



Dipartimento di **Scienze Politiche**

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**Eastern Germany: Post Reunification Shocks and the Success of
Extreme Rightwing Political Parties**

*How cultural, economic and social shocks risen after German reunification helped
extreme rightwing parties' success in former Eastern Germany*

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1. Introduction

In the time period ranging from German reunification up to today, extreme rightwing populist parties in Germany had plenty of success bursts. These parties mainly scored high in the new Länder of Eastern Germany. The whole of Eastern Germany could have been a prosperous field for extreme rightwing parties, as the conditions for these parties started to appear right after reunification. In fact, instead of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's promised "flourishing landscapes", Eastern Germany after reunification was hit by a severe economic crisis: Elevated rates of unemployment relented the high hopes of Eastern Germans for a better life post-unification. Furthermore, significant differences in the consistency and culture of both societies made unification an unexpectedly arduous task to achieve. During the unification process, Eastern Germans came quickly in contact with Western neoliberal society, this resulted in shocks of economic, social and cultural nature on the Eastern side.

On the other hand, since reunification, Eastern Länder experienced a strong success of both leftwing and extreme rightwing parties. This thesis paper aims to investigate the extent of the reunification shock's influence in the success of extreme rightwing political parties in Eastern German Länder: A very actual topic, given the present European political status: In states in the former communist block extreme rightwing positions are becoming increasingly popular.

Therefore, the question of this thesis paper will try to investigate the relation between the shocks experienced by former GDR Germany after reunification and the success of extreme rightwing parties there: **"To what extent have the cultural, social and economic shocks experienced by Eastern Germans during the 1990 reunification process contributed to the success of populist extreme rightwing political parties in Eastern Germany?"**

On this subject I have found plenty of existing research dating back to the 1990's, as soon as the problem emerged; moreover, I have found plenty of research concerned with extreme rightwing parties in Germany dating back to the 1960's. American and English researchers were on the front line in exploring extreme rightwing populist parties in Germany, before and after reunification. Strikingly, on some areas of this thesis paper, German research was surprisingly not abundant: Surely there was more English research on the subject.

I downloaded information regarding the Land and Bundestag German electoral results from Wahlrecht.de: This is a very versatile website that includes any information on German elections since the foundation of the FRG. Regarding AfD and NPD party information, I used the newest AfD Land and National programs; on the other hand, regarding DVU I used a 1999 party program I managed to download using “Google time machine”: A service (independent from google) that allowed to me to visit a “snapshot” of DVU’s website in 2000 and to download their party program.

This thesis paper will mainly deal with the emergence of xenophobia in Eastern Germany linking the situation today with GDR-era influences. Moreover, this paper will deal with the perception of extreme crisis experienced by eastern Germans and its relationship with the success of extreme rightwing parties. Furthermore, this thesis will stress the presence of contrast with the ruling elite of Eastern Germans.

In this thesis paper, I will not deal with the presence of a Heartland in extreme rightwing parties in Eastern Germany; In addition to this, this thesis paper will not be concerned with the communication methods of such parties.

In the first chapter, I will define extreme rightwing and populism; moreover, I will propose the dependent and independent variables of this thesis paper.

In the second chapter, I will analyze the “protagonists” of this thesis paper with a chapter that will present the three extreme rightwing populist parties that will be considered in this thesis paper: I will outline the history, electoral success and main core-points in each party’s manifesto.

The next chapter will deal with “Extreme Crisis” and will handle the first two independent variables: Xenophobia and reaction to extreme crisis. The former will comprise in-depth analysis on how xenophobia developed in Eastern German Länder before reunification and how it exploded after the “Wende”; moreover, in this chapter I will analyze the stance of extreme rightwing populist parties on migration and how it evolved in the past thirty years. The latter will comprise in-depth analysis on whether extreme rightwing populist parties perceive xenophobia and the economic crisis as an extreme crisis; in this chapter I will take in consideration multiple sources, including national electoral programs and Land electoral programs.

The last chapter will deal with “Contrast with the Ruling Elite” and will present the three grounds, on which I intend to base the concept of contrast with the ruling elite: namely xenophobia,

economic crisis and the development of an Eastern German culture, identity and ethnicity: On the latter I will present an in-depth analysis including notions such as “Ostalgie” and “Trotzidentität”.

Lastly, in the conclusion I will test whether the independent variables are verified and I will answer to the question of the paper.

2. Definitions and Variables

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 A Definition of Populism: Many observers award the beginning of populism to the Agrarian People’s party in the United States in the 1890’s; yet, most populist parties recently developed all around the world just recently. In Southern America, populism is usually associated with the sprout of leftwing populist parties, for instance with Chavez’s Venezuela; on the other hand, in Europe with rightwing parties¹.

Traditional parties often recur to appeals towards the “people” to represent a common interest against a specific group’s interest; yet rather than populist, this is more accurately described as opportunistic. Populism does not focus on core values and mainly focuses on the contraposition between the often corrupt “ruling elite” and the “people”: the latter can be only represented authentically by the populist party itself. That said, populism comprises at least five traits: The presence of a Heartland in the party’s narrative, the reaction to an extreme crisis, hostility towards the ruling political elite, lack of core values, short life².

The former refers to the populist’s ideal world: The “Heartland”. This is the populists’ utopia: An imaginary construction of a perfect world, that differs from utopia in the way that, as utopia is a hoped future, the Heartland is a lifestyle that has already been lived, but that modernity took away².

¹ THOMAS GREVEN (2016): “Right-wing Populism in Europe and the United States: A Comparative Perspective”; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Page 1.

² PAUL TAGGART (2004): “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe”; Journal of Political Ideologies 9:3; Page 274

Populist parties pick their values from the “Heartland”, which is a diffuse and blurred vision in the electorate².

The second trait focuses on an extreme crisis that can be of any sort: from an economic crisis, to an extraordinary migrant influx or the loss of traditions due to the rapid advancement of modernity³. These three examples will be examined in depth in the case of Eastern Germany later.

The third characteristic deals with the populist parties’ opposition to the ruling elite, accused not to do the country’s interest and to be deeply corrupted³.

The fourth assumes that populist parties lack core values, because of the popular blurred vision of the heartland. Therefore, populist parties might have rightwing, as well as leftwing values and even both coexisting, as every person has its version of the heartland³.

The last trait refers to the short life of populist parties, their appeal is often strictly related to their unusualness, as soon as they start to have good electoral results, win parliamentary seats and institutionalize they lose this peculiarity and start worsening their electoral results: Populist parties are hard to maintain on the long run³.

2.1.2 A Definition of Extreme Rightwing: Extreme rightwing populist parties usually hold two more traits than normal populist parties: “Us versus Them” type of conflict and a tactical and strategic use of new forms of communication⁴.

The former trait relates to the despise extreme rightwing political parties display against minorities, the “other” or immigrants. A common conspiracy theory in extreme rightwing parties and endorsed by Frauke Petry and Pegida, is “le grand remplacement”: The theory is that the German government is importing immigrants in Germany, to fix declining birthrates⁴.

Second, extreme rightwing parties have a strategic and tactical use of new forms of communication; extreme rightwing populist parties speak against political correctness, mount calculated scandals and provocations and break supposed taboos⁴.

“Us against them” rhetoric does not only apply to the field of xenophobia, in fact it is also a way to address the “Us”: Cultural homogeneity⁴. This identity, based on common sense, is contraposed

³ TAGGART 2004; Pages 273 - 276

⁴ GREVEN 2016; Pages 3 - 4

against the “others”, usually immigrants and foreigners, accused to be favored by the corrupt ruling elite⁵.

2.2 Dependent and Independent Variables

The dependent variable of this thesis paper will clearly measure the influence of cultural, economic and social shocks after German reunification in 1990 in the success of populist extreme rightwing political parties in Eastern Germany.

The independent variables, on the other hand, will try to explain how the conditions of Eastern Germany in the aftermath of the “Wende” laid fertile ground for the success of populist extreme rightwing political parties. More in particular, the independent variables will check whether German reunification laid the necessary conditions for the traits of a populist extreme rightwing political party to develop. Therefore, the independent variables will check xenophobia, contrast with the ruling elite and reaction to an extreme crisis.

2.2.1 Xenophobia: As the GDR (German Democratic Republic) has always tried throughout its forty years of history to achieve and preserve ethno-national homogeneity⁶; it did so also severely limiting migrant influx: in fact, the only foreigners in Eastern Germany were few guest workers from other friendly communist states, such as Vietnam. For this reason, the GDR never had a very diverse population: In fact, in 1991 foreign population represented only somewhat over 1% of total in Eastern Germany⁷. Soon after reunification though, former GDR citizens experienced a cultural and social shock given the higher number of foreign individuals in the West reallocating or being distributed to the East⁸. This independent variable will try to single out the xenophobia that rose from the culture clashes after German reunification and assess whether it has been a majorly contributing factor in the rise and success of populist extreme rightwing political parties in Eastern Germany.

⁵ GREVEN 2016; Page 3

⁶ JANNIS PANAGIOTIDIS 2015: “What is German’s Fatherland? The GDR and the Resettlement of Ethnic Germans from Socialist Countries (1949 – 1989)”; *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 29:1; Page 130

⁷ PATRICK R. IRELAND 1997: “Socialism, Unification Policy and the Rise of Racism in Eastern Germany”; *The International Migration Review* 31:3; Page 561

⁸ IRELAND 1997; Page 556

2.2.2 Contrast with the ruling elite: With the persistence of the German-German border for forty years, culture to the East and to the West of the wall started to diverge. When the “Wende” occurred, Eastern Germans had already developed their own culture and for many Easterners the process of reunification (to which they were surely favorable) felt more like an annexation of the East on behalf of the West. Soon after the “Wende” former GDR citizens started to defend their culture through a process of “Ostalgie” and “Trotztidentität”, which will be examined in depth later in the paper. Through this process, citizens of the Eastern Länder developed an intense sense of regional politics enhancing local leaders and Land presidents, that conversely gained plenty of political importance: They were perceived as defenders of the East⁹. This independent variable will investigate whether the “Wende” enhanced a feeling of “contrast against the ruling elite” in Eastern Germany and whether this was a major contributing factor in the rise and success of populist extreme rightwing political parties.

2.2.3 Reaction to an Extreme Crisis: Without doubt, German reunification has been far more difficult than hoped. The East, soon after the “Wende” experienced a deep economic crisis that involved a plummet in manufacturing output, GDP growth and employment rates¹⁰; moreover, waves of immigrants reached to the once ethnically isolated territories of the former GDR¹¹. This independent variable will examine whether social, economic or cultural crisis in Eastern Germany originated from the “Wende”, if the public perceived them as extreme crisis and more importantly if it had helped populist extreme rightwing political parties to gather consensus behind a reaction to an extreme crisis that the ruling elite cannot solve.

The perception of extreme crisis, though, does not originate only from economic crisis, but also from an impression of invasion from ethnically and culturally diverse people. AfD and “PEGIDA” are denouncing in the last years that the German government is both trying to substitute Germans with immigrants¹² and destroying German culture and society¹³. Extreme rightwing electors affirm the former, because they believe that the German ruling elite is trying to make up low German

⁹ JENNIFER A. YODER 2000: “Regional Differences and Political Leadership in the New German States”; German Politics & Society, 18:1; Page 41

¹⁰ RÜDRIGER POHL 2000: “The Macroeconomics of Transformation: The Case of Eastern Germany”; German Politics & Society, 18:3; Page 59

¹¹ IRELAND 1997; Page 556

¹² GREVEN 2016; Page 4

¹³ AfD Landprogramm: Sachsen-Anhalt; Page 23

birthrates and support its own personal interests¹⁴; the latter because they affirm that German and European politicians are not able to deal with the “epochal” migrant influx¹⁵. It clearly looks like AfD electors and PEGIDA activists (“PEGIDA” is actually a movement) are trying to respond to a perceived situation of extreme crisis. This independent variable will also try to examine whether a reaction to an extreme crisis occurred and whether it is an offspring of the way the reunification process was conducted.

