Crime/Immigration Coverage and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment:

The effect of the media on support for AfD

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Abstract

From the years 2013 and 2019, Germany witnessed the rise of a far-right anti-immigrant party by the name of Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD). During this timespan, AfD improved upon its previous electoral performance each time it stood for election. AfD is now the third-largest party in the German federal parliament, or Bundestag.

This paper tests a novel theory, focusing on the influence of print media and what it chooses to cover. Specifically, I looked at the effects of immigration and crime coverage on AfD's poll numbers. Ultimately, I found no statistically discernible correlation between crime or immigration coverage on their own and future changes in public support for AfD. There was, however, a significant negative correlation between coverage that combined crime and immigration and support for AfD. I hypothesize that this may be due to ownership of these issues favoring less conservative parties in Germany.

Context

The test case this thesis examines is Germany from 2013 to 2019. That time period overlaps almost perfectly with the European migrant crisis, which largely resulted from heightened conflict in the Middle East. The wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq produced millions of refugees who traveled north to Europe fleeing violence and atrocities. Other big sources of refugees included Kosovo, Pakistan, Eritrea, and Somalia (Frontex 2015).

Those migrants dispersed throughout Europe. A whopping 3.1 million refugees arrived on the continent's shores between 2015 and 2017. And 44% of them applied for asylum in Germany, making it a disproportionate landing spot (Schaub et al. 2020, 687). In all, Germany took in well over one million refugees during the crisis. For reference, by the end of 2017, Germany's refugee population was larger than that of France, Italy, Sweden, Austria, and Greece combined (Statista 2018).

While Germany's humanitarian efforts were lauded by the international community, integrating and absorbing so many immigrants had its difficulties. There were certainly short-term hits. For example, the influx of impoverished people significantly increased the state's financial burden (Trines 2019). Linguistic barriers also posed a problem, though the federal government set up intensive German language programs to address this (Brücker et al. 2019, 3).

The German far-right latched onto these challenges, arguing that Germany was accepting more immigrants than it could handle. Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), now Germany's third-largest party, rose to political prominence criticizing the country's liberal immigration policies. The party's leaders called for a completely different approach:

net-zero (or lower) immigration. This means a policy mandating that the number of

immigrants accepted must not exceed the number of people deported (Bierbach 2017).

Hardline proposals like that comprised a platform that ultimately won AfD 94 Bundestag

seats in the 2017 federal election.

     In addition to immigration, this thesis also covers the issue of crime. Between

2013 and 2017, rates of victimization trended upward in Germany before dipping back

down in 2018 and 2019 (Eurostat 2021). The number of reported crimes also rose each

year from 2013 to 2016 (Pieper 2018). And the rate of increase far outstripped

population growth. Interestingly, AfD is most popular in the German regions with the

highest crime rates.

Introduction/Research Question

Over the last decade, the rise of far-right political parties has emerged as a popular research topic. Much of this scholarship has dealt with how these parties exploit fears about immigration to garner votes (Ivarsflaten 2008; Golder 2016). Examples abound. In my home country of the United States, former president Donald Trump shaped his political identity around hardline anti-immigrant policies such as mass deportations, separating migrant families, and constructing a "big, beautiful wall" across the Southern border — which was only partially built and which Mexico definitely did not pay for (Timm 2021).

But less has been said about why voter attitudes are often congruous with the far Right's xenophobia. Without the circus — his large base of supporters — Trump is just a lonely clown. And the same goes for other right-wing authoritarian leaders and parties. This thesis tackles that important question by examining the test case of Germany from 2013 to 2019. Those years correspond with the rise of the country's premier anti-immigrant party, Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD).

AfD was founded in 2013, which is the same year that they first stood for federal election. They won 4.7% of the vote, just failing to crack the 5% threshold necessary to win representation in the Bundestag. But AfD would not be kept out for long. Next federal election, they improved on their performance, winning 12.6% and 94 seats. In doing so, AfD became Germany's third-largest political party.

And they had similar success in the European Parliament elections. In 2014, AfD received 7.1% of the vote and a proportional seven seats. Five years later, they

received 11% and 11 seats. What could be fueling this string of electoral successes, each one improving on the last?

There are many possible explanations, some of which I will touch on in the literature review. But I ultimately decided to investigate how crime coverage in the media — with a focus on print media — creates a generalized fear that is then weaponized against outgroups in general and immigrants in particular. Thus, the central question I seek to answer is: *How has crime coverage in print media affected anti-immigrant sentiment (in Germany) and, as a result, support for AfD?*

Literature Review

There is a large collection of academic literature that seeks to explain the cause of anti-immigrant sentiment. One popular explanation is contact theory, which is a famous concept in psychology. It was first developed in the 1950s by an American PhD named Gordon Allport. He said that groups interacting with one another can be a powerful tool for promoting tolerance and acceptance.

This sounds intuitive enough. So it is no surprise that, since its introduction into the academic sphere, many studies have produced evidence for contact theory (DeAngelis 2001). In the context of this thesis, contact theory predicts that exposure to immigrants will reduce prejudice against them (Williamson 2015; Vezzali and Stathi 2016).

But there are some obvious problems with this in the case of Germany from 2013 to 2019. Within that time frame, Germany took in a very large number of migrants and refugees over a relatively short period of time. In other words, contact between natives and immigrants must have increased. And yet the data suggests that hostility toward immigrants increased as well.

There are many indicators of this, and AfD's electoral success is just one. Opinion polls are another. For example, an Ipsos poll from 2016 found that only 18% of German respondents said that immigration is good for Germany. Meanwhile, 45% said it is causing negative changes. And a whopping 83% of Germans polled agreed that terrorists are pretending to be refugees and sneaking into Germany to cause "violence and destruction." All of these results were more extreme than those from previous years.

