also made more difficult for citizens of non-Soviet Union countries to claim resettler status. Finally, with the beginning of the coalition of the Social Democrats and the Green Party in 1998, much harder language tests were introduced for immigrants claiming German citizenship as part of a general citizenship reform in 2000 (Wüst 2004). While this reform signalled that Germany had become a country of immigration - introducing elements of *ius soli* into German law, and for the first time also addressing questions of immigrant integration - it also made no exceptions for resettlers as far as mandatory language tests and questions of integration were concerned. Consequently, the emerging German integration policy regime no longer addressed the special ethnic and legal status of resettlers (Golova 2006). This new policy approach, combined with the increasing opening up of Germany to all kinds of immigration from the early 2000s, led to the situation in which resettlers only play a very limited role in discussions about immigration and integration policy in today’s Germany.

However, recently this has changed and the general picture put forward by political analysts is that of a partial re-orientation of Russian-Germans towards the Alternative for

Germany (AfD), Germany's most successful party of the Radical Right. While we are the first to offer reliable survey data on this pattern, the correlation of the number of Russian-Germans and AfD results at the district level indicates that Germany's biggest immigrant voter group now disproportionately supports an anti-immigrant party, which attracted quite a bit of media attention shortly before and after the 2017 election. On the side of the AfD, efforts to target Russian-Germans specifically are clearly visible. Not only does the party translate its election programmes into Russian, it also emphasizes that it has its own party network for 'Russian-Germans in the AfD' and targets Russian-Germans specifically with election posters (Goerres et al. 2018). Thus, after years of relative silence, Russian-Germans are clearly back on Germany's political scene.

2. Why Do Immigrants Support an Anti-Immigrant Party?

Immigrants supporting a party known for its pronounced anti-immigrant agenda calls for a proper explanation. Theoretically, we can differentiate between two perspectives. Firstly, support for the AfD among Russian-Germans might be explained by the same factors already identified for AfD support among native voters and thus by approaches used to explain PRRP support among European voters more generally. Secondly, AfD support among Russian-Germans might also be motivated by reasons special to this group and that are not relevant for, or even applicable to, non-immigrant AfD supporters. In the following, we will present both perspectives in more detail.

2.1. Hypotheses stemming from PRRP research

As other PRRPs in Western Europe, the AfD can be characterized by a national, anti-immigrant and populist political agenda (Arzheimer 2015; Franzmann 2016; Lewandowsky et al. 2016). The comparative literature on the voters of PRRPs thus serves as a fruitful starting point to derive possible explanatory variables to be examined in the empirical analysis. As many

reviewing articles (see e.g.: Arzheimer 2009; Kitschelt 2007; Van der Brug & Fennema 2007) have summarized, the number of potential explanatory variables for PRRP support is impressive and seems to grow even further. While this speaks for a still vibrant literature, it also faces us with the problem to identify a core model of AfD/PRRP support, which is comprehensive enough not to suffer from omitted variable bias but also parsimonious enough to be applicable to our rather small sample. In addition, this core model should be applicable to both Russian-German as well as native AfD supporters. Weighing these requirements against each other, in the following we propose a model tapping the socio-economic profile of AfD supporters, their politically relevant attitudes, and potential protest motives.

Earlier studies have stressed that PRRPs draw support from voters with a clearly defined socio-economic profile (Betz 1993; Kitschelt 1995). As far as demographics are concerned, time and again research has reported that men are much more likely to support PRRPs than women. Also, the Radical Right draws disproportionately strong support from voters of younger and older age groups, while it is under-represented among middle-aged voters (for many: Van der Brug et al. 2005). Previous studies have also claimed that lower social strata are more likely to vote for PRRPs; most prominently, Georg Betz has described the supporters of PRRPs as the ‘losers of modernity’ (Betz 1994: 25). In this view, PRRP supporters are poorly educated, and either unemployed or at least severely threatened by unemployment and economic decline (Carter 2005; Ivarsflaten 2005; Lubbers et al. 2002). While the ‘losers of modernity’ argument is still influential, it is not uncontested, e.g. Rydgren (2008) showing that the main line of separation between PRRP and mainstream voters is not low vs. higher education but rather a university education vs. the lack of it. With regard to household income, several studies have also claimed that certain high-income voters are especially unwilling to support the redistribution of wealth from natives to foreigners as they might be burdened with the lion’s share of this through higher tax contributions (Burgoon et al. 2012). Recent contributions indicate that the role of the socio-economic variables for AfD support is somehow limited,

gender being the noteworthy exception (Goerres et al. 2018). While this resembles the results from the comparative literature on PRRP voters – once other explanations are controlled for – we end our list of socio-economic variables with a German specialty: as we know from several subnational and the latest national election, the AfD gains significantly more support in the Eastern than in the Western part of Germany.