2.3 Undealt Traits

Clearly, the independent variables of this thesis paper correspond roughly to some of the traits of populist extreme rightwing parties; yet there are some which are not being presented in the independent variables: Heartland, a new way of communication and doing politics, lack of core values and short life.

I decided not to deal with the “new way of communication and of doing politics” and the limited life of populist parties”, because they are not majorly related with the process of reunification and East Germany in particular.

Moreover, AfD, DVU and other radical right populist parties do not lack core values: AfD, for instance, is xenophobic and holds most values of a radical rightwing party, such as security and identity¹⁶.

Whereas the extreme rightwing populist parties studied in this thesis paper do have a “heartland” pool of values, it is difficult to relate it to the misadministration of the reunification process and therefore becomes trivial for this paper. Plenty of values are shared between AfD and Eastern Germans, hence the impressive electoral results; yet, no source or research relates the pool of values or “heartland” of AfD, DVU or NPD from Eastern German values. Instead, PDS (heir of the GDR SED dictatorship) uses an East German “heartland” to draw its values¹⁷; yet this is a leftwing party and therefore not fully relevant with the topic of this thesis paper.

¹⁴ GREVEN 2016; Page 5

¹⁵ AfD Landprogramm: Sachsen-Anhalt; Page 24

¹⁶ AfD Wahlprogramm; Page 4

¹⁷ DAN HOUGH 2005: “The programmatic development of the Eastern German PDS: Learning what from whom and under what conditions?”; *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 21:1 Pages 143 - 145

3. Extreme Rightwing Populist Parties

Not long after World War II, one of the first waves of extreme rightwing political parties started to appear on the European political chessboard. They started to emerge in the 1950's and continued until today.

In this chapter I will take in consideration three extreme rightwing populist parties in Germany, representing three different time periods: NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands – German national democratic party), DVU (Deutsches Volkunion – German People's Union) and AfD (Alternative für Deutschland – Alternative for Germany) will be main parties dealt in this chapter and one of the main topics of this thesis paper itself. While secondary values of these parties varied, the core values always remained the same: First, these parties are xenophobic and anti-immigration, second, they oppose the European Union and third, they value greatly German identity. These traits will be examined in depth later in the chapter for each of the three parties.

Furthermore, to better understand which are parties that this thesis paper will deal with, this chapter will analyze the history, manifestos and successes of each party. Moreover, the chapter will try to explain how said parties fared in Eastern Germany and the possible reasons and implications to such experiences. Furthermore, NPD and DVU had a short lived regional success; the former lived and is still living a long life for a populist party¹⁸(more than 50 years old), yet it was not successful for long; DVU also had been successful in regional politics, but only for brief time. This chapter will try to inquire why these parties have been successful only for short time and what caused their decline in electoral success.

3.1 Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands

The “Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands” is one of the extreme rightwing parties that existed for the most time in Germany, being founded only in 1964 and being still alive . The party was founded as a successor of the DRP (Deutsches Reichspartei – German Reich Party). Even if many sources define DRP as a party with neo-Nazi tendencies, it is hard to define the NPD as a neo-Nazi party, also because it was illegal to establish a National-Socialist political party under

¹⁸ Populist Parties do not usually live long lives (Taggart 2004)

Western German law and identification of NPD with Nazis has been strongly opposed by the party itself, even by legal actions. Still, NPD was founded by former members of National Socialist Workers Party (NSDAP)¹⁹ and holds extreme rightwing²⁰ and ultranationalist political views¹⁹.

“Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands” was founded in 1964 as a unification of splinter extreme rightwing groups and parties²¹; right after its foundation, the media started to label the party as neo-Nazi. The party opposed these allegations vehemently, often recurring to legal suits: The life of the party was at risk, as “undemocratic” and neo-Nazi parties were not allowed by Western German law, therefore NPD had to make clear their disassociation with neo-Nazism. Yet, just one year after the party’s foundation, the party started losing law suits and, as a consequence, it stopped using legal channels to defend itself against these allegations and instead started using disciplinary actions towards its members that were “too open” about neo-Nazism²².

The party fell in decline in the 1970’s following infighting and scandals of being allegedly associated with violent rightwing extremist groups. Since the mid-eighties NPD adopted an anti-migration rhetoric²³ as core value; this granted the party survival, but with very limited electoral success: In fact, the party would never reach again 1968/1969 levels ever again. As successive parts of the chapter will outline, after reunification the party found fertile grounds to relatively grow on the regional level in Eastern Germany; yet, as stated above, NPD would never reach the success it had in the end of the sixties but other extreme rightwing populist parties would.

3.1.1 Party Program and Characteristics: “Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands” is an extreme rightwing populist party and its party program contains unsurprising conservative characteristics; yet the decision-making process of NPD is surely uncommon. In fact, NPD acts through “Active Minority”: Within an hour of the beginning of the party’s meetings, members can make decisions, regardless the number of present members²⁴.

¹⁹ STEPHEN E. ATKINS 2004: “Encyclopedia of Modern Worldwide Extremists and Extremist Groups”; Greenwood Publishing Group; Pages 106 - 107

²⁰ Bundesministerium des Innern – German Ministry of Internal Affairs 2010; Page 7

²¹ Encyclopedia Britannica

²² LOWELL DITTMER 1969: “The German NPD: A Psycho-Sociological Analysis of ‘Neo-Naziism’”; Comparative Politics 2:1; Pages 82 - 84

²³ CAS MUDDE (2000): “Germany: Extremism without Successful Parties”; Parliamentary Affairs; Page 457 - 459

²⁴ DITTMER 1969; Page 80

It would have been interesting to retrieve electoral programs dating back to the nineties, but these are extremely difficult to find, therefore I decided to consider today's electoral program dating to 2017. Considering today's electoral program, for the upcoming 2017 national elections, NPD has three core points: anti-Migration and anti-Islam action, anti-Globalization and anti-Poverty and anti-EU and anti-NATO.

The former core point refers to the party's historical opposition to immigration and immigrants; NPD favors a campaign to help German citizens and declares itself "For the German People"²⁵. The program also identifies the "Asylum Lobby" as "Terrorism helpers"²⁶; moreover, in this regard the party declares to be the only one in Germany to act with Germans' interest in the mind, accusing even the rightwing extremist "Alternative für Deutschland" not to want to stop the "mass migration process".

NPD is also, unsurprisingly, anti-poverty. The party wishes to reallocate resources allegedly used to help migrants to the German population: In fact, NPD believes that if the resources currently used by asylum-seekers would be enough to drastically decrease poverty²⁷. Furthermore, NPD supports a strong, independent and sovereign Germany and places itself in strong opposition to globalization, the European Union and NATO²⁸.

3.1.2 History of Electoral Success: "Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands" had solid electoral results in the West during its first five years of life: In fact, it managed to achieve 9,8% in Baden Württemberg in 1968 and 8,8% in Bremen one year before²⁹. Observers have given the responsibility of this positive electoral trend to the "Großkoalition" between SPD-CDU: A collation of the center-left (SPD) and the center-right (CDU) that also occurred in the sixties, this very centrist coalition drove the rightwing electorate to vote for NPD³⁰.

The electoral results of the party from the seventies until the late nineties have always been towards zero. After reunification, NPD found a number of voters in the newly established Eastern Länder, supporting its anti-immigration and anti-foreigner campaign: The party managed to obtain 9,2%

²⁵ "Ja zum Deutschen Volk!" – Translation by the Author (NPD Wahlprogramm 2017 Sektion 2)

²⁶ "Asyl Lobby = Terror Helfer" – Translation by the Author (NPD Wahlprogramm 2017 Page 9)

²⁷ NPD Wahlprogramm 2017; Page 9

²⁸ NPD Wahlprogramm 2017; Page 26

²⁹ Wahlrecht.de

³⁰ DITTMER 1969; Page 101

in Sachsen in 2004; 7,3% in Mecklenburg Vorpommern in 2006 and again in Sachsen 5,6% in 2009. For the first time after almost forty years, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, NPD returned to achieve relatively strong electoral results. Nowadays NPD does not fare that well anymore³¹, mainly because it is being obscured by a more appealing extreme rightwing populist party: “Alternative für Deutschland”.

3.2 Deutsches Volkunion

“Deutsches Volkunion” has been an extreme rightwing populist party from 1987 to 2011. Before German reunification its electoral success was very limited: In fact, only after reunification the party achieved superior results, both in the West and in the East, even if the most impressive victory of DVU had been in Sachsen-Anhalt in 1998³².

Millionaire rightwing publisher Gerhard Frey created “Deutsches Volkunion” as a movement in the 1970s; alongside, he also created rightwing action groups and magazines to support the party. In 1987 “Deutsches Volkunion” became a party and run in elections for the first time. DVU begun its operations and political activity in Bremen and Bremerhaven with limiting foreign immigration as a banner. In the Bremen state council and Bremerhaven city council, DVU obtained 3,4% and 5,4% respectively: That was the first time after almost twenty years that an extreme populist party gained a seat in a state council³³. DVU failed, though, to achieve an impressive result at the European elections in 1989: Regardless the Frey’s support with 17 million DM, the party only managed to obtain 1,6%. In 1991 the party returned from the dead, membership grew from 18600 in 1988 to 25000 in 1991 and with reunification DVU started to obtain even more impressive electoral results³⁴. In 2009 Gerhard Frey decided not to run for reelection as chairman, in 2011 the DVU merged with NPD and the party ceased existence.

3.2.1 Party Program and Characteristics: As DVU is a defunct party and the website is dead, it has been hard to gain access to party related manifestos, programs and material; yet, I

³¹ Wahlrecht.de

³² Wahlrecht.de

³³ CAS MUDDE 2002: “The Ideology of the Extreme Right”; Manchester University Press; Pages 60 – 64.

³⁴ Mudde 2002; Pages 63 – 65.

managed to find a “snapshot” of the DVU website taken way back (around 2000) and in that way, I managed to obtain the original 1999 party manifesto: One year before, “Deutsches Volksunion” recorded its biggest electoral victories and therefore I deem this party program one of the most important documents to evaluate the party’s values and characteristics.

In the 1999 DVU electoral program, I outlined three important topics that will help to identify the traits and characteristics of this party. The first topic regards the “preservation of German identity”: DVU proposes to limit considerably immigration, enhance a German national identity and even proposing to set up an institution to defend and preserve German language.

The second topic deals with sovereignty: DVU positions itself against the European Union and strongly opposes the Euro in favor of the DM (Deutsche Mark), moreover DVU argues that the Oder-Neiße border with Poland is against international law, suggesting that German borders should expand further East.

The third topic regards “Equal Rights for Germans”: DVU is strongly against the responsibility of future generations for the past crimes committed by “the National Socialists and the Communists”³⁵.

From the manifesto DVU is clearly an extreme rightwing party with ultra-conservative values, against immigration and even arguing that the German Eastern borders are against international law (hinting that they should be expanding).

3.2.2 History of Electoral Success: “Deutsches Volksunion” has been a successful party, electorally speaking, only in a few occasions and it did never achieve electoral results as impressive as AfD would have later done. DVU had its golden age between the early nineties and the early two-thousands, in this period the party’s results seemed massive for it being an extreme rightwing populist party; yet just ten years later, with the rise of AfD, these results for this type of party would have become almost “the standard” in Eastern Germany.

“Deutsches Volksunion” achieved positive results both in West and East: 6,2% in Bremen in 1991, 6,3% in Schleswig Holstein in 1992 and 6,1% in Brandenburg in 2004. The true massive electoral result for an extreme rightwing populist party at the time, was the impressive 12,9% achieved in

³⁵ DVU Wahlprogramm 1999; Page 2

Sachsen Anhalt in 1998: In this case, DVU obtained sixteen “chairs” in the Land parliament. It was the first time in German post-war history that an extreme rightwing populist party scored that high³⁶.