But this is the exact opposite of what contact theory would predict. In Germany, over the past decade, more immigrants has correlated with more anti-immigrant sentiment. So perhaps what is happening is a sort of reverse contact theory. That is, maybe increased exposure to immigrants is actually driving hatred toward them in Germany (and maybe even in general too).

Again, though, this appears flawed. Time and time again, AfD has proven to do best in the German regions least affected by the recent migrant influx (Adam 2015; *Financial Times* 2017; Schuetz 2017). Also, the Berlin Social Science Center tested this very theory of reverse contact in the rural areas of eastern Germany and found null effects: "Our measurements confirm the presence of widespread anti-immigrant sentiments. However, these are unaffected by the presence of refugees in respondents' hometowns: on average, we record null effects for all outcomes" (Schaub et al. 2020, 686).

Other popular explanations are based in class and socioeconomic status. One of which says that the poor and unemployed are more likely to harbor anti-immigrant attitudes. The theory emphasizes competition over scarce resources and can be summed up as follows: "The lower classes disproportionately oppose immigration because these groups are the ones most affected by the immigration process, whether in its labor aspects (greater competition in the search for work) or in everyday coexistence (housing and schools)" (Fetzer 2000, 7).

Studies testing this theory often rely on large-n survey data and seldom establish anything more than a weak relationship. Although an article published in *International Sociology* interestingly concluded that "the working class is more

xenophobic when the immigrant working class is large" (Hjerm and Nagayoshia 2011, 1). This would appear to be something of a synthesis of the competition framework and contact theory.

But the hypothesis that competition for scarce resources among the lower classes is causing anti-immigrant sentiment is by no means bulletproof. There is a lot of evidence to the contrary. For example, it has been observed that regions of Europe "with a higher unemployment rate among natives… show less pronounced anti-immigrant attitudes" (Markaki and Longhi 2013, 311). There is simply no robust relationship between unemployment rates and xenophobic attitudes or support for anti-immigrant political parties. And that is why some have taken to calling the competition framework a "zombie theory" — one that will not die despite all of the evidence against it (Miller 2018, 23).

It is worth noting that some see classism in suggesting that a lack of means and bigotry are related. Perhaps this is compelling or perhaps it is not. Regardless, what is more relevant is that it also appears to be false in regard to contemporary Germany. AfD's voter base is richer, less blue-collar, and are no more likely to be unemployed or on welfare (Goerres et al. 2018, 259).

Another class/socioeconomic explanation is from economic anxiety. Studies have shown that pessimism about one's future economic standing is positively correlated with openness to far-right ideology. And this seems to be the case across time period and region (Kates and Tucker 2019). So perhaps it is unsurprising that a study published in *Political Communication* found that economic anxiety "enhanced anti-immigrant

attitudes among citizens across all education levels" (Schmuck and Matthes 2017, 607). But this is far from settled (political) science.

Indeed, there is plenty of research that contradicts these findings. Clemson University professor Steven Miller has delved into this question of whether economic anxiety drives anti-immigrant sentiment. He did so by analyzing election surveys going back to 1992. And Miller ultimately found no correlation whatsoever between economic anxiety and immigration attitudes across his nearly quarter century of data.

The theory of economic anxiety driving anti-immigrant sentiment also does not fit terribly well with what is known about the German base of far-right voters. Researchers Michael Hansen and Jonathan Olsen found that "AfD voters [are] not driven by anxiety about their own economic situation." Many of them enjoy job security and high wages, thanks in part to a union membership rate on par with that of the general population.

But anxiety can function at more than just the individual level. People can also feel economically anxious about the general state of their region or nation. There exists research demonstrating that racial bigotry festers when slowed economic growth is coupled with a growing minority population (Quillian 1995).

Germany from 2013 to 2019 certainly fulfills the latter criteria. In those years, Germany granted asylum to a huge number of refugees — most of whom we nonwhite. It is this open-doors policy that helped earn the country a reputation of being a friendly and welcoming place.

But the German economy actually picked up significantly between 2013 and 2019. In 2013, Germany's GDP growth rate was just 0.44% — barely one-tenth of what it had been only three years earlier. But, the following year, that rate rebounded to

2.21%. And, by 2017, it had increased further still to 2.6%. However, that was then followed by two consecutive years of decrease. Germany's GDP growth rate dipped down to 1.27% in 2018 and again to 0.56% in 2019 (Macrotrends).

So, while the German economy continued to grow, the rates bounced around quite a bit. Whether Germany experienced slowed economic growth between 2013 and 2019 is therefore somewhat of a tricky question. At some points, it did. And, at others, it definitely did not.

Theory

Since none of the aforementioned explanations struck me as viable, I came up with one of my own. My theory can be summed up by the following diagram:

Crime-related news stokes fear and anxiety (Riley and Peterson 2019). And, when someone is experiencing these emotions, they are more likely to direct their defense mechanisms toward stimuli external to what they perceive to be their in-group. "Fear is more readily learned toward exemplars of… out-group than toward one's own" (Navarrete et al. 2012, 591). That breeds hostility toward outsiders — namely, immigrants. Of course, those feelings are highly related to support for Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD) as they are fundamentally an anti-immigrant party.