Besides socio-economic variables, support for PRRPs has mostly been explained by three clusters of politically relevant attitudes: policy preferences with regard to immigration, preferences with regard to the economy, and feelings of distrust and disenchantment with politics. Firstly, starting with immigration, the most consistent finding in PRRP research is that the supporters of the Radical Right are very critical of it, especially so if immigration stems from poorer, ethnically different and, most importantly, Muslim countries (Arzheimer 2008; Ceobanu & Escandell 2010; Rydgren 2008). This critique is motivated by both cultural as well as economic concerns about the consequences of immigration for the receiving countries, but for the sake of our interest it seems sufficient to state that PRRP supporters are very critical of any policy that increases the number of immigrants to their country. Secondly, the role of economic and social policy preferences for PRRP support are discussed. The lingering question here is whether PRRP supporters are solely motivated by the issue of immigration or if they also hold certain economy-related issue preferences which distinguish them from other voters. Three theoretical positions can be identified, ranging from the assumption that economic questions are only of subordinated relevance to PRRP voters (Mudde 2007), that these voters are motivated by a combination of nationalism and *laissez-faire* economic policies (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1995), to the now quite prominent view presenting PRRPs as the new working-class parties with pro-welfare voters (Aichholzer et al. 2014; Ignazi 2003; Schumacher & Kersbergen 2016). Thirdly, PRRP supporters are seen as generally distrustful of mainstream politicians and institutions and therefore are attracted by the populist rhetoric of the radical right (Kitschelt 2002; Lubbers et al. 2002; Van der Brug & Fennema 2003). From this perspective, they are not

so much motivated by substantive policy preferences but by emotional and irrational feelings of dissatisfaction. While the relationship between rational policy and emotional motivations is debated (see e.g. Van der Brug et al. 2000), the literature suggests that we control for both when analyzing AfD support among Russian-Germans and native voters.

In summary, our core model of AfD support includes variables tapping the socio-economic profile (age, gender, education, class, own economic situation, and an East/West dummy), politically relevant attitudes (immigration and economic policy preferences) and emotional motives (political efficacy). ~~As macro-level variables, we also include changes in regional immigration levels and economic conditions.~~ This core model is applicable to both Russian-German as well as native voters and our working hypothesis is that differences in AfD support between both groups might disappear once controlled for the core model's variables. However, AfD support among Russian-Germans might also be due to less familiar and immigrant-specific factors, which we will turn to in the following.

2.2. Hypotheses stemming from Immigrant-specific Approaches

In contrast to the political participation of immigrant-origin voters, the number of studies addressing their party preferences is still rather limited. In general, immigrant-origin voters often show a higher likelihood to support left-wing parties in their host societies (Bird et al. 2011), but there are also prominent examples where they tend to Conservative (Cuban-origin voters in the US, see Bishin and Klorstad 2012) or Christian-Democratic parties (Russian-Germans in the 1990s, see above). At the same time, immigrant-origin voters supporting a PRRP is a very special pattern and, to the best of our knowledge, explicit examples for it are restricted to France, where the support of so-called Pieds-Noirs for the Front National has attracted some scholarly attention. While related examples stem from Israel (Islamophobia among Soviet-origin immigrants), Switzerland (Secondos supporting immigration quotas), and

the US (inter-minority attitude formation between Latinos and African-Americans), none of these deal explicitly with voting behavior but rather have some of the main explanatory variables for PRRP support, as summarized in the previous section, as their explanandum.