Observers assessed the reasons of DVU success in Eastern Germany and particularly in Sachsen Anhalt to be multiple. One possible cause is even hypothesized to be parental unemployment³⁷: After the “Wende” unemployment in Eastern Germany peaked up to 20%, in this time the transition from planned to market economy had become extensively painful for former GDR citizens. Sachsen Anhalt was not an exception to this trend, instead it was one of the New Länder with higher unemployment rates, peaking at 22%³⁸. This theory hypothesizes that parenthood unemployment might shift children’s political behavior towards the far right³⁷. Of course, other causes such as asylum quotas and xenophobia played a major role in DVU’s impressive 1998 electoral result.

After its peak in 1998, DVU started fading over time³⁶ until its merger in 2011, when the party disappeared. Observers justify the collapse of “Deutsches Volkunion” on multiple grounds: First, DVU lacked severely a party structure, as it was mostly controlled from Gerhard Frey’s house in Munich. Second, both politicians and the public opinion acknowledged that DVU parliament members were largely incompetent³⁹.

DVU managed impressive results for the time, as it was the first extreme rightwing populist party to muster more than 10% since the end of World War II; yet, its electoral results seem meager in comparison to the next party that will be analyzed: “Alternative für Deutschland”.

³⁶ Walhrecht.de

³⁷ THOMAS SIEDLER (2007): “Does Parental Unemployment Cause Right-Wing Extremism?”; German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin); Pages 3.

³⁸ MARTIN EICHLER; MICHAEL LECHNER (1998): “An Evaluation of Public Employment Programmes in the East German State of Sachsen-Anhalt”; Universitaet Mannheim, Universitaet St. Gallen; Page 7.

³⁹ DAVID ART (2004): “The Wild, Wild East: Why the DVU Doesn’t Matter and Why the NPD Does”; German Politics & Society, Vol. 22 No. 4 (73); Pages 125 - 127

3.3 *Alternative für Deutschland*

“Alternative für Deutschland” (AfD) has been surely one of the fastest growing parties in the German political chessboard, in the last five years. The party is also particularly successful in gathering members: In 2014 AfD could count just about 10’000 members⁴⁰; yet, already in 2016, the number increased to more than 28’000⁴¹ (280% increase!). This result is particularly impressive considering that AfD is only five years old. On social media, “Alternative für Deutschland” managed even to surpass Germany’s traditional parties: Now AfD with about 346’000 likes has more Facebook visibility than CDU (about 143’000) and SPD (about 158’000) combined^{42,43,44}. Nowadays, AfD does not only have an incredible membership increase trend and massive visibility, but also extraordinary electoral results.

“Alternative für Deutschland” began its political life in September 2012, when former journalist for “Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung” Konrad Adam, former CDU member Alexander Gauland and Hamburg university macroeconomics professor Bernd Lucke, decided to create the “Wahlalternative 2013” for the 2013 general election. In February 2013 Adam, Lucke and businesswoman Frauke Petry founded “Alternative für Deutschland”. Until the second half of 2015, AfD was surely conservative, but it did not show particularly populist or extreme-right traits⁴⁵. Yet, since July 2015, as party leader Bernd Lucke was ousted and Frauke Petry took his position as AfD’s chairwoman, the party underwent a complete change of direction pointing towards extreme rightwing populism⁴⁶.

3.3.1 Electoral Program: Often populist parties’ lack of core values⁴⁷ dictates their one-dimensional electoral program, with said party focusing majorly only on the topic that made it emerge as a party (e.g. Immigration...). On the other hand, “Alternative für Deutschland” affirms itself as a multidimensional party with an extensive ninety-six-page long party program: The

⁴⁰ KAI ARZHEIMER 2015: “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?”; West European Politics, 38:3; Page 541.

⁴¹ AfD Kompakt. (Official AfD News Outlet)

⁴² AfD Official Facebook Page

⁴³ CDU Official Facebook Page

⁴⁴ SPD Official Facebook Page

⁴⁵ ARZHEIMER 2015; Page 546

⁴⁶ GREVEN 2016; Pages 3 - 4

⁴⁷ TAGGART 2004; Page 275

values of the party, in most fields, are drawn from the extreme rightwing populist pool. The program focuses mainly on sovereignty, security, preservation of traditions, immigration, Islam and gender.

“Alternative für Deutschland” proposes itself as a Eurosceptic party: In fact, the party is anti-Euro and advocates for a complete overhaul of the European Union, asserting that it should be an institution with facilitating trade between European countries as main objective. Moreover, “Alternative für Deutschland” perceives that security in Germany is increasingly declining to worrisome levels: In fact, AfD’s main objective is to strengthen internal and external security. The latter also involves substantially increasing funding to the army; according to AfD, this will allow other European powers to see Germany on their same level. This “remilitarization” would also be achieved with compulsory military service for young Germans between the age of 18 and 25: The return to military conscription is one of the main objectives of AfD regarding security.

Regarding traditions and culture, “Alternative für Deutschland” is without doubt on the rightwing side of the political spectrum. AfD advocates for the return and subsidizing of the traditional family, this would have as side-effect the increase in birth rates. “Alternative für Deutschland” positions itself strongly against immigration, immigrants and Islam: In fact, AfD perceives the growing number of Muslim immigrants as a worrying menace for Germany and the German culture⁴⁸. Lastly, “Alternative für Deutschland’s” electoral program is completely against new Gender culture that broke through recently in Germany; moreover, AfD is against “Gender mainstreaming” in German society and against exposing this ideology to children; according to AfD, the national government should make sure that the traditional gender roles of men and women should be taught since Kindergarten⁴⁹.

3.3.2 PEGIDA: “PEGIDA” is an interesting phenomenon born in Dresden in 2014; “PEGIDA” stands for “Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes” (European Patriots Against the Islamization of the West). It is a movement that comprises multiple protests against mass immigration and Islam. Between December 2014 and January 2015,

⁴⁸ AfD Wahlprogramm 2017; Pages 2 – 6 (The actual “Wahlprogramm” covers insights on such issues)

⁴⁹ AfD Wahlprogramm 2017; Pages 53 – 56.

PEGIDA managed to gather more than 110'000 people in multiple protests, peaking with 25'000 on the 12th January 2015⁵⁰.

The positions of “Alternative für Deutschland” and PEGIDA are near in the theme of migrations: So near that the media has already linked the two⁵¹⁵²⁵³. Some observers declare that AfD adopted anti-establishment rhetoric from PEGIDA: For instance, the expression “Lügenpresse” (“lying press”)⁵⁴. Moreover, AfD leader Frauke Petry announced that German police should fire at incoming immigrants if necessary⁵⁵: A position that is surely shared with the majority of PEGIDA protesters.

3.3.3 AfD's Electoral Success: “Alternative für Deutschland” mustered impressive results in Land elections both East and West Germany: 15,1% in Baden-Württemberg in 2016 and 12,6% in Rhineland Pfalz on the same year. The most impressive results, though, have been in Eastern Germany, in which the electoral trend shows a very rapid growth in its electoral share. AfD managed to achieve 12,2% in Brandenburg in 2014 and 10,6% in Thüringen in 2014. The results mustered in Eastern Germany in 2016, though, are impressively almost double than the 2014 electoral outcomes: 20,8% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in 2016 and 24,3% in Sachsen Anhalt in 2016, in both cases AfD managed to be the second party per representatives in the Land parliaments⁵⁶.

According to some observers, such a massive performance of AfD in the East is not only caused by economic elements, instead the reasons are also to be searched in perceived inferiority many Eastern Germans experience in relation with their Western counterparts; furthermore, such results are also to relate to existing xenophobia and a perceived decline in service performance⁵⁷.

⁵⁰ Polizei Sachsen – Sachsen Police Department (2015)

⁵¹ BBC News (2016)

⁵² DW (2017)

⁵³ The Local de (2017)

⁵⁴ BBC News (2016)

⁵⁵ BBC News (2016)

⁵⁶ Wahlrecht.de

⁵⁷ JOACHIM RAGNITZ (2016): “Wahlerfolge der AfD im Osten – Reflex auf die ökonomische Lage?“, Wirtschaftsdienst 96; Pages 702 – 703.

The above analyzed extreme rightwing political parties will be the main subjects of this thesis paper's research in trying to understand whether the economic, social and cultural shocks caused by the reunification process paved the way of success to extreme rightwing populist parties in Eastern Germany. The next two chapters will focus on xenophobia, perception of extreme crisis and the conditions of Eastern Germany during the reunification process and how did all of these bring a relatively large percentage of the population to favor extreme rightwing populist parties.

4. Reaction to Extreme Crisis

“[...] populism is a reaction to a sense of extreme crisis. Populism is not the politics of the stable, ordered polity but comes as an accompaniment to change, crisis and challenge. This crisis may well stem from a sense of moral decay but it always spills over into a critique of politics and into the sense that politics as usual cannot deal with the unusual conditions of crisis.”⁵⁸

The crisis taken into consideration in this thesis paper would be the perceived immigrant invasion and the deep economic crisis that struck Eastern Germany immediately after the beginning of the unification process. This chapter will, therefore, deal with xenophobia and the economic crisis; furthermore, this chapter will also examine whether these conditions are a consequence of the cultural, social and economic shocks Eastern Germany experienced in the early 90s. Moreover, in this chapter, I will investigate whether these conditions influenced the populist extreme rightwing political parties at the time.

First, the section of the chapter will deal with xenophobia and the perceived sense of invasion: It will handle with the perception of ethnically non-German people in Eastern Germany, as the GDR and the Eastern Länder of united Germany had always had very limited foreign populations within their borders (slightly more than 1% circa⁵⁹). In addition to this, the chapter will also focus on populist extreme rightwing parties' electoral programs that include xenophobic remarks: This to

⁵⁸ TAGGART 2004; Page 275

⁵⁹ IRELAND 1997; Page 561

understand whether the migrant situation was perceived as an extreme crisis and whether populist extreme rightwing parties reacted to this. The presence of xenophobic traits in the studied parties will also verify (or deny) the first independent variable.

Secondly the chapter will deal with the economic crisis that struck Eastern Germany in the nineties: Initially I will examine how the shift from planned to market economy worked for former GDR Länder. Then, the chapter will investigate whether the economic crisis was part of populist extreme rightwing political parties' narrative and whether it was perceived as an extreme crisis.

4.1 Xenophobia

4.1.1 Invasion: In Eastern Germany, economic crisis and widespread xenophobia have been arguably some of the largest issues in the immediate aftermath of German reunification. The explanations for the latter are on three distinct approaches: Purely economic, socioeconomic and an issue of national identity.

The purely economic approach comprises the negative economic effects of reunification, specifically low employment rates: This triggered a perceived fierce competition for jobs between foreigners and natives⁶⁰. The socioeconomic approach, on the other hand, does not imply any true impoverishment, instead it does stress the natives' perceived disadvantage in respect to foreigners in receiving benefits such as welfare, jobs and housing, even if this disadvantage does and did not exist. The third and last approach deals with national identity and argues that unification caused a clash between Eastern Germans and foreigners, as the former are uncertain about their role in new and unified German society and are fearful to become second class citizens⁶¹.

⁶⁰ IRELAND 1997: Page 543

⁶¹ IRELAND 1997; Pages 544 -550

Aside from the three approaches outlined above, traces of xenophobia in Eastern Germany date back to the German Democratic Republic. The GDR had always had a very slim percentage of foreigners on the total population: In fact, foreigners accounted for only 1.2% in 1989⁶².

In the GDR, foreigners lived almost completely socially isolated: They lived in walled compounds clustered next to factories in the peripheries of cities; social interaction was to minimum, foreign residents were subject to security checks in entrance and exit from the compounds and in the areas, there were often very few bars and discos where foreign citizens could have leisure time⁶¹. It was very rare for GDR citizens to see people ethnically different from them.

Some of these “foreign centers” were placed in small urban centers or even rural regions and in the communities where these compounds were placed there was a slight perception of invasion: “If a couple of Mozambicans appeared in a small town, for example, rice could completely disappear from local store shelves” (Ireland p549). In small local bars, even few foreigners could trigger the perception of an invasion. On the other side, GDR citizens expressed some xenophobic traits: Soon after Skinheads and neo-Nazis started to sprawl in Western Germany, their Eastern counterparts, who followed Western radio and television, started to spread in the East. Neo-Nazis living in the GDR accused foreigners to spread AIDS, to assault Eastern German women and to receive better welfare treatment than native citizens. The situation slightly escalated during the economic crisis of the eighties, as natives saw foreigners as competitors in getting consumer goods⁶¹; yet, reunification brought the most critical issues, as the existing tensions intensified.