It is said that some people are naturally more susceptible to nativist and far-right politics. Political scientist and psychologist Karen Stenner explains this at length in her book *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, identifying those susceptible as having an "authoritarian personality." This archetype typically entails a combination of the following traits:

- Belief in strict adherence to the letter of the law

- Aversion to ambiguity and belief in a single right way to live or act

- Strong confirmation bias and rejection of balanced information, especially when under threat

- Cognitive decline and refusal to engage when faced with diverse others

But other experts have challenged this account. Take philosopher Martha Nussbaum, for instance. In *The Monarchy of Fear*, she argues that authoritarian personality is not innate but rather is activated as a response to fear. When people are scared, they look to an authority to control and perhaps even suppress the threat. Unlike Stenner, Nussbaum assumes that we are all equally susceptible to this fear response because we were all babies — and, thus, in a state of complete helplessness — at one point.

This is a nuanced and complicated debate with strong arguments on both sides. So it is fortunate that it does not matter who is right for the purposes of this thesis. Whether or not it is innate, authoritarian personality can be heightened through exposure to threats. Stenner says as much in *The Authoritarian Dynamic*. She notes that it usually takes a "trigger" to activate authoritarians to take initiative and act on their concerns. Authoritarian personalities should therefore become more visible when they feel as though they are under threat. And that is ultimately what my research is trying to measure.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the German press is both free and independent. In fact, Article 5 of the German constitution reads as follows:

"Every person shall have the right freely to express and disseminate his opinions in speech, writing and pictures, and to inform himself without hindrance from generally acceptable sources… There shall be no censorship."

Moreover, newspapers like *Junge Freiheit* — the one I analyzed — are not managed by the state but are instead in private hands. This made things considerably easier as nowhere in my research or theory did I have to account for government manipulation, bias, or suppression of the media. According to the World Press Freedom Index, the German press is among the freest in the world. As a matter of fact, it is much more free than the American press (World Press Freedom Index).

Junge Freiheit is Germany's second-most popular weekly national subscription newspaper. I originally intended to analyze the most popular one, *Die Zeit*, as I assumed it would be more representative of the average German's media consumption. But *Die Zeit* rarely covers the sorts of domestic crime stories that I was looking for. So *Junge Freiheit* ended up being the best available option.

Junge Freiheit mostly publishes shorter articles, typically well under 1,000 words. Occasionally, however, the paper will publish longer-form content such as interviews that number in the thousands of words. *Junge Freiheit* is very political and covers a healthy mix of both domestic and global issues. Unsurprisingly, coverage of the European Union — and its fiscal and immigration policies in particular — is quite common.

Junge Freiheit's editorial stance leans rather nationalist and conservative. That is evident from both the op-eds that they publish and their selection of news stories. Writers for *Junge Freiheit* frequently criticize Germany's Green Party and the ruling Christian Democratic Union. Prime Minister Angela Merkel is generally covered in an unfavorable light. *Junge Freiheit* could reasonably be described as Euro-skeptical and

are quick to latch onto stories about "left-wing extremism." In fairness, though, *Junge*

Freiheit has also covered and condemned right-wing extremists and domestic terrorists.

Methods

  To measure crime coverage in German media, I randomly selected five issues of

Junge Freiheit for each year from 2013 to 2019. This involved digging into the paper's

archives, for which a link is conveniently listed on the homepage of their official website.

For each of those 35 issues, I simply counted the number of articles about crime. That

resulted in 148 articles over the time period covered — an average of about 4.2

crime-related articles per issue.

  To measure support for Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD), I gathered polling data

on vote intentions from INSA. I chose polls whose dates corresponded with the release

date of one of the selected *Junge Freiheit* issues. Polls have their problems and, thus,

are not perfect representations of public opinion. However, they remain the best

available way to measure voter attitudes over time.

  INSA in particular has proven to be quite accurate in their measurements of the

German electorate. In their last poll before the 2017 federal election, INSA forecasted

that AfD would capture 13% of the vote; they got 12.6%. The resulting time series

consists of 35 observations, from the beginning of 2013 to the end of 2019.

  The variable *Crime.articles* represents the number of crime-related articles in a

given issue of *Junge Freiheit*. The variable *AfD.support* represents the percentage of

respondents to an INSA poll who voiced an intention to vote for AfD. Figure 1 shows

graphical depictions of these two variables of interest.

  As alluded to in the literature review, it is possible that economic dynamics affect

support for AfD. So, I controlled for a potential confounder. The variable *Unemployment*,

which you will encounter in the analysis section, is a monthly measure of Germany's

national unemployment rate from a time-series dataset courtesy of the Federal Reserve

Bank of St. Louis.

   To measure the effect of *Crime.articles* on *AfD.support*, I employed econometric

techniques. Specifically, I used a vector autoregression. Previous research has used