We are thus faced with a very fragmented state-of-the-art – both in terms of theoretical approaches and dependent variables – in combination with a diverse set of immigrant-origin voters in different host societies. Deriving from this a framework applicable to the support of Russian-Germans for the AfD, or, more generally, to the question which immigrant-origin voters are more or less supportive of PRRPs, is not an easy task. In order to structure our theoretical arguments, we will thus start with a commonality of all immigrant-origin voters: as (relatively) new arrivers, they must first find their place and position in relation to the host society. As integration research states, this often stressful and conflictual process has structural, cognitive, social, and identificatory components (Esser 2001). In the following, we will use these sub-dimensions of immigrant integration as a conceptual map in order to summarize the different theoretical perspectives and use prominent examples from different groups of immigrant or ethnic minority voters as illustrating cases. We will also hypothesize about whether structural, cognitive, social, and identificatory integration is related to the vote decision for an PRRP – in addition to the standard explanatory variables introduced in the previous section.

Structural integration refers to the positioning of immigrants in central areas of the host societies' socio-economic systems, most prominently the labor-market and the educational system. Directly related socio-economic resources as job status, income, and formal education take center-stage in debates on migrant integration and there is no doubt that immigrant groups differ in these resources – both when compared to the native population as well as to other immigrant or ethnic minority groups. At the same time, both scholars favoring different theoretical and normative positions towards the integration of immigrants – most prominently assimilation or multi-culturalism – would agree that there is little reason to speak of successful

integration if immigrants find themselves in precarious socio-economic conditions with no hope for improvement.

Previous studies have mainly related structural integration to migrants' political participation (see Spies et al. 2020 for a recent review) but we also see arguments for why it may also be related to immigrants' PRRP support. The reason for this is that immigrant-origin voters might compete with more recent immigrants over scarce public resources. While this argument stems from the standard model of PRRP support presented in the foregone section (see 'losers of modernity'), for immigrant-origin voters this competition might be the more intense, the worse they are integrated into host societies' labor markets. This line of reasoning is supported by evidence from the US, where resource competition is perceived as a central force in Black-Latino relations: African-Americans express the more racially prejudicial attitudes towards Latinos, the more they think that these wield more economic resources relative to their own group (Gay 2006), a pattern seemingly intensified by low class status and corresponding tighter competition on the job market (Nteta 2013). Also, Blacks reporting higher levels of economic anxiety have been found to be more open for the recent anti-immigration rhetoric, and to be more supportive of the corresponding policy reforms, initiated by president Donald Trump (Carter and King-Meadows 2019). Evidence for conflictual inter-ethnic minority relations related to levels of structural integration also stems from the European context. Analyzing support for the 2014 Swiss referendum against mass immigration, Strijbis and Polavieja (2018) identify labor market competition as a central explanatory factor for the surprisingly high support for this initiative among immigrants already established in Switzerland. The authors conclude that especially immigrant residents being employed in occupations requiring less specific human capital and living in areas exposed to higher levels of cross-border commuters, show very similar levels of support for restricting further immigration to Switzerland when compared to native voters. For Israel, Canetti-Nisim et al. (2009) identify the loss of economic and psychological resources as one of the main drivers for

xenophobia among immigrants from the Ex-Soviet-Union, which is especially directed towards Palestinian citizens. In sum, this lets us to assume that it is the less structurally integrated immigrant-origin voters that are more attracted by the pronounced anti-immigration policy approach of PRRPs.

Cognitive and *social* integration both refer to the acculturation of immigrants into their host societies. Parallel to the significance of structural resources, non-economic resources are seen as necessary to participate in political life and have been shown to impact both immigrants' formal and informal political participation (Fennema and Tillie 1999; Jacobs and Tillie 2004) as well as vote choices (Bergh and Bjørklund 2010; Sanders et al. 2014; Heath et al. 2013). We see proficiency of the host societies' official language as well as its use in different contexts (family, friends, workplace, etc.) as indicators of cognitive integration, which we regard as an important resource in order to gather, process, and discuss information on the host societies' political system, including parties. In addition, cognitive integration can be seen as a precondition for social integration, which we define as membership in host societies' voluntary organizations (clubs, churches, unions, etc.). Organizational membership can further be divided into this providing bridging or bonding capital. Bridging capital connects immigrants with autochthonous networks, bonding capital links them to their co-ethnic network (Jacobs and Tillie 2004). In sum, cognitive and social integration are central dimensions of migrant integration, linking immigrants to their own ethnic networks and/or to the majority society. The question for vote choice, then, is whether members of ethnically defined networks are more or less likely to vote for certain political parties, including PRRPs.