After reunification, following an extraordinary immigrant influx, the central German government decided to create a quota system, where the old and new Länder were to accept migrants based on their population⁶³. Eastern Länder were on the verge of collapse, as they had never seen such big foreign populations so large and administration workers were still adapting to the changes the “Wende” brought. Asylum seekers in the East were placed in “Central Processing Areas” (“Zentrale Aufnahmestelle” - ZAST) where they waited to be reallocated in the assigned communities. Although only 5% of asylum seekers were accepted, the others were not forced to leave; the outcome was that ZASTs became very rapidly insanely populated until 1992, when riots

⁶² IRELAND 1997; Page 561

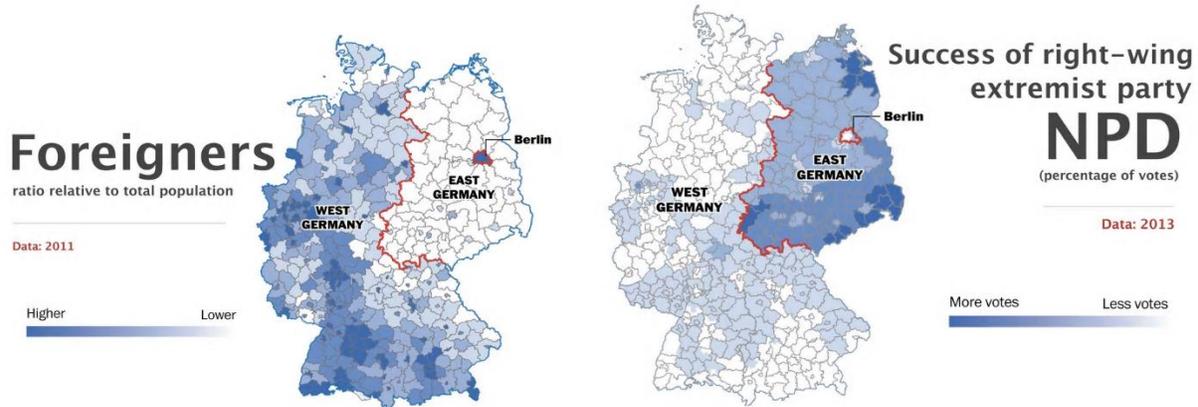
⁶³ IRELAND 1997; Pages 551 -554

exploded in Rostock against the local ZAST. In this case skinheads and neo-Nazis firebombed the ZAST, as the cheering neighborhood looked to the act with sympathy.

This episode was just the iceberg tip of violence against foreigners. In Eastern Germany, the whole first half of the nineties is spotted with several violent incidents against asylum seekers and foreign minorities such as stabbing and murder⁶⁴.

Insofar xenophobia already existed in the GDR, it mostly exploded in after German reunification. Therefore, rampant xenophobia is arguably an offspring of cultural, social and economic shocks that occurred during the reunification process; the next paragraph will examine populist extreme rightwing political parties' that obtained substantial electoral success in Eastern Germany after reunification and their electoral programs, to better understand whether xenophobia had been used as an electoral weapon at the time and today.

4.1.2 Parties and Foreign Immigration: The case seems a paradox, but, as the following chart shows, in Eastern Germany there are the least foreigners of the whole country and the most support for populist, anti-immigration extreme rightwing political parties.



Picture 1⁶⁵

Eastern Länder have a long history of support for populist extreme rightwing political parties: The cases are multiple. “Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands”, for instance, achieved a staggering 7,3% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern again in 2004; in the same year, in Sachsen NPD

⁶⁴ IRELAND 1997; Pages 559 - 562

⁶⁵ Source: Washington Post; Noack 2014; “The Berlin Wall fell 25 years ago, but Germany is still divided”;

even managed to obtain 9,2%⁶⁶. If NPD were not a party founded by several NSDAP (National socialist party) members⁶⁷, these results would not have been stunning; yet, NPD is also still considered by the media basically a neo-Nazi party⁶⁸.

NPD is not, though, the only case: “Deutsches Volkunion” is another populist extreme rightwing political party, also founded by various former NSDAP members and considered in sometimes a neo-Nazi party by the media⁶⁹. This party obtained 12,9% in Sachsen-Anhalt in 1998, achieving the fourth position per votes. At the same time, an extreme rightwing populist party could have never hoped to achieve the same electoral results in Western Germany from the late sixties, up until the creation of “Alternative für Deutschland” in 2013⁶⁶.

“Alternative für Deutschland” has been, though, the most successful extreme rightwing populist party since World War II, as it managed to obtain impressive electoral results in the last four years. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern’s last Land elections (2016) AfD achieved 20,8%, claiming the second place per number of votes; In the same year in Sachsen-Anhalt AfD obtained 24,3%⁶⁶.

In looking for the presence of associations between migrants an extreme crisis, I decided to focus primarily on AfD’s national and Land electoral program on two grounds. The first is that the “Deutsches Volkunion” electoral program of 1999 contains many notions against immigration, even if it is never regarded as an extreme crisis; it is probable that other sources pointed towards DVU’s perception of immigration as an extreme crisis, but I could not find any. The second ground is that “Alternative für Deutschland” is recently obtaining outstanding electoral results.

After carefully reading AfD general and regional electoral programs, I found interesting results: There are clear association to the immigration situation in Germany and a perceived condition of extreme crisis.

In AfD’s national electoral program, the first sentence under the paragraph “Asylum Immigration” is: “An international migration of historical dimensions is challenging Europe”^{70 71}, moreover AfD

⁶⁶ Wahlrecht.de

⁶⁷ ATKINS 2004; Page 106

⁶⁸ Süddeutsche Zeitung (2010); The Local de (2009); The Local de (2008)

⁶⁹ RAND C. LEWIS (1996): “The Neo-Nazis and German Unification”; Greenwood Publishing Group; Page 74.

⁷⁰ AfD Programm für Deutschland 2016, p. 59

⁷¹ „Eine Völkerwanderung historischen Ausmaßes fordert Europa heraus.“ – Translation by the Author

proposes also to close EU external borders: “The AfD is therefore committed to a complete closure of EU external borders [...]” (AfD, “Program für Deutschland 2016, p 59)⁷². This already points to the fact that AfD perceives the migrant influx as something to be avoided (possible index of xenophobia) and considers it a crisis, to which it proposes a reaction: The closure of borders.

Analyzing AfD’s Land electoral program for Sachsen-Anhalt, where the party obtained 24,3% in last elections⁷³, the xenophobic rhetoric is amplified. The immigration related paragraph states: “The immigration, asylum and integration policy of established parties goes directly to a social catastrophe”^{74 75}.

“Through the unrestrained influx of millions of immigrants who do not speak our language, which come from cultures which are deeply foreign to us, and which mostly have no special qualifications, parallel societies are cemented. Integration becomes impossible. Social tensions to an unprecedented extent are coming to us. [...] Immigration cannot be a general-purpose solution to the societal aberrations and failures of the established economic and social policy because it creates more problems than it solves!”^{74 76}.

AfD’s Sachsen-Anhalt regional program contains unambiguous evidence of the way the party perceives the influx of migrants in Germany as a policy that will lead to “social catastrophe” and therefore an extreme crisis. Moreover, the manifesto clearly outlines in an arguable xenophobic way that “integration is impossible” and that immigrants cause “social tensions to an unprecedented extent”. “Alternative für Deutschland” positions itself against foreigners in a xenophobic way, moreover it perceives the mass migration phenomenon as an extreme crisis.

4.1.3 Xenophobia: Thriving German extreme rightwing populist parties have surely xenophobia in their DNA and view immigration as an extreme crisis to which they propose a

⁷² “Die AfD setzt sich für eine vollständige Schließung der EU-Außengrenzen ein.“ – Translation by the Author

⁷³ Wahlrecht.de

⁷⁴ AfD, Wahlprogramm zum Landtagswahl Sachsen-Anhalt März 2016, page 23

⁷⁵ „Die Einwanderungs-, Asyl- und Integrationspolitik der etablierten Parteien führt geradewegs in eine soziale Katastrophe.“ – Translation by the Author

⁷⁶ „Durch den ungebremsten Zustrom von Millionen von Einwanderern, die unsere Sprache nicht sprechen, die aus Kulturen stammen, die uns zutiefst fremd sind, und die zumeist über keine besondere Qualifikation verfügen, werden Parallelgesellschaften zementiert. Integration wird unmöglich. Soziale Spannungen in einem bislang ungekannten Ausmaß kommen auf uns zu. [...] Immigration kann keine Allzwecklösung für gesellschaftliche Fehlentwicklungen und Versäumnisse der etablierten Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik sein, denn sie schafft mehr Probleme als sie löst!“ – Translation by the Author

solution. Moreover, xenophobia may be a trait caused by the cultural, social and economic shocks during the “Wende” and German reunification: In the GDR, there were few foreigners and, as explained above, the immigrant quota system adopted after reunification caused extreme rightwing rallies; moreover, the population to be more supportive towards radical rightwing parties. This shock continues today, as the number of foreigners is still relatively low in Eastern Germany⁷⁷; yet the support for populist extreme rightwing parties, that represent mass migration as an extreme crisis, is now higher than ever there.

Therefore, both independent variables of xenophobia and reaction to extreme crisis are verified. The next paragraph will examine the economic crisis, whether this depression developed from the “Wende” and German reunification; moreover, it will study whether extreme rightwing populist parties’ programs depict the economic crisis as an extreme crisis.

4.2 Economic Crisis

When East and West Germany unified in 1990, a huge wave of enthusiasm hit Eastern Germany. Helmut Kohl, erstwhile chancellor of the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany – Western Germany), promised “flourishing landscapes” in the East⁷⁸ and former GDR citizens were ready to reap the fruits of capitalism. Though, the transition from planned to market economy did not go as softly as expected: In fact, although the enormous transfers from Western Germany to Eastern Germany, former GDR Länder experienced a heavy economic crisis characterized by overall low GDP growth and extreme high unemployment rates.

4.2.1 Some Data: After the “Wende”, the GDR registered a loss in GDP of 15,6% in 1990 and 22.7% in 1991; after reunification, Western Germany started providing Eastern Germany with substantial DM transfers and, unsurprisingly, GDP started to rise. Yet this proved to be a partial and short-term result: In fact, not only the unemployment rate kept rising at staggering rates, but

⁷⁷ As picture 1 outlines

⁷⁸ BBC News (2000)

GDP growth started also slow down at the same rate. In 1998, when the populist extreme rightwing party “Deutsches Volkunion” obtained an impressive electoral result (12,9%) in Sachsen-Anhalt, Eastern Germany was experiencing an almost flat annual GDP growth of 0,6%, unemployment rate at 19,5% and non-employment rate⁷⁹ of 35%: As the chart below shows, these are not even the worst results recorded between 1990 and 2000⁸⁰.