this technique to infer similar causal dynamics (Brandt and Williams 2007; Vliegenthart
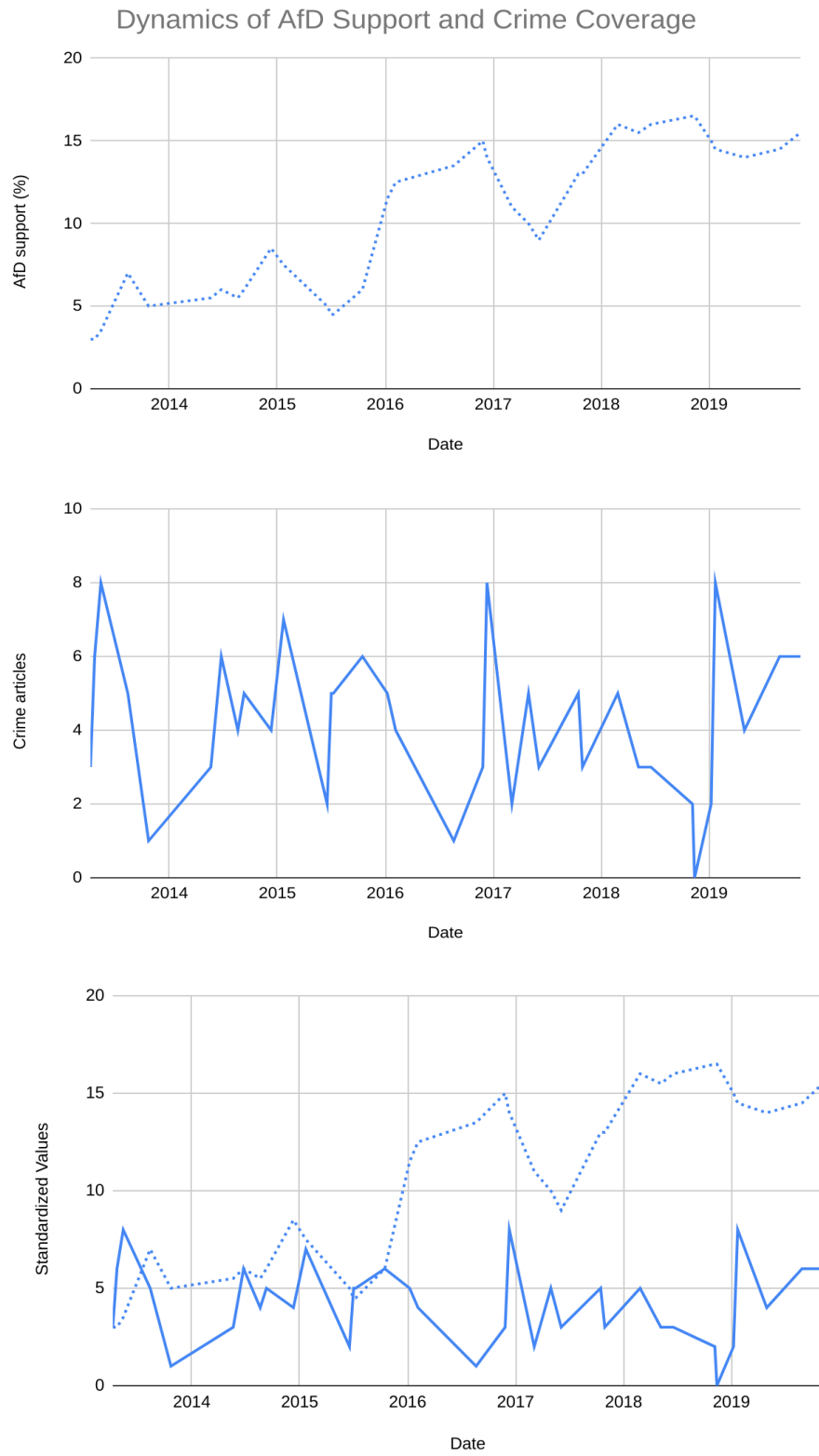
et al. 2012).

Figure 1. Dynamics of AfD support and crime coverage.

Of course, it is possible that other media dynamics affect support for AfD. The variable *Immigration.articles* represents the number of immigrant- or immigration-related articles in a given issue of *Junge Freiheit*. In the 35 issues I analyzed, there were 209 articles of this kind. That averages to about six per issue.

Again, the effect on AfD's poll numbers was measured through vector autoregression. I also did this for *Immigration.articles* plus *Crime.articles* — a variable which I labeled *Crime.plus.immigration*.