Empirical evidence indicates that ethnically defined group membership can be a strong predictor of vote choice, prominent examples include the long history of support of African-Americans for the US Democrats and the not less decisive support of Cuban-origin voters for the Republicans. Analytically, it is often hard to decide if group members vote for a certain party because of individual calculations or because they see this party as representing their

group interests, thereby engaging in a form of ethnic bloc (Bergh and Bjørklund 2010; Webster and Webster 1986) or ethnic candidate voting (Barreto 2007). However, there is evidence that network effects do play a prominent role for individual vote choice by signaling to members which political alternatives can be regarded as being compatible with the interests of the ethnically defined group. The role of African-American churches (Calhoun-Brown 2001) and this of Spanish-speaking media and radio stations in Florida (Girard and Grenier 2008; Girard et al. 2012) are well researched in this regard.

As far as the role of ethnic networks for PRRP support among immigrant-origin voters is concerned, the best-researched example is the support of so-called Pieds-Noirs for the French Front National (now: National Rally). Pieds-Noirs ('Black-Feets') are referred to as the ethnic French, or European origin, residents of Algeria during the period of French colonial rule. As a consequence of the lost colonial war (1954 to 1962) and subsequent Algerian independence, the vast majority of them departed for mainland France, mainly settling in some Southern départements (Savarese 2016). These regions soon became known for being strongholds of the Front National (Savarese 2016: 180). Further analyzing the voting patterns of Pieds-Noirs in several French national elections, Veugelers (2005) and Veugelers et al. (2015) estimate support levels around 40 to 50 percent for the French Radical Right and explicitly point to the role of network effects: Members of Pieds-Noirs veteran organizations – veterans of the Algerian war – show a two to four times higher likelihood to support the Front National and especially its then leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, himself a veteran of the colonial war. These network effects also survive the inclusion of several control variables, including anti-immigrant sentiments. In contrast, membership in other organizations, providing bridging capital to non-Pieds-Noirs, significantly reduced Front National support (Veugelers et al. 2015), which is also lower among second generation voters (Savarese 2016: 182).

Membership in veteran organizations can surely be seen as very special indicator of immigrants' social integration, but recent evidence from Germany also stresses the potential

role of more modern networks. Analyzing the posts of Russian-speaking internet users on several online platforms, Sablina (2019) finds strong evidence for discriminatory and Islamophobic statements, expressed by Russian-Germans users on explicitly Russian-German forums. These forums with titles as “Germany in Russian” or “Destroyed Europe. Refugees in Europe” report several hundred-thousands of registered users and seem to serve as a marketplace for radical and extreme right-wing discourses, often accompanied with favorable statements towards the AfD. While posts in (often closed) online platforms can hardly be considered as being representative for all Russian-Germans, Sablina identifies “the lack of cultural integration” (2019: 2) as a potential explanation for the rapid community mobilization of Russian-Germans. Whatever the effect of such online forums on the political preferences of Russian-Germans are, they can surely be considered as providing much more bonding than bridging capital to their predominately Russian-speaking members.

Finally, *identificatory integration* taps the emotional attachment of immigrant-origin voters to their host society’s social system. Theoretically, identificatory integration is often related to the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner 1979), where social categorizations as ethnicity are cognitive instruments that are used to systematically order the social environment into ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’. Empirically, such group-attachments are often measured by using answers to questions of self-identification, e.g. “feeling German” vs. “feeling Russian-German” or “feeling Russian” in our case. Identificatory identification surely is the most debated sub-dimension of integration, as one may ask why immigrant-origin voters should identify themselves with their host society’s social system in order to be regarded as integrated, especially as “feeling German” might not only refer to the country’s social system but also to “German” as an ethnic identity. Also, “feeling German” is an emotional statement not shared by many non-immigrant German citizens and known to be one driver of PRRP support. Accounting for the diversity of possible identities and implied normative perspectives, we build on the work of Berry (1984) and distinguish between four types of identificatory integration:

Assimilation (sole identification with the culture of the country of destination, i.e. “German” in our case); separation (sole identification with the culture of the country of origin, i.e. “Russian”); integration (identification with both cultures, i.e. “Russian-German”), and marginalisation (identification with neither culture).

