The rise of right-wing populism: a test of three hypotheses about voter support for the AfD in Germany

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Introduction

- **Monitoringsystem und Transferplattform Radikalisierung (MOTRA)**
  “Monitoring System and Transfer Platform Radicalization” (MOTRA) is a research association funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany. The project was developed for the early detection, prevention and combating of extremism and terrorism over the course of five years (11/2019 - 10/2024).  
  [https://www.motra.info/](https://www.motra.info/)

- **Menschen in Deutschland (MiD)**
  The study Menschen in Deutschland (People in Germany) is a yearly population survey conducted by the University of Hamburg. The survey addresses questions about life in Germany on main topics from society, politics and religion.  
  [https://www.mid.uni-hamburg.de/en/startseite.html](https://www.mid.uni-hamburg.de/en/startseite.html)

- **Data source**
  The dataset used for this presentation represents the first data collection of the MiD survey collected during the second quarter of 2021.  
  (N = 4 483; participation rate = 23.6)
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Main ideas

1) To test the competing relevance of three predictors of the intention to vote AfD in Germany

   Economic deprivation
   Post-democracy
   Cultural backlash

   Intention to vote AfD

2) To test a conceptual mediation model on intention to vote AfD including these three predictors and inspired by Agnew’s General Strain Theory of Terrorism (GSTT)

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Main ideas

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- Negative social emotions
- Dysfunctional coping behaviour
- Economic deprivation
- Cultural backlash
- Post-democracy

Intention to vote AfD
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Strains

Negative social emotions

Dysfunctional coping behaviour

Intention to vote AfD
Operationalisations

- **Objective: Socio-economic Status (SES):**
  - Dimension 1: education
  - Dimension 2: profession
  - Dimension 3: income

- **Subjective: economic worries:**
  To what extent are you worried about the following social developments and their impact on your life?
  - That increasing digitalisation and computerisation could lead to job losses.
  - That economic crises could lead to more poverty.
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![Image showing economic deprivation distribution](image.png)

- Mean = 54.67
- SD = 16.9
Monitoring System and Transfer Platform Radicalisation

Operationalisations

Economic deprivation → Post-democracy → Cultural backlash → Intention to vote AfD

**Dimension A. Basic rights of freedom**
- Every citizen should have the right to go out and demonstrate for what they believe in.
- Strikes and demonstrations pose a danger to public order and should be banned.
- The freedom of the press in our country must be protected.
- All minorities should have the right to freely express their views.

**Dimension B. Constitutional principles of democracy**
- Those who lose out in an election should not be allowed to criticise the business of government.
- If a government is doing a good job, there is no reason to hold a new election after four years.
- If Parliament makes a decision, it cannot be allowed to be overturned by a court.
- In order to have strong political leadership in Germany, Parliament should have less influence.

**Dimension C. Equal rights**
- People should not be discriminated against because of their skin colour.
- Women and men should receive equal pay for doing the same work.
- Foreigners should not be treated differently to native citizens regarding allocation of housing.
- Muslims must be allowed to pursue their religion in the same way as Christians, Jews or followers of other religions.
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![Democracy distance graph]

Mean = 17.2
SD = 13.7
**Dimension A. Xenophobia**
- The mixing of so many people with different origins in Germany cannot work.
- There are too many foreigners in Germany.
- If we are not careful, Germany will become an Islamic country.

**Dimension B. Traditionalism**
- Traditions that are important to me are given no room in this society.
- In this society, men are increasingly being denied the right to protect their families themselves.
- A people must have a homeland with its own traditions.
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- In this society, men are increasingly being denied the right to protect their families themselves.
- A people must have a homeland with its own traditions.
If the German federal election was taking place next Sunday, who would you vote for? (undecided and non-voters excluded)

- CDU/CSU: 27.8%
- SPD: 17.8%
- Greens: 27.3%
- FDP: 7.0%
- The Left: 5.0%
- AfD: 6.7%
- Others: 8.4%

N = 3,110
Hypotheses

Competition of perspectives:
• H1: *Economic deprivation* is a relevant predictor of the *intention to vote AfD*
• H2: *Democracy distance* is a relevant predictor of the *intention to vote AfD*
• H3: *Cultural backlash* is a relevant predictor of the *intention to vote AfD*
• H4: The influence of *cultural backlash* on *intention to vote AfD* is bigger than the influence of *economic deprivation* and *democracy distance*

Conceptual mediation model:
• H5: The influence of *economic deprivation* on *intention to vote AfD* is at least partially mediated through *democracy-distance* and *cultural backlash*
• H6: The influence of *democracy distance* on *intention to vote AfD* is at least partially mediated through *cultural backlash*
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Conceptual mediation model:
• H5: The influence of *economic deprivation* on intention to vote AfD is at least partially mediated through *democracy-distance* and *cultural backlash*
• H6: The influence of *democracy distance* on intention to vote AfD is at least partially mediated through *cultural backlash*
Results 1: compared influences on intention to vote AfD

Percentage points change in the probability of an intention to vote for the AfD for one standard deviation increase in ...

- economic deprivation: 3.4
- post-democracy (democracy-distance): 3.6
- cultural backlash: 6.7

*controls = gender, age (6 categories), region (2 categories), migration status
Results 2: mediation model

Percentage points change in the probability of an intention to vote for the AfD for one standard deviation increase in ...

- cultural backlash
- post-democracy (democracy-distance)
- economic deprivation

*controls = gender, age (6 categories), region (2 categories), migration status
Conclusions/Discussion

- Cultural backlash has the strongest impact on intention to vote for the AfD (H4)
- The impacts of economic deprivation and post-democracy on intention to vote for the AfD are completely mediated through cultural backlash (H5 & H6)

Contributions

1) New dataset
2) New measurements
3) New conceptual (mediation) model

Future

- Refine theory (Procedural Justice Theory maybe?)
- Test other statistical models (SEM with latent constructs maybe?)
- Define policy implications (long and short run)
Thank you!!!!