Lastly, some articles combined coverage of immigration and crime. They are represented by the variable *Crime.Immigration*. And their effect on AfD's poll numbers was tested as well.
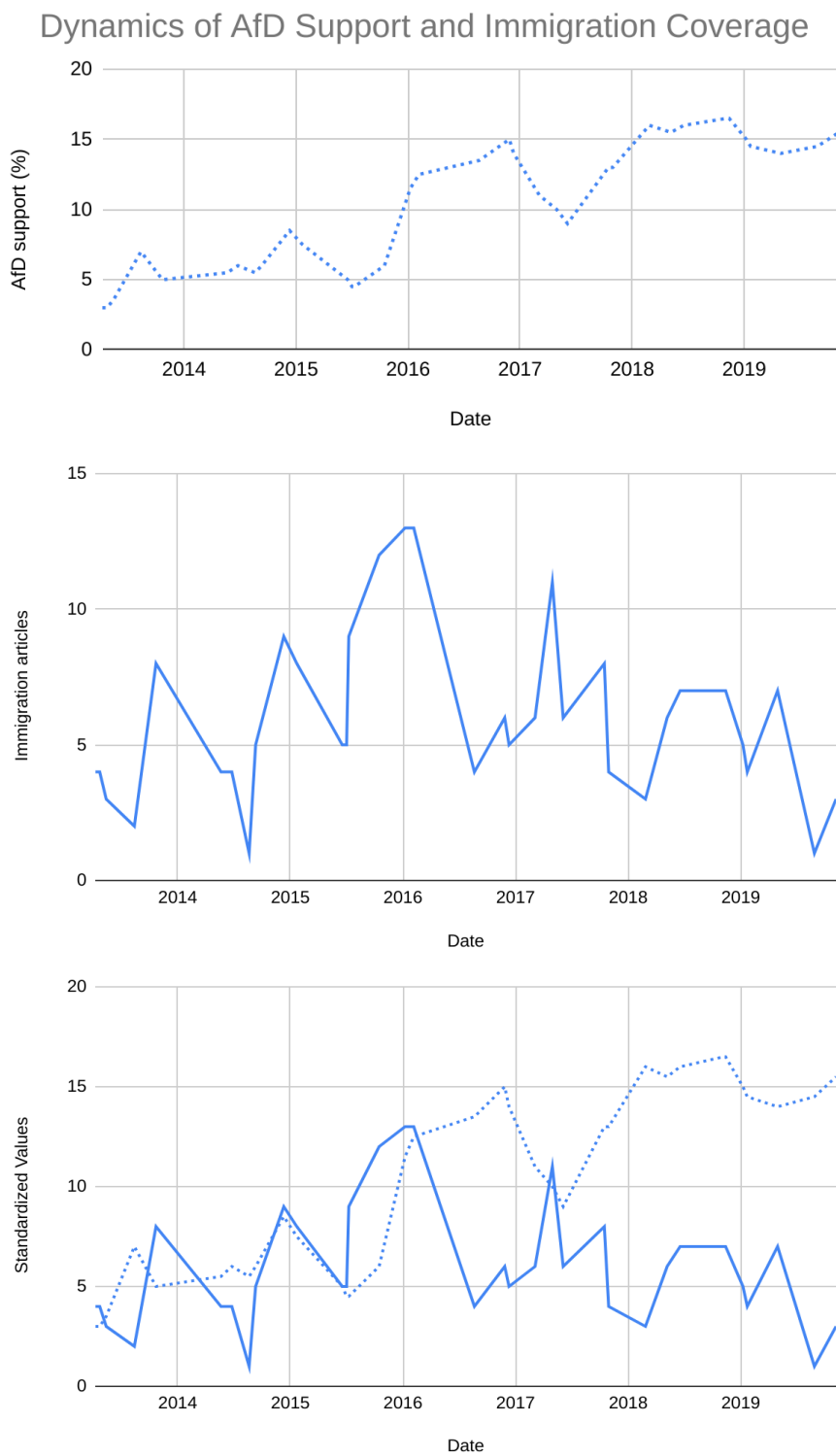
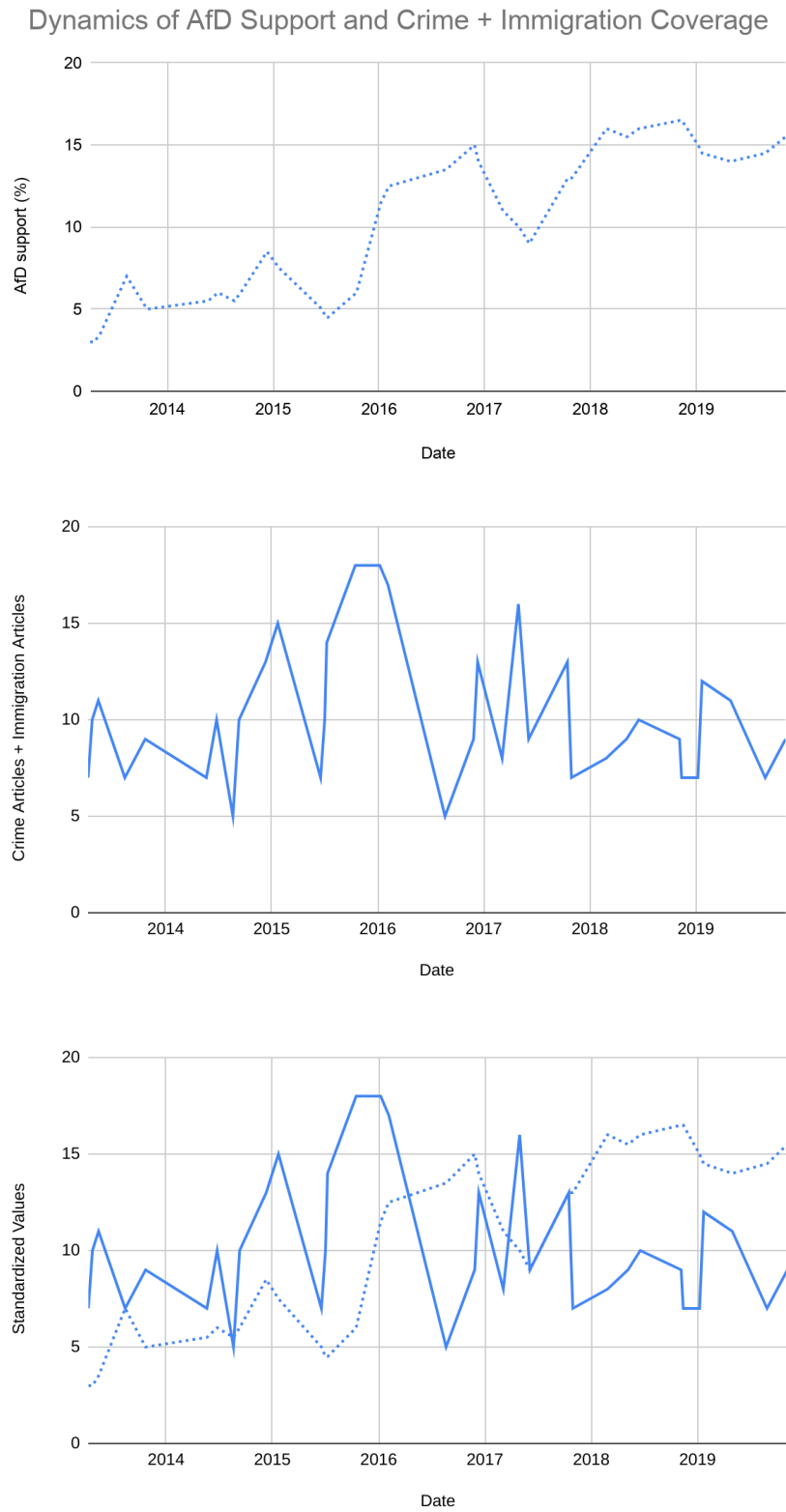**Figure 2.** Dynamics of AfD support and immigration coverage.