Percent

Year	GDP Growth		Unemployment Rate		Non-Employment Rate	
	East	West	East	West	East	West
1991	-22,7	4,6	10,3	6,3	26,8	27,1
1992	7,3	1,5	14,8	6,6	34	21,1
1993	8,7	-2,6	15,8	8,2	35,1	27,9
1994	8,1	1,4	16	9,2	34,1	28,5
1995	3,5	1,4	14,9	9,3	33,4	28,7
1996	1,7	0,6	16,7	10,1	34,2	29
1997	0,3	1,6	19,5	11	35	28,5
1998	0,6	2,3	19,5	10,5	35,2	27,9
1999	1	1,6	19	9,9	34,8	26,9

Picture 2⁸¹

On the table above, it is clearly visible the GDP growth slowdown that occurred in the second half of the nineties: Although this happened both in the Western and Eastern Germany, the former was backed by a stable economy and it still managed to have a higher average growth than former GDR Länder. Unemployment rate in the Eastern Germany constantly escalated throughout the decade, being more than double than Western Germany in 1992 and almost double in 1999. The harsh international situation could not have been the only and major cause of this economic hardship, because otherwise Western Germany would have experienced an economic crisis as hard or even

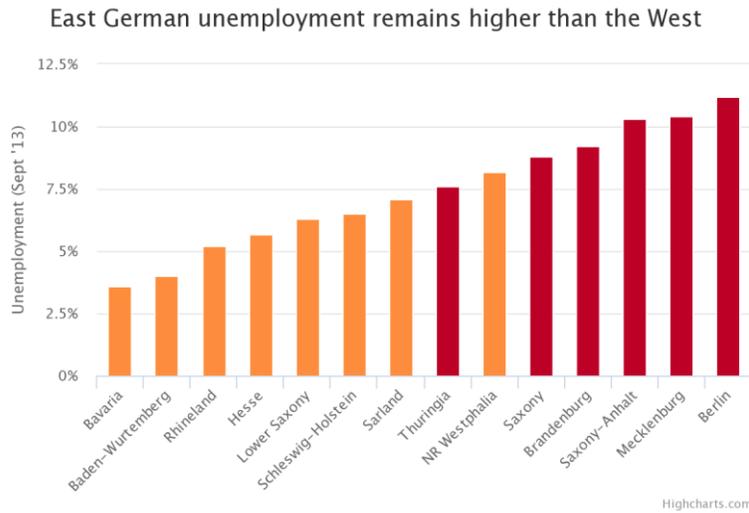
⁷⁹ Defined as 100 minus the employed share of the working-age population.

⁸⁰ MICHAEL C. BURDA, JENNIFER HUNT (2001): “From Reunification to Economic Integration: Productivity and the Labor Market in Eastern Germany”; Brookings Papers on Economic Activity; Page 6.

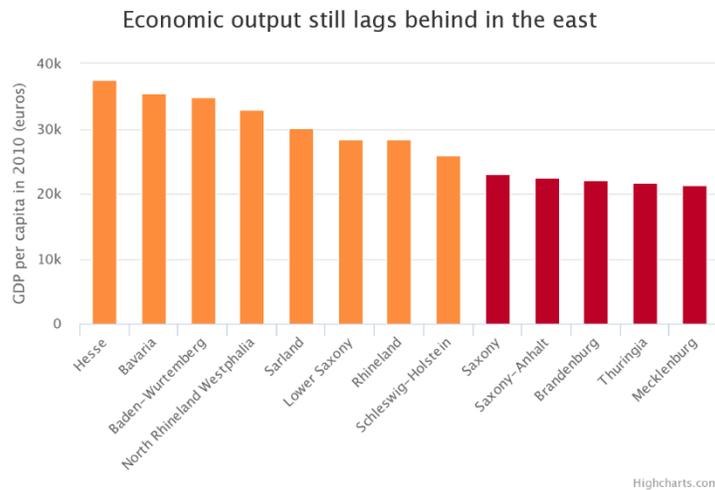
⁸¹ Source: Burda, Hunt 2001; “From Reunification to Economic Integration: Productivity and the Labor Market in Eastern Germany”; page 6; reformulated by the author of the thesis paper, without changing the original content.

harder, given the monetary transfers from Western to Eastern Germany. Arguably, the cause of such an economic crisis is majorly the transition from planned economy to market economy.

As the following charts show, still today Eastern Germany lags economically in a perceivable way, with averagely lower GDP and higher unemployment rates than Western Germany.



Picture 3⁸²



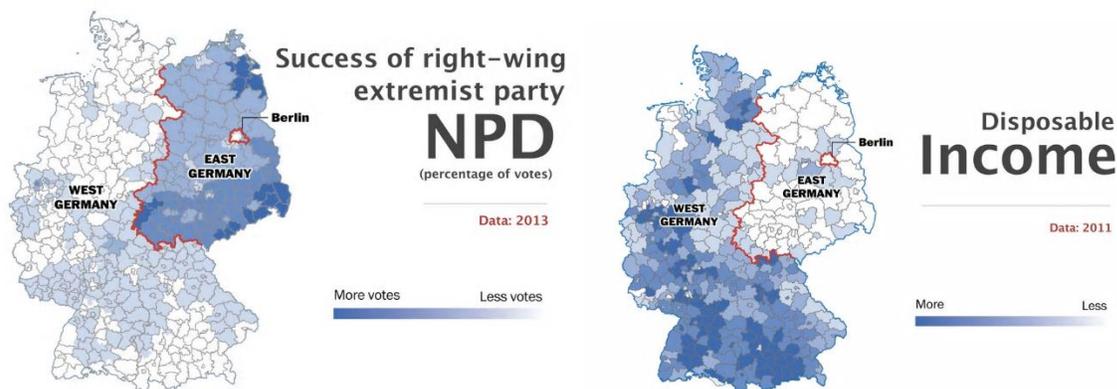
Picture 4⁸³

4.2.2 Economic Crisis, Extreme Crisis?: The experience in Eastern Germany shows that voter support for populist extreme rightwing political parties generally increased in presence of

⁸² Source: The Telegraph; “Seven Charts that show how Germany is still not a unified country”; Kahn 2015

⁸³ Source: The Telegraph; “Seven Charts that show how Germany is still not a unified country”; Kahn 2015

economic difficulties. A clear example would be “Deutsches Volkunion” impressive electoral result of 12.9% in 1998 in Sachsen Anhalt: GDP growth in Eastern Germany was 0.6%, one fourth of Western Germany, and the unemployment rate was 19.5%, almost double than the Western Germany⁸⁴. Yet, I could not demonstrate that AfD, DVU or NPD perceived at the time and today the economic crisis as an extreme crisis. Mostly due to a lack of party programs, manifestos and other part material from the nineties decade, but also due to the theme of economic crisis and the economic difference between West and East Germany not being consistently amplified in AfD’s party programs; only in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Land program there is a reference to equal pay between East and West Germany; yet I do not believe this is a satisfactory ground to assume “Alternative für Deutschland” views the economic crisis as an extreme crisis, as it does for instance with migration. Therefore, even though economic crisis could have plausibly influence voters to redirect their preferences towards populist extreme rightwing parties, the theme of economic crisis is not dealt by these parties in a major or extensive way. It holds that Eastern Länder, that are poorer than their Western counterparts, vote comparatively way more for extreme rightwing parties as the charts below show.



Picture 5⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Picture 2

⁸⁵ Source: Washington Post; Noack 2014; “The Berlin Wall fell 25 years ago, but Germany is still divided”

4.3 Chapter Summary

“Alternative für Deutschland” is the party this thesis paper majorly focuses on, also because it is the only extreme rightwing populist party that managed to achieve really important electoral results. “Deutsches Volkunion” success in 1998 in Sachsen Anhalt was surely impressive; yet no extreme rightwing populist party managed to obtain results like AfD in the past year.

This chapter shows and explains that “reaction to extreme crisis” is a very present feature of “Alternative für Deutschland”, that therefore classifies as populist. This extreme crisis is, though, caused more from a perceived invasion, rather than the economic crisis; after all, AfD is a party that is mainly concerned with xenophobia, immigration and Islam⁸⁶.

This chapter also explains how xenophobia may be a legacy from the cultural shock of the “Wende” and German reunification: The ethnical isolation of GDR citizens and the introduction of the quota system that reallocated asylum seekers and economic migrants in the whole German, caused a cultural and social shock in Eastern Germany. Xenophobia is also a large component in AfD’s party narrative verifying another independent variable.

What instead is sincerely unexpected, is the quasi-absence of the economic crisis in AfD’s party narrative and electoral program. This theme might be present in secondary sources, but it is not surely treated as an extreme crisis, as this independent variable requires.

Still the reaction to an extreme crisis is very present in AfD’s party narrative: Mainly for xenophobia, as the economic crisis does not have importance in the party program; yet the independent variable is still verified.

5. Reunification

This chapter will deal with the process of reunification between East and West Germany in 1991. This procedure, on these proportions, was never really attempted in modern history and it

⁸⁶ GREVEN 2016; Page 3

demonstrated to be much harder than initially foreseen. In fact, the result was an economic crisis for both the Western and the Eastern Germany, even though the former GDR Länder got hit the most⁸⁷. Still, economics was not the only field that brutally hit the new Eastern Länder: Reunification proved to be especially difficult also because, during the forty years of division, Eastern and Western Germany developed different identities⁸⁸, creating a process of “wall in the mind”, once the two Germanies got reunified⁸⁹. This difference identity and culture culminated with “Ostalgie” (nostalgia of the East - Nostalgia plus Ost)⁹⁰, “Trotzidentität” and contrast with the ruling elite: Each one of these processes will be explained later in the chapter in detail.

Therefore, this chapter will deal with the independent variable of “Contrast with the ruling elite”. Thus, I will base the analysis of whether Eastern Germans have developed the trait of “Contrast with the Ruling Elite” during the reunification process on three grounds: Xenophobia, economic crisis and the development of an Eastern German culture. I will particularly stress the latter analyzing the presence of important and powerful regional politicians: A strong indicator of contrast with the national elite. Moreover, I will also investigate in cases of perception of second class citizenship in the minds of former GDR citizens, as these could possibly be originating from shocks created by the way the reunification process was conducted; furthermore, I will study the potential presence of these factors in populist extreme rightwing political parties.

5.1 Brief History of German Reunification

Before explaining the way the “Wende” and German reunification occurred, it is important to outline some particulars: the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was a dictatorship where the

⁸⁷ Picture 2

⁸⁸ MARC HOWARD (1995): “An East German Ethnicity? Understanding the New Division of Unified Germany”; German Politics and Society, Vol. 13 No.4(37); Page 49.

⁸⁹ HANS-DIETER KLINGEMANN, RICHARD I. HOFFERBERT (1994): “Germany: A New “Wall in the Mind“?”; Journal of Democracy; Vol. 5 No. 1; Page 30.

⁹⁰ DOMINIC BOYER (2006): “Ostalgie and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany”; Public Culture Vol. 16 No. 2; Page 361.

main communist party, the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands”) controlled the parliament. SED had, until the last years of its life, firm grip on the state and the people thanks to the Stasi: Eastern German secret service and secret police (“Staatssicherheit”). The parliament was comprised of the SED and bloc parties such as CDU (Christian Democrats) and SPD (Socialists); yet, although these parties had say in day-to-day decision-making, the only party that decided anything important was SED.

In 1989, Eastern Germany guided by the SED regime, was preparing to celebrate its forty years anniversary of the GDR’s (German Democratic Republic) birth. Almost nobody knew that that same year, history would have changed forever.

The protest culture in the GDR begun way before 1989, but it is in that very year that the protests escalated very quickly. The 9th September 1989 an opposition group, “Neues Forum”, was founded: The objective of this movement was to gather citizens from all professions and social areas and try together to solve the problems in the state. The GDR ministry of interior refused “Neues Forum’s” application of registration; as a result, on the 2nd of October 1989, 10’000 people gathered in Leipzig to protest in favor of the registration of “Neues Forum” and against the lack of democratic values of the SED regime: During the protest policemen and the Stasi arrested and injured many protesters.

The protests continued during the next few days, when the GDR closed its border with another friendly communist state: Czechoslovakia. In this occasion, thousands of protesters demonstrated against the closure of the border and demanded to exit from the country. Also in this case the answer of the police and the Stasi was not peaceful: Protesters were shot with water cannons and hit with truncheons⁹¹.

On the 9th October 1989, more than 100’000 people stood on the streets of Leipzig to protest against the government; the GDR deployed the police and the army; yet the protest took a peaceful course, mainly because the forces of the regime did not receive combat orders. Nine days later Honecker, leader of SED, resigned and participants to protests continued to increase; by the 8th November more than one million people took the streets to protest, the next day new permissive

⁹¹ ANDREAS HADJAR (2003): “Non-violent political protests in East Germany in the 1980s: Protestant Church, opposition groups and the people”; German Politics Vol. 12 No. 3; Pages 108 -111.

travel laws were introduced⁹², the Berlin wall was destroyed and the future for about twenty million Eastern German's begun that day.

5.2 Contrast with the ruling Elite

Reunification has been a troublesome process on many fronts, its difficulty originates from multiple aspects: Differences between Eastern and Western Germans, completely different social and economic consistency and the simple fact that such a process on such a scale has never been done before.

Immediately after reunification, Eastern Germans started valuing regionalism, mainly because they thought that Western politicians were not able or were not interested in resolving problems in Eastern Germany. Consequently, strong Land leaders emerged in Eastern Länder: One striking example would be Kurt Biedenkopf, minister president of Saxony⁹³. Biedenkopf was often regarded as “King Kurt” and was famous for his outspoken contrast Bonn (and later Berlin) politicians, accused not to legislate in the interest of Eastern Länder. Therefore, with this chapter, I will analyze the topic of “contrast with the ruling elite” in Eastern Germany, and the three grounds, on which I argue it is based.

Contrast with the ruling elite, emerges from different grounds; in the case of Eastern Germany, I outlined three distinct grounds that might have established protest vote: The poor administration of migration influxes, bad management of economic policies after the “Wende” and German reunification and the rise of an eastern culture and identity, with different preferences than the West.

5.2.1 Foreigners: As stated in the “xenophobia” chapter, Eastern Germans were not used to have relatively substantial amounts of foreigners within their populations; poor administration of migration influxes and the introduction of the quota system caused major unrest in most of the Eastern Länder. The results are the fires of Rostock 1992 and the success of populist extreme rightwing parties in Eastern Germany. This might be indeed one of the main reasons of protest votes in Eastern Germany, because both “Deutsches Volkunion” and “Alternative für Deutschland” stress in a major way the topic of immigration.

⁹² HADJAR 2006; Pages 109 - 111

⁹³ YODER 2000; Pages 42 – 43

DVU declares that Germany must remain the land of the Germans⁹⁴ and that the party promises to decrease the number of foreigners in the population and stop the increasing immigration influx⁹⁵.

Nowadays, the number of foreigners in Eastern Germany is still relatively low⁹⁶; yet protest vote against the ruling elite, related to immigration still exists. “Alternative für Deutschland” asserts that the growing Muslim population is a menace for Germans, Germany and German culture⁹⁷. Clearly, Eastern Germans agree to an extent to AfD’s anti-immigration ideas, as AfD is the second party per electoral share in many Eastern Länder⁹⁸. Moreover, PEGIDA was born in Dresden (Eastern Germany) and the main duty of the movement was to protest the central government against the migrant intake. Therefore, immigration is still the leading factor in explaining the protest vote of Eastern Germans, who express their dissent against the “Berlin” politicians, too distant to the normal lives of easterners⁹⁹.

The misadministration of immigration influxes is probably the largest cause of contrast with the ruling elite in the East; yet there are also other factors that might explain such a strong protest vote.

5.2.2 Economic Policies: There is no doubt that the reunification process did not completely provide the desired economic outcomes. Unemployment rate rose to unprecedented levels, unseen after World War II, and the GDP growth rate resulted to be way less than economic analyst hoped. Consequently, Eastern Germans developed a certain uncomfortable feeling over job insecurity and unsuccessful economic development. Nowadays, the economic situation of Eastern Germany has greatly improved; yet Eastern Länder are still among the poorest in Germany¹⁰⁰.

During the nineties protest vote over economic issues favored the left-wing PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism – “Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus”): This party was the direct heir of SED, main and only ruling party of the GDR¹⁰¹. Nowadays, protest vote over economic issues favors the radical rightwing “Alternative für Deutschland”. AfD criticizes aggressively the embargo against Russia, voted by the central government’s big coalition (“große Koalition”),

⁹⁴ “Deutschland soll das Land der Deutschen bleiben“ (DVU Program 1999, Page 1) Translation by the Author

⁹⁵ “[...] Begrenzung des Auslaenderanteils, Stopp dem zunehmenden Auslaenderstrom [...]“ (DVU Program 1999, Page 1) Translation by the Author

⁹⁶ Picture 1

⁹⁷ AfD Wahlprogramm 2017; Page 4

⁹⁸ Wahlrecht.de

⁹⁹ YODER 2000; Pages 42 - 44

¹⁰⁰ Pictures 3 and 4

¹⁰¹ HOUGH 2005; Page 142

between the center-right CDU and the center-left SPD. Such embargo, claims AfD, could have caused the loss of thousands of jobs in Eastern Germany and a depression in Eastern German economy¹⁰². Therefore, “Alternative für Deutschland” requests “the immediate lifting of the anti-Russia economic campaigns which are politically incorrect as well as ineffective and which primarily harm our domestic economy.”¹⁰³. In this case, AfD also condemns the political aspect of the sanctions, defining them “politically incorrect”. Consequentially these sanctions are deemed not to be in the national interest, therefore AfD and its numerous Eastern German electorate poses itself as a contrast to the ruling elite and accuses the ruling politicians not to do the national interest.

5.2.3 Eastern Culture: Another unexpected difficulty in achieving total German reunification is that during the forty-year-long separation, Eastern Germans developed their own culture and it is very different than the Western counterpart. Even more interesting, the two cultures started to polarize even more after reunification. Not only Eastern Germans in united Germany have a different vision concerning foreigners, but they also have a shared pool of values and common past¹⁰⁴.

Two important outcomes of this cultural difference are “Ostalgie” and “Trotzidentität”. The former refers to nostalgia of the life in the East (before the fall of the GDR): Unemployment, job insecurity, the disappearance of a state and its institutions created a sense of revival of Eastern culture manifestly in “Ostalgie”, as in the GDR virtually no one was unemployed and there was a different perception of the state. The latter refers to a sense of perceived second-class citizenship experienced by Eastern Germans: The same values of “Ostalgie” are in a sense used as contraposition against the perceived arrogance of Westerners. In fact, Eastern Germans felt the reunification of Germany more as a “takeover” of the West towards the East, rather than a simple merger¹⁰⁵.

“Ostalgie” and “Trotzidentität” are strictly related and both are of extreme importance in explaining Eastern German culture, identity and society after reunification with Western Germany. The former is somewhat more materialistic, but with deep roots entrenched in identity. Vita Cola, Rotkäppchen Champagne and plenty of eastern products that did not stand a chance in the market

¹⁰² AfD Party Program Sachsen-Anhalt 13 March 2016; Page 4

¹⁰³ AfD Party Program Sachsen-Anhalt 13 March 2016, page 33

¹⁰⁴ HOWARD 1995; Pages 62 – 64

¹⁰⁵ HOUGH 2005; Pages 56 -57

economy, survived fueled by the “Ostalgie” felt by former GDR citizens¹⁰⁶. “Ostalgie” also covers products that could no longer be produced and that cannot be installed on the production line anymore, such as the Trabant, a somewhat cheaply built eastern car, that now is represented on T-shirts and “Ostalgic” books. Both “Ostalgie” and “Trotzidentität” are, without doubt, offspring of a reunification process that aimed to impose western ideology over the eastern one, together with a sense of annexation instead of reunification¹⁰⁵. Western politicians could not understand and were probably not interested in understanding the difficulties of Eastern Germans during reunification¹⁰⁷, this surely created an Eastern opposition towards the western ruling elite.

5.2.4 Populist Extreme Rightwing Parties and the Contrast with the Ruling Elite: When taking into consideration the three grounds of contrast with the ruling elite (foreigners, economic policies and Eastern German culture), it becomes clear that this characteristic is part of value-pool of extreme rightwing populist parties.

Considering foreigners, “Alternative für Deutschland” openly declares that the actions of the political elite, regarding immigration, will bring German society down¹⁰⁸. Moreover, plenty of AfD exponents assert that German ruling elite has a plan (actually a French conspiracy theory called “Le Grand Remplacement”) to import migrants from Africa and the Middle-East to make up for German low birth-rates¹⁰⁹.

As stated above, “Alternative für Deutschland” does not support sanctions against Russia and claims that, through them, the German ruling elite is damaging in a major way German economy and most importantly Eastern German already crippled economy¹¹⁰.

Lastly AfD acknowledges the differences between Eastern and Western Germany: In particular, the wage gap between East and West Germans, as the former are declared to gain less¹¹¹. This, although it is a true fact, includes a rhetoric of second-class citizenship experienced by Easterner

¹⁰⁶ MARTIN BLUM 2000: “Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgie, Identity, and Material Culture”; Popular Culture Vol. 34 No. 3; Page 229.

¹⁰⁷ YODER 2000; Pages 42 - 44

¹⁰⁸ „Die Einwanderungs-, Asyl- und Integrationspolitik der etablierten Parteien führt geradewegs in eine soziale Katastrophe.“ (AfD Wahlprogramm Sachsen-Anhalt 2016); Translation by the Author

¹⁰⁹ GREVEN 2016, Page 4

¹¹⁰ AfD Programm Sachsen Anhalt; Page 4

¹¹¹ AfD Wahlprogramm Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2015/2016; Page 6

Germans. Furthermore, AfD is strongly averse to the European Union, often depicted as a ruling elite incapable to do the interests of European citizens¹¹².

Therefore, it is safe to say that “Alternative für Deutschland” includes in its narrative the contrast with the ruling elite.

5.2.5 Contrast with the Ruling Elite: As this paragraph demonstrated, the grounds for contrast with the ruling elite mostly originates from the poor management of the reunification process.

The lack of foresight of the German government, mostly comprised by Western politicians, in the distribution of migrants caused Eastern Germans, still not used to have even small amounts of foreigners within their population, to develop a strong anti-foreigner rhetoric culminating in plenty of votes for anti-foreigner populist extreme rightwing parties, such as “Alternative für Deutschland”.

The less than great administration of the economic reunification process, caused the Eastern economy to be crippled and remain so up to today, even if the situation exponentially improved in comparison with the nineties. AfD claims that the sanctions against Russia may damage even more the already fragile Eastern Economy, even more the one of Land Sachsen-Anhalt.

The rise and spread of Eastern German culture is mainly a side effect of the process of reunification itself that hardly could have been avoided. Now, “Alternative für Deutschland” picks up what remains of Eastern German perception of second-class citizenship and is rewarded with an impressive electoral trend¹¹³.

Therefore, “contrast with the ruling elite” is one of the values that arguably originated from the several shocks during the reunification process. “Alternative für Deutschland” is a populist extreme rightwing party and “contrast with the ruling elite” is present in multiple areas of their narrative; furthermore, AfD obtains impressive electoral results in Eastern Germany. Thus, for the reasons outlined above, the “Contrast with the Ruling Elite” independent variable is verified.

¹¹² AfD Wahlprogramm; Pages 7 - 8

¹¹³ RAGNITZ 2016; Pages 702 – 703

6. Conclusion

In the past years, extreme rightwing populist parties have been a worrying fact. After reunification, rightwing extremism related crimes increased massively. In 1989 there was one instance of murder, 205 of violent offences and 1'853 overall extreme rightwing offences; in 1992 there were 17 instances of murder, 2'639 violent offences and 7'684 overall extreme rightwing offences¹¹⁴. An enormous increase in just three years. The reunification process had some effect in the rise of extreme rightwing sentiment in Germany. I argued in this thesis paper that the social, economic and cultural shocks experienced by Eastern Germany during the reunification process majorly influenced former GDR citizens in voting for extreme rightwing populist parties. To do so, I first demonstrated that extreme rightwing populist parties have been more successful in Eastern Germany, than in the Western Germany; then I demonstrated that the traits of extreme rightwing parties are mostly retraceable to the misadministration of the reunification process. The analyzed traits were: Xenophobia, reaction to an extreme crisis and contrast with the ruling elite.

6.1 Xenophobia: Xenophobia is one of the main traits of extreme rightwing political parties; German radical right populist parties are inherently xenophobic and view the German immigrant intake as an invasion and extreme crisis, to which they propose a solution. Furthermore, xenophobia may be a trait originated from the cultural social and economic shocks experienced by Eastern Germans during the reunification process: The GDR population and society included very few foreigners compared to Western Germany. After reunification, the central German government, composed almost entirely by Western German politicians, imposed an immigrant quota system that mainly affected Eastern Länder. Already during the GDR, few foreigners in a town would seem an “invasion”, with the quota system the situation escalated massively. After all, “Ethnicity” and “Color of Skin” are the respectively the first and third main characteristics of victims of extreme rightwing violence¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ LEE MCGOWAN (2006): “Much More Than a Phantom Menace! Assessing the Character, Level and Threat of Neo-Nazi Violence in Germany, 1977 – 2003”; *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*; Vol. 14 No. 2; Page 260.

¹¹⁵ MARC COESTER (2010): “Commentary: Right-Wing Extremism and Bias Crime in Germany”; *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*; Vol. 8 No. 1; Page 58.

After the imposition of the quota system, extreme rightwing violence erupted in Eastern Germany, culminating, but not ending, in the 1992 Rostock ZAST arson, where more than 1'200 rightwing activists rioted and tried to set the local refugee center on fire throwing petrol bombs through the windows. Nowadays, extreme rightwing anti-immigrant sentiment continues: PEGIDA organizes gathers, protests and marches with more than 15'000 people per day and even achieved 25'000 people in one instance. Furthermore, "Alternative für Deutschland" advocates for the end of German Islamization and the closure of EU external borders.

Although xenophobia had roots dating before German reunification, this characteristic emerged as a consequence of the reunification process and it is surely one of the main traits of German extreme rightwing populist parties such as NPD, DVU and AfD; thus, the independent variable of xenophobia is verified.

6.2 Reaction to Extreme Crisis: Reaction to extreme crisis is a main feature of populist parties and therefore, also of extreme rightwing populist parties, such as AfD, DVU and NPD. "Reaction to Extreme Crisis" is very present in AfD's narrative, even if more as a perceived immigrant invasion and forced Islamization, than an economic crisis.

Economic crisis surely originated from misadministration of the reunification process, it hit Eastern Germany harshly and surely helped extreme rightwing populist parties to flourish. Some observers even related parental unemployment with radical right political orientation of children, in explaining the success of extreme rightwing parties in Eastern Germany.

In Germany, where the electorate is poorer, extreme rightwing populist parties gain higher shares at local elections. Yet, I could not demonstrate that German radical right political parties use economic crisis as an extreme crisis in their narrative. The only real source that hints economic crisis is AfD's Sachsen Anhalt electoral program that addresses the issue of the wage gap between Eastern and Western Germany. Still, there are no grounds to affirm that extreme rightwing populist parties in Germany perceive the economic crisis as an extreme crisis.

German extreme rightwing populist parties view, though, the immigrant invasion as an extreme crisis: Both in AfD's and DVU's electoral programs immigration is perceived as an extreme crisis that will take Germany to disaster, if not dealt properly.

Therefore, although economic crisis is not present in the extreme rightwing populist parties' narrative, xenophobia is still perceived as such and so the independent variable regarding the existence of extreme crisis in AfD's and DVU's party narrative is verified.

6.3 Contrast with the Ruling Elite: The "tradition" of contrast with the ruling elite in Eastern Germany is based on multiple grounds; of these grounds, as the previous chapter demonstrated, at least three are related to poor management of the reunification process in Eastern Germany.

Although already existing in Eastern Germany, the feel of migrant invasion and the related trait of xenophobia were aggravated by the central German government. The quota system, almost immediately enacted after reunification created substantial issues in Eastern Germany; these continue today as political parties such as "Alternative für Deutschland" declare that the German ruling elite is importing immigrants to make up for the lower birth rates and for their personal (economic) interests. After all, Eastern Germans' dislike for immigrants is clear, as extreme rightwing populist parties, that have as main point in their programs anti-immigration solutions, are now voted by 24% of the electorate in some states.

While it is hard to come up with a different economic solution for the reunification process, it is just as hard to assert that the obtained result turned out to be optimal for the new German Länder. Eastern Länder were hit by shocking levels of unemployment and overall unimpressive levels of GDP growth, considering the whole nineties decade. Nowadays the situation is surely improved since the nineties, yet former GDR Länder are still among the poorest in Germany. "Alternative für Deutschland" claims in their Sachsen Anhalt electoral program that the government is backing sanctions on Russia against German interests, particularly the economic interests of Eastern German Länder. These sanctions, AfD claims, would damage the already fragile Eastern German economy.

Although arguably already existing as a side effect of the process of reunification itself, the last ground is the evolution of Eastern German identity and culture: This identity manifested itself with "Ostalgie" (nostalgia of East or in German "Ost") and developed in "Trotzidentität". Even today

there is a feeling of second class citizenship in the East ¹¹⁶; “Alternative für Deutschland” picks up this perception in its Land electoral programs, in Eastern Länder.

Therefore, based on these three grounds, Eastern Germany experienced and still experiences a contrast with the ruling elite. In the nineties, this paved the path for the emergence of “Leitfiguren” in Eastern Länder: These were Land presidents and influential Eastern politicians, mostly from traditional parties like CDU and SPD, that thought that German politicians in Berlin were not doing the interests of the East. They presented themselves as a viable option to prioritize the interests of former GDR Länder¹¹⁷. Therefore, the independent variable regarding contrast with the ruling elite in Eastern Germany is verified.

6.4 Final Remarks: I can now answer to the question of the thesis paper: “How did the cultural, economic and social shocks that rose after the German reunification help extreme rightwing parties have widespread success in former Eastern Germany?”. I demonstrated that cultural, economic and social shocks existed in Eastern Germany in the first place, then I demonstrated that most of them were caused by the reunification process and arguably by its mismanagement. In the end, on the grounds of the paragraph above, I demonstrated that these shocks contributed in a major way to the success of extreme rightwing populist parties in Eastern Germany.

Therefore, summarizing, economic, social and cultural shocks contributed in a major way in the success of extreme rightwing populist parties in Eastern German Länder.

The recent success of “Alternative für Deutschland” in Eastern German Länder, together with the impressive electoral results of other parties of the same type in Europe, suggests that the next half-century might be the one where extreme right, protectionist, xenophobic, populist parties compete with traditional neoliberal ones over political leadership. Any attempt to predict the future, without being backed by extensive research, would be pure speculation; yet it is arguably safe to say that the next half-century will bring new challenges and might broadly change our society and subsequently the political world, in which we live in: Therefore, it is of utmost importance to continue and further research on extreme rightwing populist parties in Europe.

¹¹⁶ RAGNITZ 2016; Pages 702 - 703

¹¹⁷ YODER 2000; Pages 42 – 44

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Dipartimento di **Scienze Politiche**

Cattedra **Contemporary History**

Germania dell'Est: Shock Post-Riunificazione e il Successo dei Partiti di Estrema Destra

Come gli shock culturali, economici e sociali sorti dopo la riunificazione tedesca hanno aiutato i partiti di estrema destra ad avere successo nella Germania dell'Est.

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Riassunto

Introduzione

In Germania, a partire dalla riunificazione arrivando fino ad oggi, i partiti populistici di estrema destra hanno vantato, in diverse occasioni, importanti successi. Questi sono sempre più frequenti e sempre più dirompenti ogni volta che si ripresentano: Dal NPD degli anni Novanta con circa il 9% o 10% alle elezioni regionali, fino all'AfD dei giorni nostri che doppia questo risultato nelle elezioni regionali e riesce anche ad entrare nel Bundestag con poco meno del 13%. Il terreno più fertile per i partiti di estrema destra, nelle elezioni regionali dalla riunificazione a oggi, sono state senza dubbio le regioni della Germania dell'Est: Complici la tragica crisi economica che ha colpito i nuovi Länder e le difficoltà incontrate nel processo di riunificazione. Questo processo ha infatti creato diversi shock a livello economico, sociale e identitario. In particolare, il processo di riunificazione è stato ostacolato dalla crisi economica, xenofobia e divergenza identitaria. La prima si riferisce alla crisi economica degli anni Novanta; la seconda all'arrivo nelle regioni della Germania dell'Est di migliaia di migranti economici extra-Europei con il conseguente innesco di un'ondata di xenofobia; e il terzo alla divergenza identitaria tra tedeschi dell'Ovest e tedeschi dell'Est, questo divario si è quasi certamente creato nei quarant'anni di divisione, tuttavia si è amplificato dopo la riunificazione. Tutte queste caratteristiche del processo di riunificazione hanno contribuito, in maniere diverse, al relativo successo elettorale dei partiti di estrema destra in queste zone della Germania.

L'obiettivo di questa tesi è appunto quello di investigare il modo in cui questi avvenimenti, dovuti al processo di riunificazione, possano aver avvantaggiato e ancora avvantaggiare i partiti di estrema destra in Germania dell'Est. Cercherò quindi di rispondere alla seguente domanda: “Con quale forza gli eventi economici, sociali e identitari, che hanno vissuto i tedeschi dell'Est durante il processo di riunificazione iniziato nel 1990, hanno contribuito al successo elettorale dei partiti populistici di estrema destra nella Germania dell'Est?”

Il lavoro di questa tesi è maggiormente quello di osservare in che modo le situazioni, createsi durante il processo di riunificazione in Germania dell'Est, hanno portato un numero relativamente elevato di elettori a preferire partiti con le caratteristiche dei partiti di estrema destra populista rispetto ad altri partiti. Tuttavia, questa tesi non tratterà tutte le caratteristiche di questi partiti: Verrà trattato il tema della xenofobia, la presenza di una crisi estrema e il contrasto tra i

tedeschi dell'Est con "l'élite dominante" rappresentata dal governo tedesco. Invece, questa tesi non vergerà sul tema "dell'*Heartland*", che verrà descritto ma non trattato nel testo della tesi; inoltre, non saranno trattati i metodi di comunicazione di questi partiti (Facebook, ...), che seppur innovativi non sono prettamente relativi all'argomento di questa tesi.

Ora presenterò le variabili di questa tesi e esporrò brevemente le principali nozioni teoriche di questa tesi.

Variabili e Definizioni

Prima di iniziare a trattare con i partiti populistici di estrema destra, è importante fornire una definizione sia di "populismo", sia di "estrema destra". Nel primo caso, la definizione è data da Taggart, nel secondo da Dr. Thomas Greven, docente e ricercatore presso la Freie Universität Berlin.

La contrapposizione tra "élite dominante" (la classe politica) e "popolo" è nel cuore del populismo. Quest'ultimo, secondo i populistici, può essere rappresentato, in modo autentico, solo ed esclusivamente dal partito populista. I politici, oppure un'altra "élite dominante" presa di mira dai partiti populistici, sono accusati di essere corrotti e di fare i propri interessi, spesso considerati agli antipodi con gli interessi del paese. L'altra caratteristica dei partiti populistici che verranno trattate in questa tesi, è la reazione ad una crisi estrema. Questa può essere di qualsiasi tipo: un flusso straordinario di migranti o una rapida perdita di delle tradizioni a causa della modernità oppure una crisi economica.

Le caratteristiche dei partiti di estrema destra sono approfonditamente esplorate nel testo principale; tuttavia, la tesi prederà in considerazione solamente l'attitudine "noi contro di loro", tipica dei partiti di estrema destra. Questa caratteristica cattura "l'odio" dei partiti di estrema destra verso le minoranze e quindi anche verso gli stranieri. Questa retorica non si applica solo alla xenofobia, ma racchiude anche una descrizione del "noi", quindi di un'identità omogenea. I partiti di estrema destra affermano che questa identità è frutto del buon senso, contrapposta a quella dei "loro", accusati di essere favoriti dalla classe politica dominante.

Chiarificate le due nozioni di base, nei paragrafi successivi verranno presentate le variabili dipendenti e indipendenti.

La variabile dipendente di questa tesi misurerà chiaramente l'influenza degli shock economici, sociali e identitari dopo la riunificazione tedesca nel 1990 nel successo dei partiti populistici di estrema destra nella Germania dell'Est.

Le variabili indipendenti, invece, proveranno a spiegare come le condizioni della Germania dell'Est dopo il crollo della DDR abbiano creato terreno fertile per il successo dei partiti populistici di estrema destra. Particolarmente, le variabili indipendenti controlleranno se il processo di riunificazione delle due Germanie ha creato le condizioni necessarie perché l'elettorato iniziasse ad apprezzare le caratteristiche dei partiti populistici di estrema destra. Quindi le variabili indipendenti studieranno la xenofobia, il contrasto tra tedeschi dell'Est e classe politica dominante e la reazione ad una crisi estrema.

La variabile indipendente della xenofobia prova a verificare se la xenofobia, dopo la riunificazione tedesca, ha favorito i partiti populistici di estrema destra. La Repubblica Democratica Tedesca (DDR), nel corso dei quarant'anni della sua storia, non ha mai vantato un grande numero di stranieri nei propri confini: Infatti, negli anni Ottanta, la percentuale di stranieri relativa alla popolazione totale nella DDR era circa all'1%. Immediatamente dopo la riunificazione, i cittadini della Germania dell'Est si ritrovarono ad affrontare shock sociali e identitari dovuti al numero relativamente alto di stranieri, che venivano riallocati dall'Ovest all'Est.

Il contrasto tra popolo e classe dominante è una variabile indipendente che mira a studiare se il processo di riunificazione tedesca ha amplificato il contrasto tra i cittadini della Germania dell'Est e la classe politica dominante a Berlino, negli anni Novanta composta quasi unicamente da tedeschi dell'Ovest. Inoltre, questa variabile indipendente cerca di esaminare se questo contrasto ha aiutato i partiti populistici di estrema destra.

L'ultima variabile indipendente riguarda la reazione ad una crisi estrema: Questa variabile mira a approfondire le crisi estreme percepite dai cittadini della Germania dell'Est dopo la riunificazione e a studiare se i partiti populistici di estrema destra hanno utilizzato queste crisi per ottenere risultati elettorali migliori.

Nei paragrafi successivi verranno prese in considerazione le tre variabili indipendenti e come sono state analizzate nella tesi ed infine, saranno descritti i risultati di queste analisi.

Analisi delle Variabili Indipendenti

La prima variabile indipendente che sarà analizzata è quella della “reazione ad una crisi estrema”. Le crisi prese maggiormente in considerazione in questa tesi saranno l’invasione di migranti percepita in Germania dell’Est e la crisi economica, iniziata nella seconda metà degli anni Novanta.

Prima della riunificazione nel 1990, la Germania dell’Est non vantava una percentuale particolarmente alta di stranieri nella sua popolazione: Infatti questa era di poco superiore all’1%. Inoltre, gli stranieri nella Repubblica Democratica Tedesca vivevano in complessi recintati e dovevano firmare per ogni ingresso e uscita effettuati, non potevano portare ospiti e avevano poche possibilità di svago. Gli stranieri fino alla riunificazione erano quasi invisibili; tuttavia, quando la popolazione entrava in contatto con questi stranieri, la percezione di invasione si innescava subito. Dopo la riunificazione, il governo centrale tedesco, composto nella maggior parte da tedeschi dell’Ovest, iniziò a ricollocare una quantità relativamente alta di migranti economici in Germania dell’Est. Questa azione provocò immediate tensioni, che culminarono nel rogo di Rostock nel 1992, dove gruppi di neo-Nazisti appiccarono un incendio al centro d’accoglienza di Rostock Lichthagen, nonostante in quel momento fosse ancora abitato; per di più, la popolazione locale osservò la scena incitando i neo-Nazisti a proseguire.

In Germania dell’Est, dove i partiti populistici di estrema destra ottengono risultati elettorali più importanti, la percentuale di stranieri sul totale della popolazione è minore. Inoltre, elementi xenofobi sono parti sostanziali dei programmi politici di questi partiti populistici di estrema destra. Ci sono infatti chiari esempi di associamenti tra migrazione ed estrema crisi: Ad esempio, il partito *Alternative für Deutschland* indica la migrazione internazionale come una sfida di livelli epici e che se si dovesse continuare con le attuali politiche migratorie aperte, la società volgerebbe verso una catastrofe.

Per quanto riguarda la crisi economica non sono riuscito a trovare un chiaro accostamento di questa ad una percezione di un’estrema crisi; questo nonostante ci siano dati che dimostrano che dove la

crisi ha colpito più forte, i partiti populistici di estrema destra hanno ottenuto risultati migliori. Tuttavia, l'accostamento della "crisi migranti" con una crisi estrema ad opera di questi partiti è sufficiente a verificare le variabili indipendenti sia riguardo alla reazione ad una crisi estrema che alla xenofobia.

La prossima variabile indipendente presa in considerazione è quella di protesta contro la classe politica dominante. Nella tesi, ho diviso questo capitolo nei tre punti d'attrito che potrebbero aver causato contrasto tra la popolazione della Germania dell'Est e la classe politica dominante: Le politiche nazionali in tema di immigrazione, le politiche economiche e la presenza di un'identità propria dei tedeschi dell'Est.

Il tema dell'invasione percepita è già stato presentato nel paragrafo precedente. Per quanto riguarda le politiche economiche, i dati sono chiari: La riunificazione economica della Germania non è stata un successo. Dopo un boom nei primi anni Novanta, i *Länder* della Germania dell'Est hanno attraversato un periodo di crescita economica stagnante e tutt'ora questi *Länder* hanno ancora il PIL più basso di tutta la Germania. *Alternative für Deutschland* ritiene che lo stato centrale tedesco non stia agendo nell'interesse della Germania dell'Est, soprattutto nel contesto delle sanzioni verso la Russia.

Il terzo tema tratta l'identità dei tedeschi dell'Est, creatasi durante i quarant'anni di separazione e rafforzata di fronte a quella che è percepita come annessione, più che una riunificazione anche a causa della supposta arroganza dei tedeschi dell'Ovest nel gestire il processo di riunificazione. Questo ha creato un sentimento di *Ostalgie* e *Trotzidentität*: Il primo si riferisce alla nostalgia della ciò che contraddistingueva il *modus vivendi* dei tedeschi dell'Est da quelli dell'Ovest, ad esempio prodotti e linguaggio, ma non la vita politica. Il secondo si riferisce al rafforzamento dell'identità dei tedeschi dell'Est, di fronte agli shock sociali e identitari sviluppatasi nel processo di unificazione. Furono molti comunque i casi in cui i tedeschi dell'Est percepirono che lo stato centrale non stesse facendo i loro interessi e in quasi altrettanti casi i partiti populistici di estrema destra hanno usato questo sentimento per migliorare la *performance* elettorale alle elezioni regionali. Conseguentemente la variabile indipendente riguardante il contrasto con la classe politica dominante è verificata.

Conclusione

Riprendendo quindi dai paragrafi precedenti, si può ora rispondere alla domanda che era stata posta a principio della tesi: “Con quale forza gli shock economici, sociali e identitari, che hanno vissuto i tedeschi dell’Est durante il processo di riunificazione iniziato nel 1990, hanno contribuito al successo elettorale dei partiti populistici di estrema destra nella Germania dell’Est?”

La risposta ha come punti cardine le variabili indipendenti: La xenofobia, l’esistenza di una di forte crisi percepita e la presenza di un contrasto contro la classe politica dominante. Questi sono chiaramente fattori determinati dagli shock avvertiti dalla popolazione della Germania dell’Est nel processo di riunificazione.

La xenofobia in Germania dell’Est, nonostante fosse in parte preesistente, è aumentata pesantemente in seguito alla riallocazione di migranti economici in Germania dell’Est nei primi anni Novanta. Infatti, i casi di aggressione e omicidio per motivi razziali sono aumentati in maniera critica nei *Länder* dell’Est tra il 1990 e il 2000. Questi crimini sono spesso riconducibili a gruppi violenti di estrema destra, anche se a volte sono supportati dalla popolazione locale, come nel caso di Rostock Lichthagen. I partiti di estrema destra hanno sfruttato questo shock in Germania dell’Est, mostrando i loro numerosi elementi xenofobi nei loro programmi elettorali locali e alcuni altri elementi dello stesso tipo nei programmi elettorali nazionali.

Come è stato descritto nella tesi, la percezione di una crisi estrema è principalmente rivolta verso la crisi dovuta alla presenza di forti flussi migratori. La crisi economica, nonostante fosse uno shock causato dalle inadeguate politiche economiche dello stato centrale, non è stata avvertita dagli elettori dei partiti di estrema destra come una forte crisi a cui si debba reagire. Ciò si evince dal fatto che nei programmi elettorali locali di questi partiti, gli elementi riconducibili alla crisi economica sono rari. Tuttavia, la percezione di una forte crisi esiste: questa è una conseguenza di uno shock sociale avvenuto durante la riunificazione (lo stesso che ha portato alla xenofobia) ed è stato usato dai partiti di estrema destra per ottenere migliori risultati elettorali.

Il contrasto contro la classe politica dominante, infine, esiste ed è causato da una combinazione di shock sociali, economici e identitari avvenuti durante il processo di riunificazione.

Le politiche del governo centrale in materia di immigrazione hanno causato chiaramente un malcontento generale tra i tedeschi dell’Est. Questo ha portato i partiti populistici di estrema destra

a marcare esplicitamente le loro forti tendenze anti-immigrazione e anti-Islam. *Alternative für Deutschland*, un partito populista di estrema destra e secondo partito più importante in molte regioni della Germania dell'Est, ha anche adottato una narrativa cospirazionista a tal riguardo: alcuni importanti esponenti del partito affermano che il governo centrale stia attuando un piano di rimpiazzamento etnico importando migranti in Germania. La contrapposizione percepita tra cittadino e classe politica dominante in questo caso è chiara.

Gli shock causati dalle politiche economiche attuate in Germania dell'Est durante il processo di riunificazione, hanno insinuato nell'elettorato un sentimento di contrapposizione con la classe politica dominante per vari fattori, esplorati sia nella tesi che comunque all'interno di questo riassunto. La crisi economica non ha solo avvantaggiato i partiti populistici di sinistra; questa ha infatti anche favorito i partiti populistici di estrema destra in molteplici modi. Per esempio, alcuni ricercatori hanno anche evidenziato come ragazzi tedeschi dell'Est che abbiano avuto genitori disoccupati durante il processo di riunificazione abbiano spesso un orientamento politica tendente verso l'estremismo di destra.

I problemi causati dall'esistenza di un'identità di "tedesco dell'Est" hanno indubbiamente favorito la contrapposizione tra popolo della Germania dell'Est e classe politica dominante. L'esistenza di questo "scontro" è documentato dalla presenza di forti figure politiche regionali, che denunciavano l'inadeguatezza delle politiche messe in atto dal governo centrale per far fronte ai problemi delle regioni della Germania dell'Est. Questo ha chiaramente inciso sulla contrapposizione di una buona parte dei tedeschi dell'Est contro la classe politica dominante nazionale formata, negli anni Novanta e nei primi anni del Duemila, da tedeschi dell'Ovest.

Questa contrapposizione ha sicuramente avvantaggiato elettoralmente molti partiti populistici di estrema destra in Germania dell'Est.

Il recente successo di *Alternative für Deutschland* nelle elezioni nazionali (12,6%) e nei *Länder* della Germania dell'Est, insieme a risultati elettorali incredibili in Europa di altri partiti dello stesso tipo, suggeriscono che i prossimi cinquanta anni potrebbe essere quello in cui partiti populistici, protezionisti, xenofobi e di estrema destra competono con i partiti tradizionale per guidare gli stati Europei. Tuttavia, qualsiasi tentativo di prevedere il futuro, senza aver effettuato ampie ricerche scientifiche, sarebbe pura speculazione; comunque si potrebbe affermare che i prossimi cinquanta anni porteranno nuove sfide e potrebbero cambiare completamente la nostra

società e conseguentemente il mondo politico in cui viviamo: quindi, è molto importante continuare e migliorare la ricerca sui partiti populistici di estrema destra in Europa.