Several studies have stressed the importance of immigrants’ ethnic identity for their vote choice (e.g. Bergh and Bjørklund 2010; Dancygier and Saunders 2006; Dawson 1994; Teney et al. 2010). Immigrants who identify closely with the ethnically defined in-group tend to see their own well-being as closely related to that of the group. This idea of a ‘linked fate’ (Dawson 1994) might then exert its influence via ethnic-group voting: the vote for a party that is perceived to represent the interests of the in-group best. Examples of ethnic-group voting are manifold. For immigrant-origin voters, the strong support of Cuban-origin voters for the US Republicans (Bishin and Klofstad 2012), of Commonwealth-origin voters for the British Labour party (Heath et al. 2013), and that of Turkish-origin voters for the German Social Democrats (Wüst 2004) are only some examples. While detailed empirical analysis of the patterns behind these strong affiliations are rare (but see Bergh and Bjørklund 2010), from the perspective of ethnic-group voting they occur because immigrants vote for the party they perceive as representing the interests of their in-group.

To the best of our knowledge there are no previous contributions directly relating immigrant-origin voters’ identificatory integration to their support for an PRRP. However, we see at least two arguments here. Firstly, and as already indicated by Sablina (2019), Russian-Germans might regard the AfD as the party representing their group-interest best, thereby engaging in a form of ethnic bloc voting. We might thus assume that strong “Russian-German” identifiers are more likely to support the AfD. Problematic in this regard is that the AfD is not only directly addressing “Russian-Germans” in electoral campaigns, but also is clearly the most nationalistic party in the German system (thereby being potentially attractive to strong

“German” identifiers), and also the party advocating one of the most ‘Putin-friendly’ approach to foreign relations with Russia (thereby potentially attracting strong “Russian” identifiers). Taken together, this leads to very ambiguous assumptions for the role of ethnic identity on Russian-Germans’ support for the AfD, which might be the lowest among “non-identifiers”.

Secondly, there are reasons to assume that it is the more assimilated immigrant-origin voters being attracted by PRRPs. Evidence stems from Switzerland, where Strijbis and Polavieja (2018) not only identified labor market competition but also in-group status as an explanation for the high support of immigrant-origin voters for the recent initiative against further immigration. More precisely, strong support stemmed from so-called “Secondos”, Swiss residents with second generation migration background (mainly stemming from Italy and Southern Europe), having attained a high group status within the Swiss system of ethnic hierarchies (Wimmer 2004). Testing for the self-identification as Secondo and controlling for several other explanations, Strijbis and Polavieja (2018) find that Secondos used their vote against further immigration as an act of symbolical boundary-making against more recent arrivers from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Also, Verkuyten et al. (1996) stress the role of migrants’ ethnic self-identification for attitudes towards other ethnically defined groups in the Netherlands. They report that also immigrants have their own ethnic hierarchies in which they see their own ethnic group first, the ethnic majority second, and all other immigrant groups third, depending on the economic and cultural distance to their own in-group. As Hindriks et al. (2014: 68) assist, “larger differences between groups stand in the way of positive group relations” – a pattern also seen as one of the main reasons for the absence of “rainbow coalitions” between Blacks and Latinos in the US (Carter and King-Meadows 2019). Translating this to the German case, we might thus assume that strong “German” or “Russian-German” identifiers do show more support for the AfD, as they are attracted by the party’s pronounced anti-immigration and especially anti-refugee policy approach. Securing and reassuring their status within the German system of ethnic hierarchies – where they take the

position of “justified” immigrants due to their unique immigration history – might be of special importance to Russian-Germans, as their ethnic Germaneness is very important to themselves, but has also been repeatedly called into question by the majority society since their arrival in the 1990s.

Data and Methods

In order to test for the explanatory power of standard and integration-specific variables for Russian-Germans AfD support, we use data from the *Immigrant German Election Study* (IMGES; Goerres et al. 2020), a post-election survey fielded after the German federal election of 2017. IMGES targets the two biggest groups of immigrants in Germany, people from Turkey and from the former Soviet Union and its successor states, and includes only German citizens eligible to vote. For our analyses, we restrict the sample to respondents from the former Soviet Union and exclude those with Turkish origin (*none* of them indicated a vote choice for the AfD). We also restrict the sample to voters aged 18 and older, resulting in a total sample of 271 Russian-Germans. While the IMGES data will be the basis for our analysis of immigrant voters, we use the *German Longitudinal Election Study* (GLES) for our baseline models for native voters (Roßteutscher et al., 2018). We can use GLES with confidence because IMGES imitated the set-up of GLES regarding sampling framework, survey mode, field time, and questionnaire design. We excluded respondents with a first- and second-generation migration background from the GLES data, resulting in a sample of 1.386 native voters.

Our dependent variable is the recalled vote decision in the federal election of 2017, coded ‘1’ for AfD voters and ‘0’ for the voters of all other parties as well as for non-voters. While vote choice is by far the most common dependent variable in electoral research on PRRPs, for our interest it comes with two disadvantages, as the reported turnout in the Russian-German sample (67 percent) is much lower than in the native sample (88 percent), thereby in

general reducing the number of positive cases. In addition, the number of Russian-German respondents not stating their vote choice is significantly higher than this for native voters, thereby limiting our sample size further. Because of these restrictions, we will additionally apply Propensities-to-Vote (PTVs) as an alternative dependent variable [note for conference: still under construction].

Our core model of AfD support (see section 2.1.) includes variables tapping the socio-economic profile, politically relevant attitudes, and emotional motives of voters. Next to *age* (in years), *gender* (1=male), and an *East/West-dummy* (1=Western Germany), we tap for the socio-economic status of respondents by asking them about their evaluation of their current *economic situation* ("How do you evaluation your current economic situation?"), on a scale ranging from 1 "very good" to 5 "very poor". We asked respondents for their *subjective class* by offering them a pre-defined list ("Which of these societal classes do you consider yourself as being part of?") and built a dummy variable for those naming "working-class". For *education*, we separate respondents into three groups (low=less than 10 years, medium=*Realschulabschluss* or 10-11 years, high=University or more than 11 years), based on their highest formal degree (for respondents who visited schools in Germany) or years of formal education (for respondents who visited schools abroad). We rely on the established items for the self-positioning of respondents on the *economic and cultural dimension of political competition*. For the first, we stated: "Some people want lower taxes, even if this means a reduction in the benefits offered by the social state, others want more benefits offered by the social state, even if this means an increase in taxation" and asked respondents to indicate their own position on a scale ranging from 1 ("lower taxes, even if this means a reduction in the benefits offered by the social state") to 11 ("more benefits offered by the social state, even if this means an increase in taxation"). For the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, we asked if immigration should be facilitated or restricted on scale ranging from 1 ("immigration should be

facilitated”) to 11 (“immigration should be restricted”). Finally, we taped external *political efficacy* by stating that “Politicians only support the interests of the rich and powerful” and asked respondent about their beliefs, ranging from 1 “does totally apply” to 5 “does not apply at all”.

Our immigration-specific model (see section 2.2.) includes variables for the structural, cognitive, social, and identificatory dimensions of Russian-Germans’ integration. We use education, economic situation, and reported class status as indicators for *structural integration* (see previous paragraph). For *cognitive integration*, we asked Russian-Germans for their usage of the German language in three different contexts (family, friends, and workplace) ranging from 1 “exclusive use of country-of-origin’s language” to 5 “exclusive use of German”. In addition, we rely on the survey interviewers’ assessment of respondents’ German language skills, ranging from 1 “very bad” to 5 “very good”. We summarize all items into a mean index tapping cognitive integration (Cronbachs alpha = 0,60). For *social integration*, we constructed a sum index consisting of three integration variables: Having a German partner, having more than half of one’s friends without a migration background, and having more than half of one’s colleagues without migration background, each adding one point to the index, so the resulting measure ranges from 0 to 3 (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.68). The higher the value, the more the person is socially integrated into German society, and the more contact the person has with the majority population. Finally, we tap *identificatory integration* by asking Russian-German respondents for their sense of feeling to the group of “Russian-Germans”, “Germans”, “Russian”, or, if they/their parents came from another country of the former USSR (e.g. Kazakhstan), if they feel as someone from there. Possible answers range from 1 “does not apply at all” to 5 “totally applies”. We then construct a classification of identity, that has the value 0 (if someone does not feel as German or an immigrant group member higher than 3), 1 (if someone feels stronger as German than as an immigrant), 2 (if both feelings are of the same strength) and 3 (if someone feels stronger as an immigrant).

Results

We start by presenting some basic descriptive statistics in Table 1, comparing four groups: (1) Native AfD voters, (2) Native non-AfD voters, (3) Russian-German AfD voters, and (4) Russian-German non-AfD voters. We separate AfD and non-AfD voters by respondents' recalled vote choice in the 2017 federal election; the variable we will also use as the dependent variable for the following logistic regression models.

Table 1: Means for independent variables by group

	Native Germans		Russian-Germans	
	AfD voter	Non-AfD voter	AfD voter	Non-AfD voter
Age	48.92	51.92	46.49	42.46
Gender: male (%)	0.69	0.50	0.60	0.43
Education: Abitur or 12 and more years of schooling (%)	0.22	0.36	0.22	0.45
Origin: West Germany (%)	0.70	0.80	1.00	0.77
Self-identification as worker (%)	0.22	0.11	0.39	0.17
Egotropic economic perception, current (1 very good - 5 very poor)	2.52	2.20	2.42	2.44
Own position: Socio-economic dim (1 less social spendings-11 more social spendings)	5.21	6.01	5.06	5.60
Own position: Liberal-authoritarian dim (1 less foreigner-11 more foreigners)	9.33	6.44	8.49	6.50
External Efficacy (1 very low feeling of efficacy - 5 very high feeling of efficacy)	2.28	3.00	2.66	2.99
Cognitive integration: use of foreign language in different domains (1 only German - 5 only foreign language)			2.45	2.22
Social integration index (0 no social integration to 3 high social integration)			2.20	2.40
Identification (%):				
none			0.02	0.14
Only German			0.42	0.46
Dual identity			0.37	0.21
Only Russian-German/Country-of-origin			0.19	0.19

For the group of native AfD voters, Table 1 resembles many results of previous studies on PRRP voters in general and those of the AfD in particular. Regarding socio-economic profile, we see disproportional support for the Radical Right among male, working-class respondents with medium levels of formal education. AfD voters do also report slightly lower levels of political efficacy and noticeable more support for reducing the number of immigrants in and to Germany. In contrast, we see limited differences between native AfD and non-AfD supporters regarding age, place of residence (Western or Eastern Germany), economic situation, and economic political preferences.

Turning to Russian-Germans, all of the more substantial descriptive differences identified for native voters seem to exist also for them: Russian-German AfD supporters are more likely to be male, working-class respondents with medium levels of formal education than Russian-German non-AfD supporters are. Also, preferences regarding German immigration policy differentiate Russian-German AfD supporters from those of other parties and non-voters, the former being much more restrictive in their preferences. Looking at the immigrant- or integration-specific variables, we see some differences regarding structural integration (class status and education): Russian-German AfD supporters seem to be structurally less integrated than Russian-German non-AfD supporters. For cognitive and social integration, we find only very narrow differences, pointing to the more frequent use of Russian in more ethnically-centred social networks among Russian-German AfD supporters. In contrast, there are clear differences between Russian-German AfD and non-AfD voters in terms of the identificatory variables, the former being much more likely to identify as “German” *and* “Russian-German” (i.e. holding a dual identity), the latter being more likely to identify with no ethnic group at all.

Moving forward to multivariate analysis, Table 2 reports the standard model of PRRP/AfD support for the group of Russian-German (M1) and native German voters (M2). While the model for native AfD supporters reveals little surprises when compared to the

descriptive statistics, the model for Russian-Germans shows remarkably few statistically significant effects, only a worse perception of the own economic status significantly differentiating Russian-German AfD supporters from non-AfD supporters. Even preferences for immigration policies do (slightly) fail to pass conventional thresholds of statistical significance, resulting in a considerable poorer model fit for Russian-German than for native AfD voters. Partly, this difference might also be explained by the much smaller sample size for Russian-Germans.

Table 2: Multivariate logistic regression on AfD vote choice by group, Average Marginal Effects

Variables	Russian Germans	Native Germans
	(IMGES)	(GLES)
	M1	M2
Age	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Gender: male	0.02 (0.05)	0.06*** (0.02)
Education	-0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.01)
Self-identification as worker	0.10 (0.05)	0.01 (0.02)
Egotropic economic perception, current	-0.06* (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)
Socio-economic dim	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)
Liberal-authoritarian dim	0.02 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.00)
External Efficacy	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Origin: West Germany		-0.01 (0.02)
N	271	1386
Nagelkerke's Pseudo R ²	0.13	0.27
McFadden's Pseudo R ²	0.05	0.25
AIC	226	643
BIC	258	696

Weighted data; Independent variables are NOT yet normalised to range 0 – 1. Origin: West Germany omitted for Russian German group due to perfect determination (no Russian German votes for AfD in the East due to low case numbers)

Finally, Table 3 presents the results of two logistic regressions based on the Russian-German sample, only. For M3, we added all integration related variables without any controls. It turns out that Russian-German AfD supporters are neither less nor more integrated than co-ethnic non-AfD supporters regarding their structural, cognitive and social integration. However, there are differences in terms of identificatory integration: AfD supporters are more likely to report a strong German identity and also more likely to identify both as “German” and “Russian-German”. As M4 shows, these effects are not affected by the inclusion of standard variables of PRRP support, only external efficacy adding significant explanatory power to the model. Thus, our tentative result is that the support of Russian-Germans for the AfD is not caused by the same explanatory variables well-known for native voters. Rather, it follows patterns of cultural integration into German society – and it is the more acculturated Russian-German voters, i.e. those identifying as “German” exclusively or as part of their dual identity, that show more support for the AfD.

Table 3: Multivariate logistic regression on AfD vote choice, only Russian-Germans

	Russian Germans (IMGES)	
	M3	M4
Age		0.00 (0.00)
Gender: male		0.02 (0.05)
Soc. Int: Education	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)
Soc. Int: Self-identification as worker	0.08 (0.06)	0.08 (0.05)
Soc. Int: Egotropic economic perception, current	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)
Socio-economic dim	0.04	0.00 (0.01)
Liberal-authoritarian dim		0.02 (0.01)
External Efficacy		-0.05* (0.02)
Cognitive Integration: Use of foreign language	0.04	0.04

	(0.03)	(0.03)
Social integration: Index	-0.06	-0.05
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Identification (ref. cat. No identification)		
Identification as German	0.11*	0.10*
	(0.05)	(0.05)
Dual identity	0.18*	0.20**
	(0.08)	(0.07)
Identification as Russian/Russian German	0.10	0.09
	(0.05)	(0.05)
N	271	271
Nagelkerke's Pseudo R ²	0.12	0.19
McFadden's Pseudo R ²	0.04	0.06
AIC	227	220
BIC	259	271

Weighted data; Independent variables are NOT yet normalised to range 0 – 1.

Conclusion

Analyzing the vote choice of Russian-Germans in the 2017 federal election, we find around 15 percent of this group voted for the Alternative for Germany, a Populist Radical-Right Party known for its tough stand on immigration policy. Immigrant-origin voters supporting an openly anti-immigrant party are a rare pattern and call for a proper theoretical explanation. Thus, we relied on both theoretical approaches derived from the established literature on PRRP support as well as on immigrant-specific approaches for answering the question why Germany's biggest group of immigrant voters disproportionately voted for the AfD.

Our tentative results indicate that both theoretical perspectives are informative: Russian-Germans are closer to the group of native AfD supporters in many of the standard explanatory variables, i.e. they are more likely to be male, working-class members with medium levels of formal education. Also, preferences regarding German immigration policy differentiate Russian-German AfD supporters from those of other parties and non-voters, the former being much more restrictive in their policy preferences. However, these descriptive differences held rather low explanatory power once added to a standard statistical model of AfD support, which is able to predict native AfD support much better than this of Russian-Germans. Turning to the immigrant- or integration-specific variables, we found Russian-German AfD supporters to be

structurally less integrated than Russian-German non-AfD supporters, but found only very narrow differences for both cognitive and social integration. However, there are clear differences in terms of the identificatory variables, Russian-German AfD voters being much more likely to identify as exclusively as “German” or “German” *and* “Russian-German” (i.e. holding a dual identity), while non-AfD supporters being more likely to identify with no ethnic group at all. While our results are still tentative, we conclude that standard PRRP explanations are not as relevant for explaining Russian-German AfD support than are immigrant-specific ones. Especially, identificatory integration into German majority society plays a role, those Russian-Germans showing higher levels of acculturation and assimilation showing more support for the German Radical Right.

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