Figure 3. Dynamics of AfD support and crime coverage plus immigration coverage.
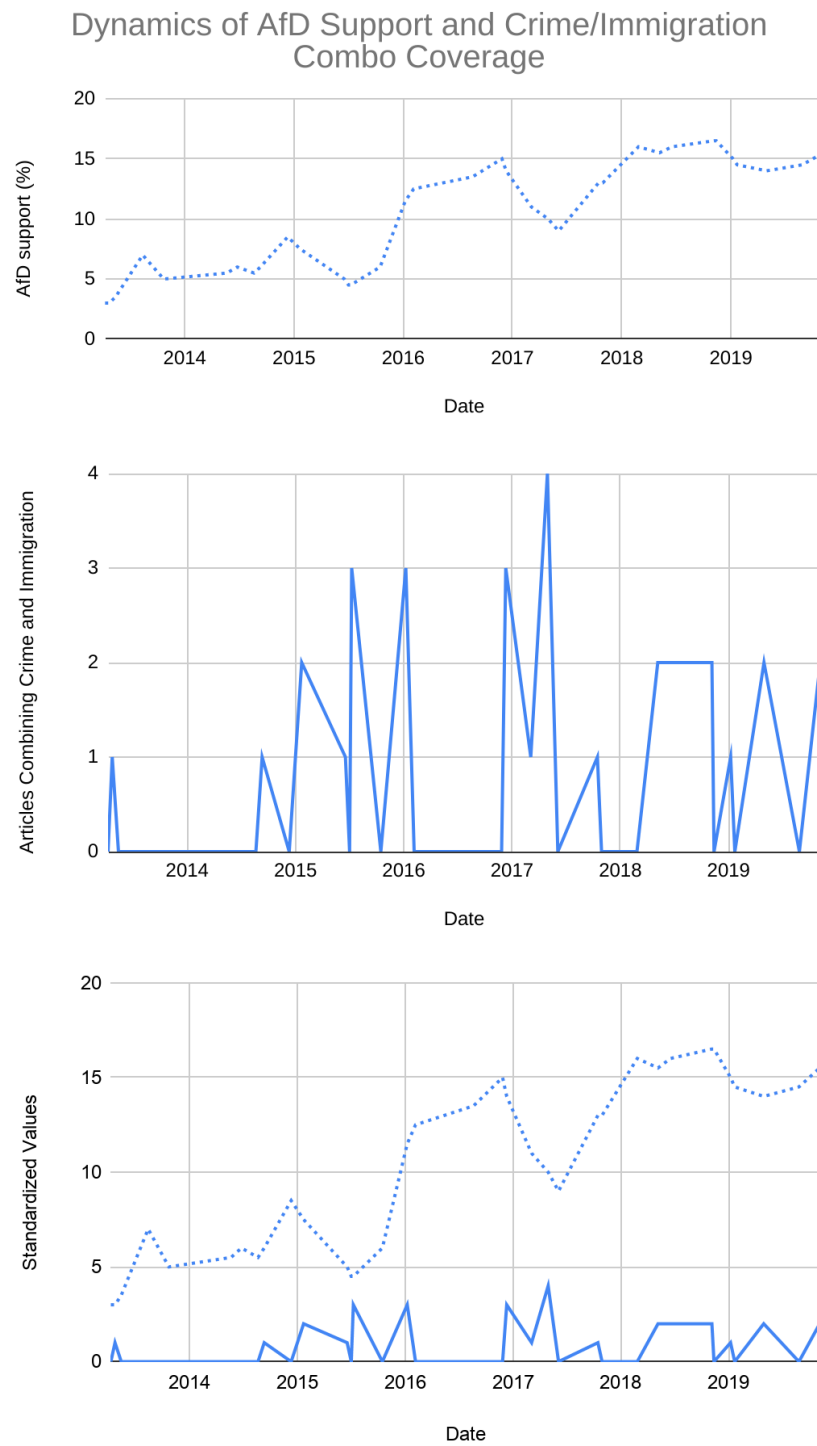
Figure 4. Dynamics of AfD support and coverage that combines crime and immigration.

Analysis

For this thesis, I analyzed the German newspaper *Junge Freiheit*. It is the second-most circulated weekly subscription newspaper in Germany and leans quite nationalist and conservative. *Junge Freiheit* has been associated with the "intellectual new right" and right-wing populist movement (Scherr 2007, 287).

My analysis concerns *Junge Freiheit*'s coverage of two issues: crime and immigration. Allow me to start with the latter. Given its political tendency, how *Junge Freiheit* covers immigration is unsurprising.

A lot of attention is placed on the sheer number of migrants entering Germany. Examples of (translated) headlines include 'Significantly more asylum seekers in March,' 'Foreigners: highest increase since 1993,' and 'Police count more illegal immigrants.' The implication seems to be that Germany is being overwhelmed by outsiders. Most of the time, this point is made implicitly using rhetoric similar to that of the aforementioned headlines.

But the point is sometimes made explicitly as well. Article titles like 'Attack on our order' and 'Gypsies endanger the German social system' show this. The second is reminiscent of the economic competition framework of anti-immigrant sentiment mentioned in the literature review. Perhaps the author was trying to convince working-class Germans that the Roma are coming for their benefits.

Junge Freiheit's coverage of crime, however, is less archetypal. No doubt, they publish their fair share of right-wing talking points. *Junge Freheit*'s editorial stance is decidedly pro-cop, with the police often depicted as an institution under siege. In October of 2017, they published an article titled 'Police officers shout for help.' This

image of an embattled force is similar to the one conservative outlets try to paint here in the United States.

But *Junge Freiheit*'s crime coverage focuses disproportionately on political violence. And their approach is not always so blindly partisan. While they make sure to heap blame on the Left with headlines like 'Left-wing are rampaging in Berlin,' *Junge Freiheit* does not ignore crimes committed by the far Right. For example, they spent over three years covering the National Socialist Underground trial. Therein, five neo-Nazis were prosecuted for a series of xenophobic murders committed across Germany. This concludes a brief content analysis of *Junge Freiheit*.

Now, onto a statistical analysis. Because neither variable is stationary, the vector autoregression is estimated with first differences of each variable. Optimal lag length for this model was determined by the Akaike Information Criteria (AIC) to be VAR(1).

Table 1 presents the results of a regression measuring the effect of crime articles in *Junge Freiheit* on the polling numbers of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). A monthly measure of Germany's national unemployment rate is included as a potential confounder, as it is possible that economic dynamics affect support for AfD too. But the regression's summary statistics show no statistically discernible correlation between past changes in crime coverage and future changes in public support for AfD. The same goes for unemployment and public support for AfD.

		Estimate	Std. Error	t value	$Pr(>|t|)$
[VAR(1)]	Crime.articles	-0.115	0.120	-0.959	0.345
	Unemployment	2.419	4.899	0.494	0.625
	AfD.support	0.141	0.194	0.726	0.474
	constant	0.509	0.463	1.099	0.281

Table 1. Vector autoregressions, crime coverage and AfD support

- *Crime.articles* = number of crime-related articles in a given issue of *Junge Freiheit*

- *Unemployment* = national unemployment rate of Germany

- *AfD.support* = percentage of respondents to an INSA poll who voiced an intention to vote for AfD

Table 2 presents the results of a regression measuring the effect of immigration articles in *Junge Freiheit* on AfD's poll numbers. Optimal lag length for this model was determined by the AIC to be VAR(2). But the regression's summary statistics show no statistically discernible correlation between past changes in immigration coverage and future changes in public support for AfD. The same goes for unemployment and public support for AfD.

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	$Pr(>|t|)$
Immigration.articles(L1)	-0.039	0.111	-0.348	0.731
Unemployment(L1)	0.267	5.086	0.052	0.959
AfD.support(L1)	0.103	0.198	0.520	0.608
Immigration.articles(L2)	0.125	0.118	1.059	0.300
Unemployment(L2)	4.714	5.011	0.941	0.356
AfD.support(L2)	0.056	0.198	0.283	0.780
constant	0.647	0.589	1.098	0.283

[VAR(2)]

Table 2. Vector autoregressions, immigration coverage and AfD support

- *Immigration.articles* = the number of immigrant- or immigration-related articles in a given issue of *Junge Freiheit*
- *Unemployment* = national unemployment rate of Germany
- *AfD.support* = percentage of respondents to an INSA poll who voiced an intention to vote for AfD

Table 3 presents the results of a regression measuring the effect of *Junge Freiheit* articles combining crime and immigration on AfD's poll numbers. Optimal lag length for this model was determined by the AIC to be VAR(1). The regression's summary statistics show a statistically discernible negative correlation between past changes in crime-immigration combo coverage and future changes in public support for AfD at the α=0.05 level.

This could be because issue ownership of crime and immigration does not favor AfD. In other words, it might be that the average German thinks other, less conservative parties better handle those issues. And so the increased salience of crime and immigration may actually work to AfD's detriment and reduce their popularity.

		Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)
[VAR(1)]	Crime.Immigration	-0.420	0.171	-2.449	0.021
	Unemployment	-0.215	4.366	-0.049	0.961
	AfD.support	0.131	0.175	0.749	0.460
	constant	0.318	0.421	0.756	0.456

Table 3. Vector autoregressions, crime-immigration coverage and AfD support.

- *Crime.Immigration* = number of articles that combine crime and immigration in a given issue of *Junge Freiheit*
- *Unemployment* = national unemployment rate of Germany
- *AfD.support* = percentage of respondents to an INSA poll who voiced an intention to vote for AfD

Table 4 presents results of a regression measuring the effect of crime or immigration articles in *Junge Freiheit* on the polling numbers of AfD. Optimal lag length for this model was determined by the AIC to be VAR(2). But the regression's summary statistics show no statistically discernible correlation between past changes in crime coverage plus immigration coverage and future changes in public support for AfD. The same goes for unemployment and public support for AfD.

		Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr($>$|t|)
	Crime.plus.immigration(L1)	-0.044	0.094	-0.470	0.643
	Unemployment(L1)	0.533	5.550	0.096	0.924
[VAR(2)]	AfD.support(L1)	0.135	0.203	0.663	0.513
	Crime.plus.immigration(L2)	0.079	0.096	0.823	0.417
	Unemployment(L2)	3.494	5.155	0.678	0.504
	AfD.support(L2)	0.009	0.204	0.045	0.965
	constant	0.340	0.325	1.04	0.305

Table 4. Vector autoregressions, crime coverage + immigration coverage and AfD support

- *Crime.plus.immigration* = the number of crime and immigration articles in a given issue of *Junge Freiheit*
- *Unemployment* = national unemployment rate of Germany
- *AfD.support* = percentage of respondents to an INSA poll who voiced an intention to vote for AfD

Conclusion

This thesis examines the influence of crime and immigration media coverage on the popularity of Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD). That alone makes it a novel contribution to the field of political science. Past research has tackled the question of these specific media effects on right-wing voting in Germany. But they have not done so in regard to AfD specifically. A paper by University of Amsterdam researchers, for example, looked at the politically irrelevant German Republicans and National Democratic Party of Germany.

Said researchers found no relationship between crime news and voting for either party. They also did not find a relationship between immigration news and voting for the National Democratic Party; however, that relationship did exist for the German Republicans (Burscher et al. 2015, 64).

Unfortunately, though, my findings shed little light on what caused the rise of the AfD. Crime and immigration coverage on their own were found to have no discernible effect on AfD's poll numbers. The same was true when crime and immigration coverage were aggregated.

This casts doubt on the agenda-setting framework as articulated by political scientists Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder. They theorized that media coverage has a significant effect on what issues people care most about. And that, in theory, should shift their voting patterns to varying extents. But the statistical tests I conducted do not support this assumption.

A significant relationship only emerged when coverage combined the topics of crime and immigration. But the correlation between that kind of coverage and AfD

support was, contrary to my hypothesis, negative. This finding could be interpreted in multiple different ways.

One potential interpretation is that issue ownership of crime and immigration does not favor far-right parties in Germany. In other words, it might be that the average German thinks less conservative parties better handle those issues. And so the increased salience of crime and immigration actually works to AfD's detriment and reduces their popularity.

If true, this conclusion would be specific to Germany. We would expect issue ownership to vary from country to country, as each has its own unique political climate and culture. For example, the United States seems to differ from Germany in this way.

Stateside, it has been shown that the Right — specifically, the Republican Party — largely owns the issue of crime. So we would expect their support to increase with crime's salience as a political issue (Valentino 1999). The same goes for the immigration. Research shows that Americans who view immigration as an important issue are more likely to support conservative policies and politicians (Knoll et al. 2011). But that is not what I found in the case of Germany.

And this validates what has been concluded elsewhere. Concerning immigration in particular, the aforementioned University of Amsterdam researchers wrote the following (Burscher et al. 2015, 66):

> *"We thus have to raise the question whether exposure to immigration in the media in the media can cause anti-immigrant voting, because not all voters might advocate a decline in immigration… positions toward immigration play a role when it comes to issue-ownership voting with a positional issue."*

So why, unlike the Republicans, might AfD not own the issue of immigration? To answer this important question, Prime Minister Angela Merkel and the ruling Christian Demcratic Union's (CDU) response to the migrant crisis must be taken into account. Many have argued that their handling of the huge influx of immigrants spelled doom for their political prospects. And it is true that Merkel's approval ratings dropped significantly during this immigration wave (though they remained high) (Armstrong 2020). But those numbers do not tell the full story.

Merkel and her CDU acolytes are cunning politicians. They did not simply flounder in the face of an overwhelming challenge. Rather, their approach was one of balance. As University of Basel researcher Oliver Nachtwey described in a 2017 interview with *Jacobin* magazine, "Merkel toughened German asylum law considerably in the wake of the refugee crisis, but was still — by the standards of German and international politics — seen as embodying a bit of humanity for at least leaving the borders open."

In doing so, the CDU was able to disarm critics from both the Right and Left. By imposing new border controls, the ruling party made it harder for AfD to paint them as soft on immigration. Simultaneously, their detractors from the Left struggled to depict the CDU as inhumane or uncompassionate. Merkel's party successfully played to both sides of the issue, which helped them maintain widespread popularity. A 2018 poll found that public opinion overwhelmingly favored Merkel's approach to the migrant crisis (Duncan 2018). And this confidence in the CDU allowed them to preserve their rule by comfortably winning subsequent elections.

As for crime, perhaps AfD does not own that issue because Germans do not naturally connect it to immigrants as I predicted they would. Because, if Germans made that connection instinctually, crime coverage would likely push them into the arms of a party that is restrictionist on immigration like AfD. But this is not what I observed. Maybe *Junge Freiheit* was trying to make the connection on Germans' behalf when publishing articles combining crime and immigration.

It might also be that Germany is somewhat immune to pressures, like crime and immigration, that typically boost the far Right. This is a real possibility because "these pressures themselves do not create success" (Art 2007, 334). Political cultures matter too. And Germany's is one wherein, "[d]ue to Germany's history of the 'Third Reich', all new parties on the political right are automatically stigmatised as heirs of National Socialism" (Berbuir et al. 2014, 7). That might neutralize factors which tend to increase support for reactionary politics.

To conclude this thesis, I would like to propose some ideas for future research. While I am proud of my work, there is certainly more to be done. No study, thesis, or research paper is ever the final word on a topic. Even if authored by the most brilliant scholar — which I certainly am not — there is always more to be said. That is what makes political science fun.

If I had more time and resources, I would have analyzed a greater number of newspapers to get a more representative sample of German media consumption. *Junge Freiheit* is popular, but it is only one of many papers. It also leans quite nationalist and conservative — political tendencies that much of the German populace does not identify with.

By only examining *Junge Freiheit*, I left out many popular newspapers that represent other areas of the political spectrum. For example, *Die Zeit* is Germany's most-circulated national subscription paper and typically publishes more centrist views. Papers like *Die Tageszeitung* and *Junge Welt*, on the other hand, represent the Left with some referring to the latter as Marxist.

And there are even right-leaning papers that are more moderate in their tone than *Junge Freiheit*. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt* come to mind, just to name a few. But there are many others.

It makes sense that moderate conservatism would be well-represented in German media considering the country has been ruled by a center-right party for the last 16 years and counting. The CDU is a force to be reckoned with in German politics. And they will, barring the unexpected, hold onto their dominant position following the federal election this September.

Ideally, I would also go beyond Germany entirely and examine other countries. It is possible that my test case for this thesis was an outlier. In other words, my theory about crime coverage stoking fear which causes anti-immigrant sentiment may be correct generally but just so happened to be false for Germany from 2013 to 2019.

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Appendix

Figures:

Tables: