



Meret Stephan
Lennart Schürmann

How Anti-Racist Protests Influence Pro- and Anti-Migration Voting Behavior: Evidence from National and European Elections

Discussion Paper

ZZ 2025-601

January 2025

Research Area

Dynamics of Political Systems

Research Unit

Center for Civil Society Research

WZB Berlin Social Science Center
Reichpietschufer 50
10785 Berlin
Germany
www.wzb.eu

Copyright remains with the author(s).

Discussion papers of the WZB serve to disseminate the research results of work in progress to encourage the exchange of ideas and academic debate. Inclusion of a paper in the discussion paper series does not constitute publication and should not limit publication in any other venue. The discussion papers published by the WZB represent the views of the respective author(s) and not of the institute as a whole.

Meret Stephan, Lennart Schürmann

How Anti-Racist Protests Influence Pro- and Anti-Migration Voting Behavior: Evidence from National and European Elections

Discussion Paper ZZ 2025-601

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (2025)

Affiliation of the authors:

Meret Stephan

European University Institute

Lennart Schürmann

Harvard University & WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Abstract

How Anti-Racist Protests Influence Pro- and Anti-Migration Voting Behavior: Evidence from National and European Elections

by Meret Stephan and Lennart Schürmann

Racist attacks and incidents frequently spark anti-racist protest campaigns. This research examines the effect of such mobilization on voting behavior in subsequent national and European elections. We focus on two periods of anti-racist demonstrations in Germany that followed 1) the killing of nine people in the 2020 Hanau racist terrorist attack and 2) the uncovering of a racist mass deportation plan by far-right actors, including some Alternative for Germany (AfD) politicians in 2024. The study hypothesizes that local anti-racist protests lead to less anti-migration, i.e., far-right AfD voting, and more pro-migration, i.e., Green voting. Empirically, we connect protest data with aggregate voting data from German state offices. Using difference-in-differences (DID) and entropy balancing, we show that local anti-racist protests can indeed influence voting behavior toward a more inclusive society. We find the hypothesized effect in the 2021 federal elections for both parties. However, in the European elections, we only find negative effects on AfD vote share. The Green Party only benefited from anti-racist protests in 2021, when they held a clear pro-migration stance and were part of the opposition.

Keywords: protest, migration, anti-racism, voting behavior, AfD, Greens, Germany.

How Anti-Racist Protests Influence Pro- and Anti-Migration Voting Behavior:

Evidence from National and European Elections

Meret Stephan*

Lennart Schürmann†

Abstract

Racist attacks and incidents frequently spark anti-racist protest campaigns. This research examines the effect of such mobilization on voting behavior in subsequent national and European elections. We focus on two periods of anti-racist demonstrations in Germany that followed 1) the killing of nine people in the 2020 Hanau racist terrorist attack and 2) the uncovering of a racist mass deportation plan by far-right actors, including some Alternative for Germany (AfD) politicians in 2024. The study hypothesizes that local anti-racist protests lead to less anti-migration, i.e., far-right AfD voting, and more pro-migration, i.e., Green voting. Empirically, we connect protest data with aggregate voting data from German state offices. Using difference-in-differences (DID) and entropy balancing, we show that local anti-racist protests can indeed influence voting behavior toward a more inclusive society. We find the hypothesized effect in the 2021 federal elections for both parties. However, in the European elections, we only find negative effects on AfD vote share. The Green Party only benefited from anti-racist protests in 2021, when they held a clear pro-migration stance and were part of the opposition.

Keywords: *protest, migration, anti-racism, voting behavior, AfD, Greens, Germany.*

Word Count: 9,500

*European University Institute; ✉ meret.stephan@eui.eu

†Harvard University & WZB Berlin Social Science Center; ✉ lschuermann@fas.harvard.edu

1 Introduction

Migration has emerged as a decisive topic in many elections around the globe, contributing to electoral successes of far-right parties in several countries (Grande et al., 2019; Hutter and Kriesi, 2022). This politicization of migration is often accompanied by an increase in racist behavior (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Such behavior can include attacks on fellow citizens, some of which have tragically resulted in fatalities. For example, on February 19, 2020, a far-right and racist extremist killed nine people in a violent terrorist attack in Hanau, Germany. This horrible event not only represented a profound tragedy but also led to large-scale protests advocating for cultural diversity and inclusivity and mobilizing against racism and right-wing extremism (Stjepandić, 2022). These protests briefly intersected with the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, which introduced unprecedented challenges to public mobilization due to nationwide lockdowns. Nonetheless, anti-racist activism resumed during the Black Lives Matter protests, peaking on June 6, 2020, and underscoring a persistent public commitment to combating racism and promoting an open society (Zajak et al., 2023). While in 2022 and 2023, many protests in Germany focused on Russia’s war in Ukraine, in January 2024, anti-racist demonstrations surged once more in response to the uncovering of mass deportation plans discussed in a meeting by far-right actors, including Alternative for Germany (AfD) officials (Guardian, 2024a).

Amidst these societal upheavals, the AfD, known for its anti-migration stance, has seen fluctuating electoral results: they have been losing votes in Germany’s 2021 federal elections compared to 2017 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2022) but gaining votes in the European election of 2024 compared to 2019. The Green Party, which is the ideological opponent of the AfD concerning cultural and, therefore, also migrational issues (Franz et al., 2019; Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021), gained votes from 2017 to 2021 and even made its way into the coalition of the federal government after the election in 2021 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2023). However, the Green Party also lost many votes in the European election of 2024 compared to 2019. This poses pressing questions about the impact of anti-racists protests. Are they effectively influencing voting behavior

toward a more inclusive society, or are they rather a symbolic expression of dissent? These considerations lead to our main research question:

How do anti-racist protests influence pro- and anti-migration voting behavior?

Protests can be a central driver of political change, especially when it comes to demanding policies (Rucht, 2003, 153). Nevertheless, it is difficult to predict when protests actually are successful in influencing the public (Rucht, 2013). While there is research on the effect of environmental protests on the public, which shows that these protests achieved a change in voting behavior and, partly, in attitudes (Valentim, 2023), we do not yet know whether the same mechanisms work for other issues in the German context, such as migration, and whether these mechanisms work across different electoral levels. Our study fills these research gaps.

As an outcome, we focus on the electoral performance of the AfD and the Green Party, which are two important and large parties in the German party system. The AfD represents the strongest anti-migration positions. The Greens, though associated with a pro-migration position, particularly stand out as the ideological and cultural opponent of the AfD. Using a difference-in-differences (DID) approach, we demonstrate that local anti-racist protests lead to a decrease in votes for the anti-migration AfD while increasing support for the pro-migration Green Party. We find this positive effect for the Greens only during the period leading up to the 2021 federal election, when they upheld an explicitly pro-migration stance and were part of the opposition. However, after shifting to a more migration-critical position during their time in government, the positive impact of anti-racist protests for Green Party votes disappears.

This study contributes to increasing literature showing that protests can indeed contribute to a more open and inclusive society. To our knowledge, however, only studies focusing on the US (Bauer et al., 2024; Caren et al., 2023) specifically examine the effects of anti-racist protests, often focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement. The studies in Europe—focusing on Greece (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2024), Italy (Colombo et al., 2024), and France (Lagios et al., 2022)—primarily investigate protests against the far-right. While the issues raised during protests against the far-right often intersect with

anti-racist positions, they should not be viewed as identical. Protests against the far-right may also address concerns other than racism. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that racism exists not only within far-right parties or political actors but also throughout the broader political landscape. This distinction is crucial, which is why our findings are not only important for the academic debate but also have important real-world implications for practitioners such as social movements.

2 Theoretical Approach

2.1 Migration and the Socio-Cultural Cleavage in Contemporary Society

Migration has become a salient and highly politicized issue, emerging as a divisive topic in national politics in numerous countries (Grande et al., 2019; Hutter and Kriesi, 2022).¹ This development has given rise to new challenger parties focusing predominantly on the issue of migration (Gessler and Hunger, 2022). Notably, far-right parties have capitalized on and further fostered anti-migration sentiments, consequently gaining support by framing migration as a threat to national identity and security. The electoral successes of these anti-migration challenger parties often caused mainstream parties (particularly center-right parties) to follow an accommodative strategy by also adopting anti-migration positions (Williams and Hunger, 2022). This process left socialist/social-democratic parties and Green parties with a comparatively more pro-migration stance. While socialist/social-democratic parties are often also internally divided on the issue of migration, it is particularly Green parties who still advocate for more inclusive policies while also emphasizing the benefits of diversity, multi-ethnic society, and the importance of human rights (Harteveld et al., 2017). Equally important, Green parties can be seen as the ideological opposition to the new far-right challengers: Unlike traditional parties, such as social-democratic, socialist, or conservative parties that typically prioritize economic issues, Green and new far-right parties are characterized by their emphasis on cultural issues (Marks et al., 2021), which also includes migration issues. This focus shows both in their

¹For an extended explanation of the term migration as used in this study, see Appendix A.1.

policy agendas as well as in how they are perceived by the public.

As migration becomes increasingly dominant in shaping the political policy-space, its politicization has become a key driver of the restructuration of European politics along a new socio-cultural cleavage. This cleavage is characterized by a deep divide between those who favor more open, inclusive policies and those who prioritize national sovereignty and cultural preservation. Various labels have been used to describe this cleavage, including ‘integration-demarcation’ (Kriesi et al., 2012), ‘universalism-communitarianism’ (Bornschier, 2010), ‘cosmopolitanism-communitarianism’ (Wilde et al., 2019), or the ‘transnational cleavage’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2018).² They all describe that the previous junctures detected by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) are not the decisive conflict lines between political parties anymore, but the socio-cultural cleavage is becoming increasingly dominant. The emergence of these socio-cultural cleavages, in which attitudes regarding migration are an important part of leads to the rise of new parties, such as Green and newer, far-right parties. This aligns with the argument that these two are then the most obvious ideological opponents. In sum, the political conflicts over migration are a major factor in the restructuring of party systems in liberal democracies, primarily shaped by the rise of far-right challenger parties.

2.2 How Protest Affects Political Outcomes

This growing strength of far-right political elites has not gone unanswered by citizens in liberal democracies. These democracies offer their citizens various ways to engage in political conflicts and to participate in political decision-making beyond voting. One such way is political protest. Among the various types of protest, this paper focuses on peaceful street demonstrations. Demonstrations can be defined as a “collective gathering in a public space whose aim is to exert political, social, and/or cultural influence on authorities, public opinion and participants through the disciplined and peaceful expression of an opinion or demand” (Casquete, 2006, 47). In the following, we present three key mechanisms how local protests affect political outcomes and, therefore, voting behavior on the local level.

²For an overview of the different labels in the context of European integration, see Hutter and Schäfer (2020).

2.2.1 Protest as a Proxy for Existing Civil Society Engagement

Protests do mostly not arise spontaneously but are carefully planned and executed by civil society organizations and political activists (McAdam, 1999). Many studies treat the appearance of protest events as an external shock, but they can also be treated as an indicator of activist engagement in a specific geographic area. In order to organize a protest and mobilize people, activists need resources, such as money, time, know-how, and a social network (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). A protest is, therefore, often organized by social movements and/or civil society organizations that have such resources (Weisskircher, 2022).

In the context of political activism, protest events are usually just one element of a larger campaign (Porta and Diani, 2009; Tilly and Wood, 2015). Other activities include: (1) educational initiatives, such as distributing information material in public spaces or producing podcasts; (2) political advocacy, for instance, through meeting policymakers and applying pressure on governments; and (3) networking efforts to bring together stakeholders in industry, science and local communities. Protests, in this broader context, are a specific strategy serving the purpose of capturing public attention, fostering public support, and setting the political agenda (Walgrave and Vliegenthart, 2012).

While many activities of social movements or civil society organizations occur behind closed doors and are difficult to quantify, protests are inherently public, making them comparatively easier to measure (Porta and Diani, 2009). Nevertheless, it is essential to understand that protests are not exogenous, one-off events. Instead, they can be treated as proxies for ongoing civil society engagement and activism regarding a political issue in a specific geographic area (Boulding, 2014).

2.2.2 Protest as an Amplifier of Future Political Activism

Protest events not only serve as a proxy for existing political activism but also play a significant role in shaping future activism, particularly through their impact on the participants involved. First, participants become more politically sophisticated through participation in a protest. At protest events, participants are exposed to new information

through protest speeches, distributed leaflets, or other forms of communication (Nieto, 2020). Through this process, participants learn about the protest's underlying issues and deepen their understanding (Branagan and Boughton, 2020). Furthermore, the communal nature of protests fosters informal exchanges of political ideas, creating bonds of solidarity (Casquete, 2006). The hours spent at the event, including travel time, provide opportunities for dialogue with fellow participants, further enriching their knowledge through interpersonal communication and collective discussion. Through these processes, political narratives are created (Polletta, 1998).

Second, protest events have an emotional dimension that shapes protest participants' experiences (Jasper, 1998). The role of emotions at protest events cannot be overstated. Speeches and political slogans by activists not only convey information but are also written and performed in a way that causes an emotional response in the audience (Van De Velde, 2024). Besides speeches, visual elements such as banners held up by other participants or activists also heavily aim at causing emotional responses, for example, through dramatic messages or humor (Hart, 2007). The emotionality of protest events is further reinforced through the entire setting in which hundreds, thousands, or sometimes even ten-thousands of people gather together, sharing one goal, sometimes culminating even in synchronous applauding or chanting (Angkasa, 2023). Moreover, famous singers and bands frequently perform at events or music is played so that a protest event can also get a festival character (Sharpe, 2008), which also elicits positive emotional reactions among the protest participants and creates a sense of belonging and purpose.

The combination of these two aspects, the transmission of information to the participants combined with an intense emotionally charged experience, is perfect to further politicize people (Verbalyte et al., 2022). Participating in a protest event is often just a first step for people to become activists themselves, with the protest event being an amplifier for future activism in institutional or non-institutional politics (Corrigall-Brown, 2011). And even if participants do not become activists within social movements, political parties, or civil society organizations themselves, they still act as multipliers. They share their experiences by talking to family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors,

transmitting the political message of protests to other people, thus further spreading the message of the protest (Walgrave and Wouters, 2014).

2.2.3 Local Protest as a Driver of Political Salience

Beyond that, protest further increases the salience of a topic in the public debate (for similar reasoning, see also Bittner and Goodyear-Grant, 2017; Colombo et al., 2024; Valentim, 2023). Salience means bringing a subject to the political and societal agenda. This includes the visibility of issues in the media debate (Zajak et al., 2023, 553), but also raising political attention (Schürmann, 2024; Schürmann et al., 2024) and public awareness to a particular issue (Carey et al., 2014). When talking about salience in the context of political and societal issues, this can be referred to as the concept of public issue salience (Dennison, 2019, 437). This concept of public issue salience can focus on either the psychological or behavioral aspects of salience. Psychological aspects mean “how important an individual believes an issue to be (or how much thought they give to it, or similar)” (Dennison, 2019, 437). Behavioral aspects are defined “as the weight an individual gives to an issue when making behavioral choices, typically electoral” (Dennison, 2019, 437). Public issue salience, therefore, describes the visibility, awareness, attention, and importance that the public—instead of, for example, parties—gives a particular subject, that is, in our case, migration.

Protests are an essential tool to increase public awareness of a subject since they aim to shed more light on the respective issues. This also divides protesting from other forms of political participation like voting or lobbying (Gause, 2022, 260). So, salience does not describe a change in behavior or attitudes per se but instead serves as a starting point for possible changes by activating a person’s thinking and reflection about a specific subject. How will this then translate into actual changes in political behavior? The main causal mechanism that can explain the effects of salience on behavior is that “attaching importance to an issue may activate and engage a person’s emotion systems” (Miller et al., 2016, 131). This process might then lead to “increased knowledge of its possible causes and solutions, stronger opinions, less likelihood of taking a neutral position, and more likelihood of participating in politics through such behavior as signing petitions, voting,

attending meetings, and writing letters” (Weaver, 1991, 53). A change in voting behavior can be explained by the weighted spatial model of voting. In this concept of voting, the main argument is that more than one issue exists for voters. This is why they must decide how much weight to give each issue, aligning their preferences according to their importance to various issues (Ansolabehere and Puy, 2018; Dennison, 2019). Following this line of argument, we state that this increased knowledge and emotional attachment that comes with salience will first increase the weight of the subject ‘migration’ and, second, change actual voting behavior in favor of the protests.

Nevertheless, one cannot overlook that triggering emotions and raising salience can also lead to the opposite effect. The exposure to protests might also reinforce existing cleavages and in-group/out-group sentiments (Borbáth, 2023). This is where the external shocks come into play. We argue that an external shock, such as a racist terrorist attack or the uncovering of mass deportation plans, might shake up strong negative opinions towards migration since we know that external shocks can influence voting behavior and attitudes – also regarding migration (Levi et al., 2024). We argue that protests can draw on these shocks by being seen as a direct reaction to them rather than as random or isolated events. In these situations, people may already be moved or inclined toward anti-racist perspectives because of the shock itself. This means that the external shocks affect the whole nation, and the protests can strengthen and expand this effect locally.

2.3 Voting as the Determinant for Political Power Distribution

Arguably the most important political impact of protest is their influence on voting behavior. Contrary to protesting, voting is a form of institutionalized political participation (Marien et al., 2010). While protesters act outside of the electoral arena, voters have institutional political power: their vote decides who governs and is thus integral to democracy.

While there is literature that shows that parties or policies can influence public opinion (Abou-Chadi and Finnigan, 2019; Béland et al., 2022), these dynamics can also work the other way around: voters can decide, firstly, which subjects are on the political agenda at all and, secondly, how the subjects that made it on the agenda are dealt with (Klüver

and Sagarzazu, 2016). Regarding migration, voters, therefore, decide whether migration-related subjects are a part of policy-making at all and, if so, how migration will be framed and handled by the government. Attitudes toward migration play an important role in voting behavior, especially for voters who hold anti-immigration views and less so for people who emphasize the pros of migration (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Kustov, 2023).

Even though we know about the just-mentioned intertwining of protesting, voting, and governing, research has not yet sufficiently analyzed these exact links between anti-racist protests and migration-related voting behavior. One of the few studies that are close to ours is examining anti-far-right protests' effect on voting (Colombo et al., 2024). They show that the Italian anti-far-right *Sardine Protests* negatively affected local far-right electoral results. We expect similar results for anti-racist protests and their effects on anti-migration party vote shares for elections on the national and supra-national level.³ Furthermore, we go beyond the mere presence of events and take repeated exposure to protest events into account (Valentin, 2023), which we expect to indicate an even stronger public opinion signal. Finally, we focus on the number of protest participants. As protest follows a logic of numbers, larger protest crowds send a stronger public opinion signal and attract more media attention. These considerations lead to our first set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Local exposure to anti-racist protest events decreases anti-migration party vote shares.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Repeated local exposure to anti-racist protest events decreases anti-migration party vote shares.

Hypothesis 1c (H1c): An increasing number of anti-racist protest participants decreases anti-migration party vote shares.

However, the protests do not just reduce the vote shares of ideological opponents. We also expect that parties aligned with the protesters' political positions will benefit from

³We use the term *national* elections when discussing elections in a more theoretical or general sense, while the term *federal* elections is used to refer specifically to our case, that is the German context. Similarly, when talking about elections at the supra-national level, we refer to them as *European* elections in our case. Therefore, we have chosen to use these terms interchangeably, depending on the context.

street mobilization. Consequently, we propose a second set of hypotheses, parallel to the previous ones, focused on pro-migration parties. This way, we not only observe whether protest strengthens alliance partners in the electoral arena or weakens opponents in the sense of counter-mobilization but look at both of these aspects simultaneously.

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): Local exposure to anti-racist protest events increases pro-migration party vote shares.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Repeated local exposure to anti-racist protest events increases pro-migration party vote shares.

Hypothesis 2c (H2c): An increasing number of anti-racist protest participants increases pro-migration party vote shares.

3 Research Design

3.1 Case Selection

We test our hypotheses on two recent periods of anti-racist protests in Germany. The first one emerged in response to the racially motivated terrorist shooting in Hanau in early 2020, where nine people were killed. This period lasted until the German federal election in 2021. The second one was triggered by the uncovering of racist mass deportation plans linked to far-right actors, including officials from the far-right party AfD, unfolding shortly before the European elections in 2024. Supra-national elections are generally seen as second-order elections, which are considered less important (Giebler and Wagner, 2015). In this context, people generally do not adapt their voting behavior to the electoral level but just vote as they would in national elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Our expectation is, therefore, that effects should be similar for both cases so that they serve as mutual validity tests. Table 1 provides an overview of key information for our cases.

Table 1: Overview of Selected Cases, External Shock, and Subsequent Election

Case	External Shock	Subsequent Election
1	Terrorist Attack in Hanau in 2020	Federal Election 2021
2	Uncovering of Mass Deportation Plans in 2024	European Election 2024

Case 1: Terrorist shooting in Hanau and the Federal Elections 2021

On February 19, 2020, eleven people died and five were wounded in a racist, far-right extremist terrorist shooting in Hanau, Hesse (Guardian, 2020). The attacker was targeting a shisha bar, a bar, and a kiosk. After the attack, he killed first his mother and then committed suicide. The nine victims, excluding his mother and himself, were of a foreign origin or holding a foreign nationality.

In the following days, weeks, and months after this horrific event, hundreds of thousands took to the streets across Germany to demonstrate against racism and for cultural plurality (Tagesschau, 2020). Nationwide initiatives like “Initiative 19. Februar Hanau” and networks like “Migrantifa” were founded as a reaction to the racist attack and have been organizing, amongst others, demonstrations against racism in Germany ever since.

When only a few weeks later, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic also hit Germany, protesting on the streets became very much impossible. Only a little later, in June 2020 in the United States, George Floyd was killed by a police officer who was choking and holding Floyd’s breath for nine minutes until he suffocated (Guardian, 2021). The slogan “I can’t breathe” quickly spread and led to worldwide protests against racist police violence and racism in general against Black people and People of Color (Guardian, 2021). Even though the coronavirus pandemic had already led to widespread contact restrictions, also in Germany, countless people gathered to participate in these demonstrations (Zeit, 2020).

In September 2020, after the detection of around 35 COVID cases, the Greek refugee camp Moria—which had already been criticized for its conditions before—burst into flames and almost completely burned down (BBC, 2020). This again shocked the European and German society, started a debate about the EU’s refugee policy, and led to protests (Seebrücke, 2021). In the following year, in 2021, we again saw protests on Hanau and Black Lives Matter, marking the one-year time point of these tragic events. In August 2021, the Taliban took over Afghanistan, which led, again, to nationwide protests that were calling for the reception of Afghan refugees (Pro Asyl, 2021).

Case 2: Uncovering of Mass Deportation Plans and the European Elections 2024

Our second case examines the period between the uncovering of mass deportation plans by far-right actors in January 2024 and the European Parliament elections in June 2024. On November 25, 2023, a meeting of high-ranking far-right political actors took place at a hotel near Potsdam, Germany. Participants included members of the Identitarian Movement, the far-right AfD party, and even some members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). During this meeting, they discussed plans for a large-scale, forced deportation campaign, referred to as “remigration,” which targets several millions of people living in Germany, including German citizens (Correctiv, 2024). The multi-step plan aimed to deport asylum seekers, foreign residents with valid permits, and those the participants labeled as “non-assimilated” German citizens. Additionally, the group discussed strategies to eliminate foreign restaurants from German streets, envisioning the project as a decades-long effort. Later it was uncovered that this secret meeting was the seventh of its kind (RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland, 2024a).

In January 2024, the investigative journalism network *Correctiv* published an article exposing the meeting, sparking widespread national and international media attention. The revelation sent shockwaves through Germany and beyond. The sinister nature of the mass deportation plan drew comparisons to the policies of Nazi Germany’s “Third Reich,” further underscored by the meeting’s proximity to the Wannsee Conference site, where senior Nazi officials planned the mass deportation and murder of Europe’s Jewish population in 1942 (Correctiv, 2024).

Immediately after the *Correctiv* article was published, a wave of anti-racist protests erupted across Germany. In Berlin, between 150,000 and 300,000 protesters demonstrated against racism and far-right extremism (Guardian, 2024b). More than 180,000 demonstrated in Hamburg, while cities like Cologne or Munich had protests with up to 100,000 participants (RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland, 2024b). Protests with such participation levels had been unprecedented in the country’s protest history.

3.2 Independent Variable: Local Anti-Racist Protest Events and Participants

Our main independent variable is the *presence of local anti-racist protest events*. For the data collection, we rely on Protest Event Analysis (PEA). We are working with data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010). We downloaded two datasets of all protest events coded in Germany on the municipality level in our time frames and created two subsets of anti-racist protests for our two cases. The first subset focuses on demonstrations between the time of the Hanau shooting (February 19, 2020) until the German federal election (September 26, 2021). This period encompasses the aftermath of the terrorist attack, the founding of networks against racism, the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing migration-related protests. The second subset covers demonstrations between the uncovering of the mass deportation plans of millions of people living in Germany (January 10, 2024) and the European election 2024 (June 9, 2024). We have decided to classify protests as anti-racist if their content relates positively to issues of ongoing migration and to the issues that dominate the public debate on migration and racism. To be more precise, this includes protests about asylum and refugees, foreign working rights, citizenship, cultural plurality, or the deportation plans. A detailed overview of the subjects is shown in Table A1 and A2 in the Appendix.⁴

Figure 1 shows the number of anti-racist protests in the data set that took place in each district in Germany between February 19, 2020, and September 26, 2021. In total, 755 protests took place in 183 of the 401 districts, relatively evenly distributed throughout Germany. Considering that we are only looking at demonstrations that took place on the streets during a pandemic and nationwide lockdowns, this is quite a large number. Most

⁴The literature is not conclusive regarding the question of whether racism is a part of the issue of migration (Della Porta, 2000) or vice versa (Matas, 1994). We decided to label the protests as anti-racist rather than pro-migration because, in both instances, the protests were mostly triggered by racist happenings. Consequently, most claims of the protests are against racism, racist hate crimes, or the mentioned deportation plans, which are, at the core, racist. This is evident in both cases, as illustrated in Table A1 and Table A2. We decided to classify voting as anti- or pro-migration, firstly because the outcomes of elections can either support or oppose pro-migration policies. Second, it is important to note that racism can also manifest in political parties that advocate for pro-migration policies, which is why we argue that for voting, the term pro-migration is more appropriate.

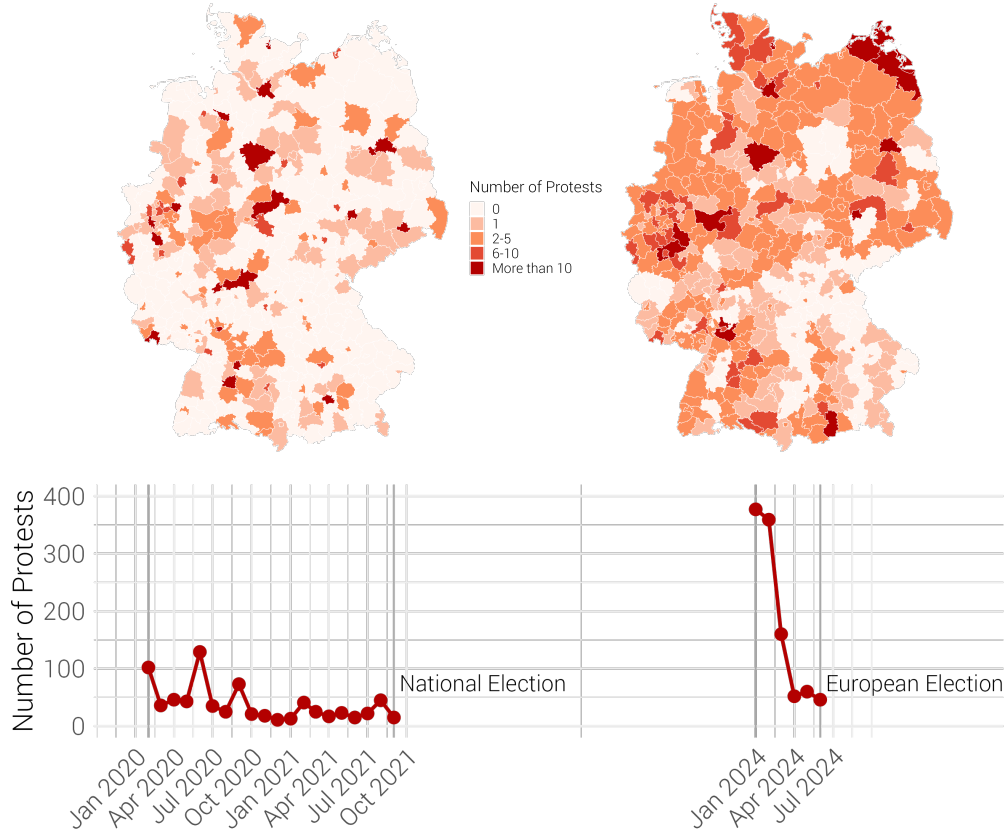
of the protests took place in larger cities like Berlin or Hamburg, which is no surprise.⁵ Nevertheless, districts that experienced more than ten protests during the treatment period were evenly distributed across Germany.

When taking a more detailed look into when the most protests happened, as shown in Figure 1, we can observe notable peaks in protest activity during February, June, and September 2020, as well as in February and August 2021. These peaks correspond to significant events that sparked large protests and were already discussed in the case selection: the Hanau shooting in February 2020, the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020, the tragic fire in the Moria refugee camp in September 2020, the one-year remembrance of the Hanau attack in February 2021, and the calls to accept refugees following the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021. Looking into the data and examining the protest notes confirm these issues as the most frequent ones in the respective months. These protests also show the various aspects of topics, with people taking to the streets to oppose racist terror attacks and racial profiling, but also to advocate for a culturally diverse society and the reception of refugees.

In 2024, the distribution of protests looks different. In 329 out of 401 districts, we know that at least one anti-racist protest took place, and in total, 1054 protests occurred from January until June 2024. What stands out is that during this time frame, the protests spread even more across Germany than in 2020-21. Only the southeast of Germany shows a notable number of districts without protests. Additionally, it is not only the usual suspects that have the most demonstrations but also districts like the Hochsauerlandkreis in North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as districts in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, that show a large number of protests. This aligns with how the protests were portrayed in the media: as very locally organized events, often featuring actors not from larger organizations but from small groups within civil society. Figure 1 also shows that in 2024, protests against racism appeared mainly in the context of mass deportation plans at the beginning of the year. During the summer, the overall number of events decreased substantially.

⁵See Table A3 and Table A4 for an overview of the cities where the most protests occurred.

Figure 1: Overview of Districts with Anti-Racist Protests in Germany: Spatial Distribution and Temporal Peaks



Note: The maps show the number of anti-racist protests on the district level (Kreise and kreisfreie Städte) that took place between February 19, 2020, and September 26, 2021 (left) and between January 10, 2024, and June 9, 2024 (right).

In addition to examining the binary indicator for the *presence of local anti-racist protest events*, we also consider the *number of local anti-racist protest events*. We hypothesize that repeated exposure amplifies the effects of local protests (Valentim, 2023). However, we anticipate that each additional protest event yields diminishing marginal returns. In other words, while an additional protest is more impactful when there have been very few or even no prior events, its effect diminishes as the number of prior events increases. We account for this diminishing marginal utility by applying the natural logarithm. Similarly, we hypothesize that an increasing number of *local anti-racist protest participants* increases the impact of protests, but also with diminishing marginal effects. For instance, the 100th

protest participant is expected to have a larger effect on vote share than the 10,000th participant. We model this diminishing marginal impact using the natural logarithm as well.

3.3 Analytical Framework and Modeling Strategy

Building on the hypotheses developed in the theoretical section, our research design looks at *aggregate voting behavior*, which serves as an indicator of whether protest can affect the political power distribution within a political system. We employ a difference-in-differences (DID) design with the aim of finding a causal effect of anti-racist protests on related voting behavior. DID methods have become a well-established method for “estimating causal effects in both experimental and observational data” (Imbens, 2024). With a DID approach, one compares the effect of a “treatment on an outcome” by examining two groups over time: the treated and the control group (De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfoeuille, 2023, 1). To test the treatment effect, we examine both groups before and after the treatment period. That allows us to analyze the within-group variations between these two groups, thereby revealing the effect of protests. This means that we do not assume that the external shocks themselves may not have an effect on the public. Instead, we acknowledge that such shocks could have nationwide effects and argue that protests have an additional local effect. We also take into account that the districts in which the protests took place might differ in all kinds of aspects that do not change over time and already have been present before the treatment, such as size, location, or historical background. Further, we decided to include entropy balanced models to make the treatment and control group even more comparable and, therefore, avoid biased results. Entropy balancing is a method that aims “to achieve covariate balance” (Hainmueller, 2012, 25). This means that, before running the actual analyses, the distributions of the control group get weighted to match the treatment group, which creates more balance between the two (Hainmueller, 2012).

To learn about voting behavior regarding migration, we examine the vote share of the anti-migration party, the AfD, and their main political opponent, the Green Party. The far-right AfD plays a crucial role in the German migration debate, as it is mainly known

for its advocacy of anti-migration and nationalist positions. The party is referred to as the “issue owner” or “issue entrepreneurs” of migration, meaning that it emphasizes migration the most in its manifesto, therefore leading the respective debate. The AfD also criticized the anti-racist protests in 2020. For example, Gottfried Curio, an AfD parliament member, stated that the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 was only an “Africa-Guilt-Cult” and that the disadvantage of foreigners is made up by anti-white German lefts (Alternative für Deutschland, 2020). In 2024, the anti-racist protests are even more closely connected to the AfD’s position on migration and racism, as many events were sparked after the release of the already-mentioned Correctiv investigation, which revealed a secret meeting involving AfD politicians, during which plans were made for the expulsion of millions of people with foreign backgrounds from Germany (Correctiv, 2024).

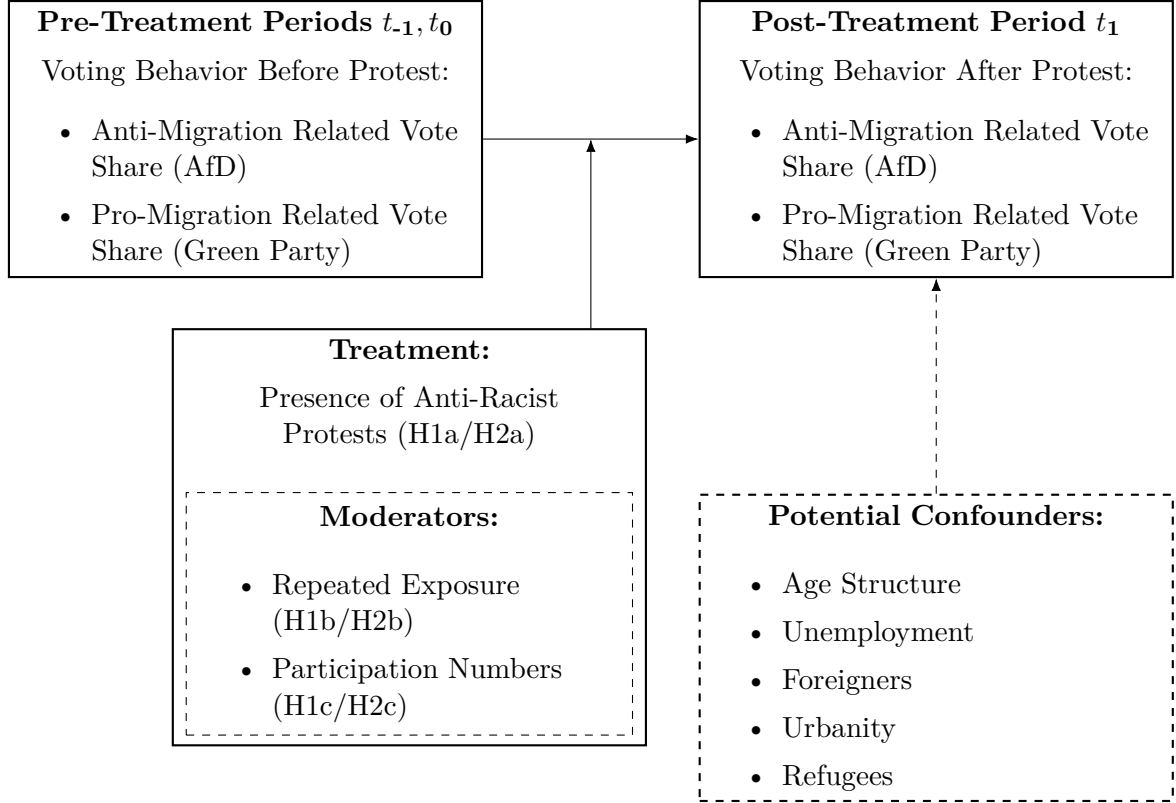
In contrast to the AfD, the Green Party is, next to their obvious focus on environmental politics, also known for advocating a culturally diverse society. For example, the party clearly condemned the Hanau attack (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2024) and emphasized participation in the Black Lives Matter protests (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2020). Also, in their manifesto for the 2021 German federal elections, they focus, again, next to environmental claims, on migration, integration, and cultural diversity. The manifesto advocates the reception and quick integration of refugees, the stop of deportations to Syria and Afghanistan, and the fight against racism (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2021). At least as important for the Greens is, however, their position as the ideological opponent of the AfD. The AfD and the Greens both focus on socio-cultural positions (Franzmann et al., 2020), what divides them from the other larger parties in Germany, that are, the Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Liberals (FDP), and the Left (Die Linke).⁶ Therefore, voting for the Greens, which we indicate as pro-migration voting, could also be seen as opposing anti-migration voting.

As shown in our hypotheses and their theoretical derivation, we argue that anti-racist protests influence political behavior in the direction they favor. To find out about these ef-

⁶We also ran the main analyses for these parties. The results can be found in Table A29 and Table A30. Further, the newly founded left-nationalist party *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* (BSW) would be an interesting case to study as it also advocates for anti-migration policies. However, our research design focuses on vote changes between elections, which is not yet possible for this party.

fects, we apply fixed effects to control for time-invariant characteristics and further control variables for the usual time-variant suspects in protest and voting research. Our analytical framework is visualized below:

Figure 2: Visualization of the Analytical Framework



To find out about the parties' vote shares, we work with data on the district level (*Kreise & kreisfreie Städte*) provided by the federal and state statistical offices (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2024). This dataset includes the vote shares for all large parties in federal and European elections for 294 *Kreise* and 107 *kreisfreie Städte*, which result in 401 districts. For the European elections, this is the most fine-grained level where high-quality data is available. Further, as outlined in our theoretical approach, we assume that the mechanisms we propose regarding the role of protests—such as their function in civil society engagement, their capacity to amplify political activism, and their ability to increase political salience—have a wider impact at the local level.

We estimate DID OLS regression models on the district level with fixed effects based on the following equation::

$$PartyVote_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \beta Protest_i x Post_t + C_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

where $PartyVote_{it}$ is each party's vote share in the respective elections in t 2013 [EU 2014], 2017 [EU 2019], or 2021 [EU 2024], and i each district. α_i shows the district fixed effects and γ_t the election year fixed effects. $\beta Protest_i$ is a dummy variable indicating whether in the district i at least one anti-racist protest took place in the specified time frames and takes the value 1 for districts with protests and 0 for districts without protests. $Post_t$ is a dummy variable that characterizes the period after the protests occurred, meaning 1 for 2021 [EU 2024] and 0 for 2013 and 2017 [EU 2014 and 2019]. This takes into account a possible secular effect of the external shocks. $\beta Protest_i x Post_t$ is the interaction term that represents the DID estimator. This term measures the effect of the anti-racist protests on vote shares in the post-treatment year 2021 [EU 2024] compared to the pre-treatment years 2013 and 2017 [EU 2014 and 2019]. C_{it} represents the control variables, ϵ_{it} represents the error term. In our second step of the analysis, we replace the binary protest variable with continuous measures that capture the number of protests and the average, maximum, and total number of participants. These variables are log-transformed⁷ to account for the diminishing effect of additional protests or participants because we assume that their additional impact decreases as their absolute numbers increase. As before, we focus on the federal and European election results and use the same district and year fixed effects.

4 Results

4.1 Presence of Protest Events

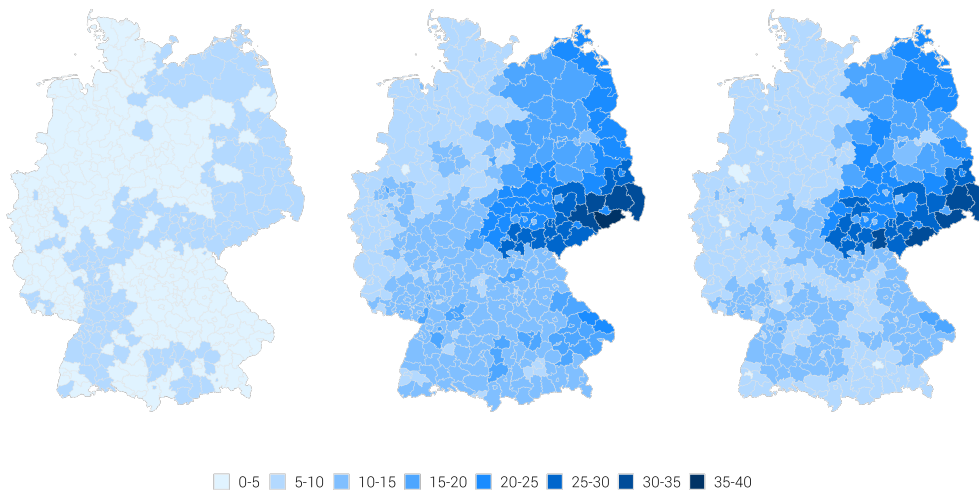
We argue that anti-racist protests can decrease anti- and increase pro-migration voting behavior in national and supra-national elections on the local level. Before moving to the effect of protests on AfD vote shares, we first briefly show the development of AfD and Green Party vote shares in Germany descriptively. Figure 3 shows the AfD vote share in

⁷We calculated $\ln(value + 1)$ so that no protest results in a value of 0.

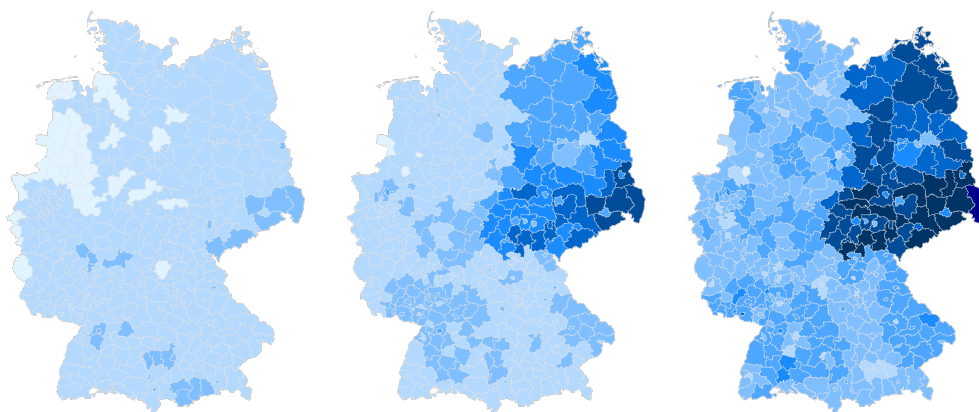
federal elections from 2013 to 2021 and from European elections from 2014 to 2024. On the federal level, the AfD gained votes from 2013 to but then again lost votes in 2021. On the EU level, the AfD gained votes continuously from 2014 to 2024. The AfD is known for being particularly successful in the eastern part of Germany, even though by no means exclusively (Manow and Schwander, 2022), which also shows in Figure 3. For both the federal and EU elections, the AfD is way stronger in eastern Germany, and this divide has increased over the years.

Figure 3: AfD Vote Shares in % on the District Level Over Time

(a) Federal Elections 2013, 2017 and 2021



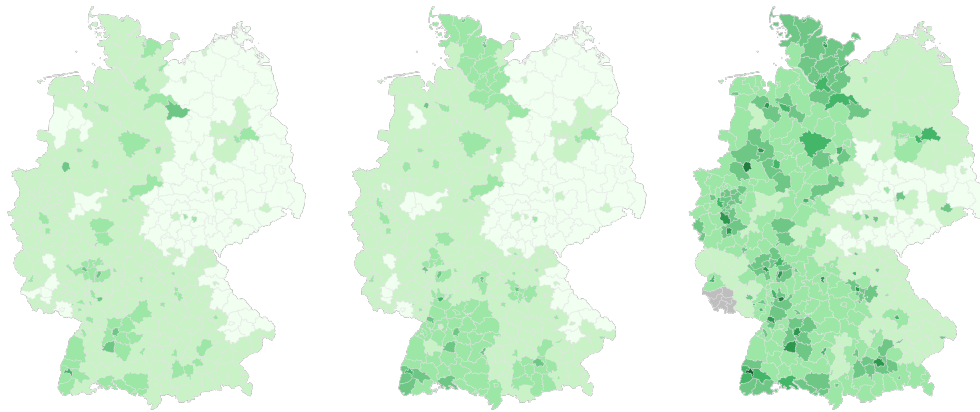
(b) European Elections 2014, 2019 and 2024



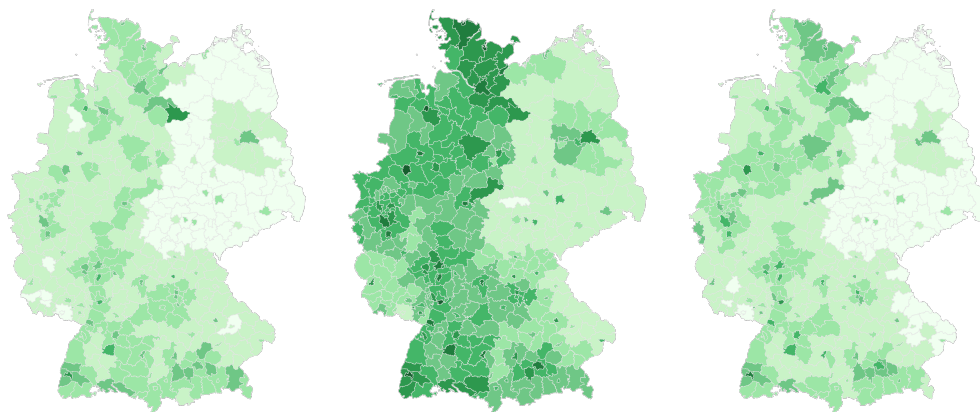
The Greens gained votes in the federal elections continuously from 2013 to 2021 and received over 10% of votes in the 2021 elections. In this year, they even became one of the governing parties. Possible explanations for the electoral success of the Green Party are the rise of climate change as a major issue, for example, due to Fridays for Future protests (Fabel et al., 2022; Valentim, 2023). As can be seen in Figure 4, in contrast to the AfD, the Greens are more successful in western compared to eastern Germany. The picture for the EU elections is particularly interesting. While the Greens gained votes from 2014 to 2019, they lost votes all over Germany from 2019 to 2024.

Figure 4: Green Vote Shares in % on the District Level Over Time

(a) Federal Elections 2013, 2017 and 2021



(b) European Elections 2014, 2019 and 2024



Yet, how did anti-racist protests affect these national and supra-national election results on the local level? We first look at the German federal elections and then, in a second step, at the European elections to see how the effects have changed over time.

Table 2 presents the results of DiD models with fixed effects for districts and election years. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. In both models, we include control variables. In these two models, the *Protest x Post* interaction is of primary interest. This interaction represents the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT), showing whether at least one anti-racist protest took place in each district during the respective treatment time. Therefore, this variable shows the effect of at least one anti-racist protest on the AfD vote share in the 2021 federal elections (Model 1) and the Green Party vote share in the 2021 federal elections (Model 2).

For the effect on AfD vote shares in the 2021 federal elections, this interaction has an estimated coefficient of -1.008, which is statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. This result indicates that the presence of at least one protest in the district during the treatment period is associated with a decrease in the AfD vote share in federal elections 2021 by approximately 1.01 percentage points, holding other factors constant and taking into account already existing previous differences between the districts. Therefore, the first model shows what we expected: On the district level, anti-racist protests decreased AfD vote share in the federal elections in 2021.

The results regarding the effect of anti-racist protests on Green vote share also align with our expectations. As can be drawn, again, from the interaction term *Protest x Post*, the occurrence of at least one protest is associated with a significant increase in Green voting by 2.2 percentage points in the respective district. The effect size is more than twice as large for the Greens as for the AfD.

In Table 3, we find similar results for the EU election outcomes regarding the AfD, but the results for the effect on Green Party vote share are less straightforward. In the European elections, districts with anti-racist protests show a decrease in AfD vote share of around 0.8 percentage points. The effect is smaller than in the federal elections but still significant. However, for the Green Party, we now find a statistically insignificant effect,

Table 2: Effect of Protests on AfD and Green Party Vote Shares: Full Models Including Controls (Federal Election Results 2013, 2017 and 2021)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	AfD Vote Share Model Including Controls	Green Party Vote Share Model Including Controls
	(1)	(2)
Protest x Post (DiD ATT)	−1.008*** (0.233)	2.184*** (0.213)
Post-Treatment Election	7.688*** (0.535)	4.287*** (0.366)
Youth Quotient	1.235*** (0.092)	−0.412*** (0.048)
Unemployment	−0.542*** (0.155)	−0.045 (0.096)
Share Foreigners	−0.246** (0.098)	−0.061 (0.072)
Population Density	−0.026*** (0.003)	0.023*** (0.004)
Number of Refugees	−0.0001* (0.0001)	0.00004 (0.00005)
(Intercept)	13.264** (5.558)	−7.295 (5.709)
Election FEs	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,179	1,179
R ²	0.932	0.949
Adjusted R ²	0.897	0.923
Residual Std. Error (df = 776)	1.908	1.367
F Statistic (df = 402; 776)	26.465***	36.175***

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

meaning that the Greens could not benefit from anti-racist protest mobilization despite its comparatively pro-migration platform. One possible reason might be that the Green Party shifted towards more anti-migration positions in the three years between the federal election in 2021 and the European election in 2024, therefore losing its institutional ally status of pro-migration mobilization.

To make sure that our findings are not just an artifact of model specifications, we ran various models with alternative specifications. The full regression tables can be seen in Appendix A.3. We visualized the respective *Protest x Post (DiD ATT)* in Figure 5. The plot shows the average treatment effect of the treated (ATT) for both parties. In these plots, we show (1) basic models with just two-way fixed effects, (2) our main models, including controls, which are already discussed above, and (3) entropy balanced models. These plots show that when not including controls but still fixed effects for elections and districts, the effects go in the same direction as they do when controlling for demographics but are even more substantial in the federal elections. When we apply entropy balancing, the effects become less substantial in the federal election results. Regarding the European election, we see that results for the Green Party remain insignificant in all models, whereas results for the AfD remain negative, albeit not in the entropy balanced model.

Table 3: Effect of Protests on AfD and Green Party Vote Shares: Full Models Including Controls (European Election Results 2014, 2019 and 2024)

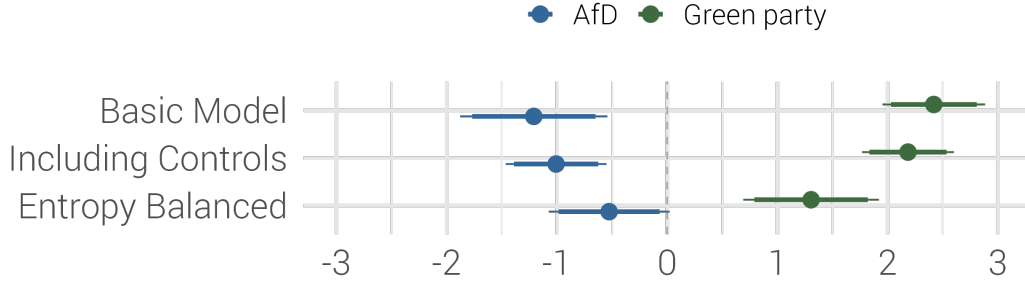
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	AfD Vote Share Model Including Controls	Green Party Vote Share Model Including Controls
	(1)	(2)
Protest x Post (DiD ATT)	−0.790** (0.362)	−0.421 (0.256)
Post-Treatment Election	7.946*** (0.741)	1.302*** (0.501)
Youth Quotient	1.626*** (0.100)	−0.168** (0.066)
Unemployment	−1.339*** (0.194)	0.261** (0.130)
Share Foreigners	−0.163* (0.098)	−0.060 (0.065)
Population Density	−0.044*** (0.004)	0.011*** (0.003)
Number of Refugees	−0.00000 (0.00003)	0.00003 (0.00003)
(Intercept)	40.398*** (7.396)	8.567 (5.901)
Election FEs	Yes	Yes
District FEs	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,178	1,178
R ²	0.945	0.948
Adjusted R ²	0.917	0.921
Residual Std. Error (df = 776)	1.988	1.930
F Statistic (df = 401; 776)	33.312***	35.139***

Note:

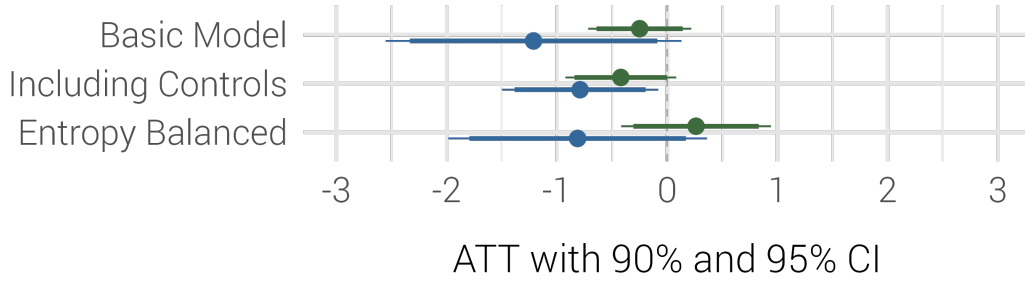
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 5: Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) of Anti-Racist Protests on AfD and Green Party Vote Shares in Federal and European Elections.

(a) Federal Elections 2013, 2017 and 2021



(b) European Elections 2014, 2019 and 2024



Note: All models include election year and district fixed effects. Thick line indicates 90% confidence interval, thin line indicates 95% confidence interval.

In sum, the results almost fully support *H1a: Local exposure to anti-racist protests decreases anti-migration vote shares*. For *H2a: Local exposure to anti-racist protests increases pro-migration vote shares*, we also find strong evidence, however, only for the 2021 federal election and not for the 2024 European election. The reasons why the Green Party did profit from anti-racist mobilization prior to the federal election 2021 but failed to capitalize on the anti-racist mobilization prior to the European election 2024 remain open. However, we discuss possible explanations below and in section 5.

4.2 Repeated Exposure to Protest Events and Participation Numbers

In the previous section, we just focused on whether protests took place in a district but did not engage with their frequencies or specifics. In the next step, we test to what

extent these factors contribute to outcomes in voting behavior. Again, we look at German federal and European election outcomes in 2021 and 2024 on the local level. We focus on the interpretation of the visualization. The respective regression tables can be viewed in Appendix A.3.

For the interpretation, we first focus on the federal election results. Figure 6 again shows the ATT for these two elections. The results we see for the 2021 federal elections again align with what we expected. Due to the logarithmic transformation of the independent variables, the interpretation of the results is not entirely self-explaining: using the logarithm means that every additional protest that takes place in a district has a smaller effect than the previous one.⁸ This leads to 2 protest events resulting in a decrease of 0.644% votes for the AfD and an increase of 1.902% for the Green Party. The next threshold for an effect increase times 2 is reached with 7 protest events, which lead to a decrease of 1.288% AfD votes and an increase of 3.804% Green votes.⁹

The interpretation of the number of participants who participated in the protests follows a similar logic. We also decided not to calculate the number of participants linear but logarithmic. This way, every additional protester gets less meaning. As an example: a difference in participants from 10 to 20 is more meaningful than a difference from 110 to 120. For average protest size, we measured the number in tens, for the maximum number of protest, we measured in hundreds and for the absolute number of protest participants, we measured in ten thousands. Otherwise, the calculation logic is equivalent to that of the protest events. For instance, an average number of 20 protest participants leads to a decrease of 0.544% AfD votes, while an average number of 70 participants leads to a decrease of 1.088%.

While the calculation seems to be a bit complex, the directions are easy to interpret, as the results show a clear direction. With an increase in the average or maximum size of the protests, we observe a decrease in AfD and an increase in Green Party vote shares in the federal election. An increase in the total number has no effect on the AfD vote share

⁸We calculated $\ln(value + 1)$, ensuring that no protest events have a value of 0. In this transformation, 1 event corresponds to a value of 0.69, 10 events to 2.3, 100 events to 4.6, and 1,000 events to 6.9.

⁹The next thresholds would be 20 events for an effect increase times 3, 51 events for an effect increase times 4, and 148 events for an effect increase times 5.

but a substantial one on the Green vote share.

We applied the same measurement for the EU elections in 2024, which can be seen in the lower panel of Figure 6. In line with our results for a binary measurement of protest occurrence, we see a clear continuous pattern for the AfD but less so for the Green Party. Regarding anti-migration voting behavior, more frequent and larger parties are still associated with a decrease in AfD vote share, and the effects have even become larger. However, for the Green Party, we see a complete shift: the positive and significant effects of the 2021 federal elections become insignificant or even negative in the European elections in 2024.

While this is not what we expected theoretically, it fits with the empirical patterns we have been observing so far: a possible explanation might be that the Green Party changed its migration positions in the years between 2021 and 2024. While in 2021, they were perceived as the ideological opponent of the AfD, also regarding their migration-related positions, the picture has changed during the last years. The Green Party became part of the German government in 2021 and took part in enforcing anti-migration policies, like introducing a payment card for asylum seekers.¹⁰ However, it might also be possible that there are other factors that drive our results, which we will go into more detail when discussing the limitations of our study.

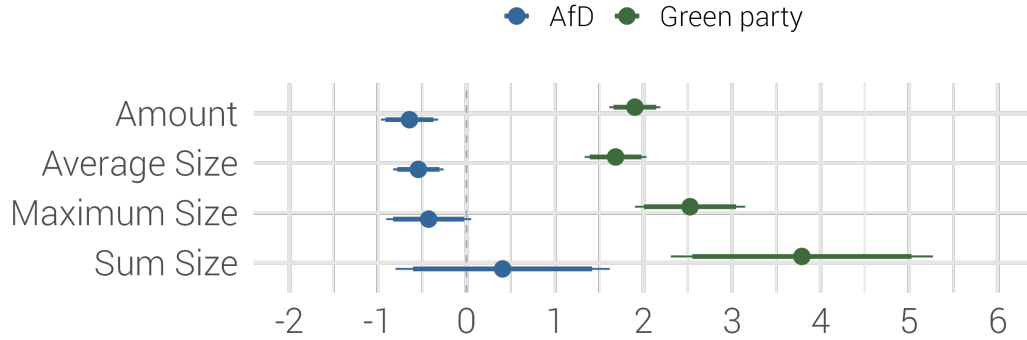
In sum, we find similar results for repeated exposure and for participation numbers as for the presence of protest events. For both elections under review, we can almost fully verify *H1b: Repeated local exposure to anti-racist protest events decreases anti-migration party vote shares*, and *H1c: An increasing number of anti-racist protest participants decreases anti-migration party vote shares*.

However, we can only verify *H2b: Repeated local exposure to anti-racist protest events increases pro-migration party vote shares*, and *H2c: An increasing number of anti-racist protest participants increases pro-migration party vote shares* for the national election in 2021, not for the European election in 2024.

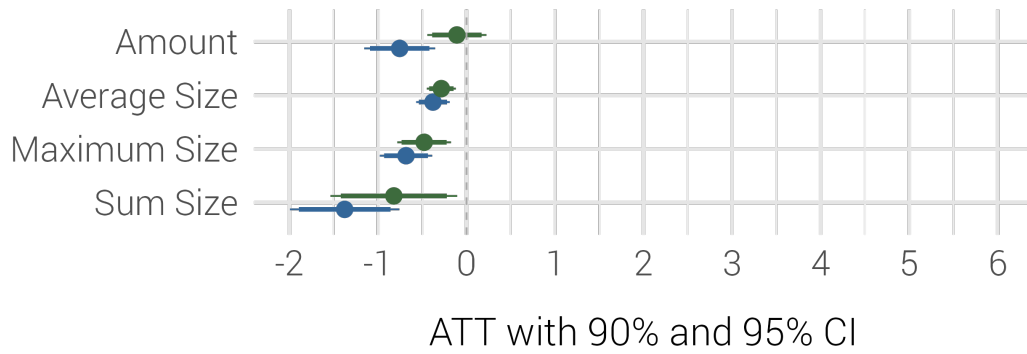
¹⁰The payment card for asylum seekers was introduced by the German national government in May 2024 and is supposed to prevent asylum seekers from sending the money they receive from the German government to their country of origin or using it for purposes other than the intended ones. This card was broadly criticized for being a humiliating tool.

Figure 6: Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) of Number of Anti-Racist Protests and Participants on AfD and Green Party Vote Shares in Federal and European Elections.

(a) Federal Elections 2013, 2017 and 2021



(b) European Elections 2014, 2019 and 2024



Note: All models include election year and district fixed effects; and control variables. Thick line indicates 90% confidence interval, thin line indicates 95% confidence interval. Variables are logarithmized to account for decreasing marginal effects. Amount (number of events) is measured in absolute numbers, Average size (number of participants) is measured in hundreds; Maximum size (number of participants) is measured in thousands; Sum size (number of participants) is measured in in ten thousands.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Racist attacks or events frequently spark anti-racist protest campaigns. But how do such anti-racist protests influence voting behavior? Focusing on two major anti-racist protest waves in Germany, we study the effects of such mobilization on the 2021 federal and the

2024 European elections.

We find that anti-racist mobilization prior to the national election in 2021 does indeed affect the vote share of pro-migration parties (here, the Green Party), while the vote share of anti-migration parties (here, the AfD) is negatively affected. This is in line with the theoretical expectations and, therefore, shows that the salience raised by protest can indeed be a mechanism that activates people to change their voting behavior. This is not only the case for environmental (Valentim, 2023) but also migration-related voting.

For the second case under study, the findings differ. Examining the European elections in 2024, we observe that anti-racist mobilization in 2024 also reduced the AfD vote share, and to an even greater extent than the mobilization preceding the national election in 2021. However, we do not find consistent evidence for the effect of anti-racist mobilization on the Green Party’s vote share.

A potential explanation lies in the Green Party’s notable shift in its stance on migration between 2021 and 2024, which may have hindered its ability to benefit from protest mobilization. For example, after the Hanau attack in 2020, the Green Party immediately demanded a commissioner specifically for racism (Zeit, 2024). In 2024, Green politicians participated in some protests, while in others, the party faced explicit criticism for being part of a government with anti-migration policies. Later that year, in September 2024, the Green Youth Board (*Grüne Jugend Vorstand*) collectively resigned, citing, among other reasons, the party’s stance on migration-related policies (Tagesschau, 2024). These trends may suggest that while the Green Party once served as a strong institutional ally for anti-racist movements, their relationship has grown more ambivalent in the years between the federal and European elections, partly due to the party’s stance on migration policies. Lastly, as mentioned, the Green Party was part of the governing coalition at the time. It is worth noting that protests are typically associated with opposition parties (Hutter and Vliegenthart, 2018). This dynamic could explain why street mobilization did not translate into increased vote shares for the Greens in the 2024 supra-national election. Further research is needed to fully understand this phenomenon.

The study has certain limitations, including potential media bias in the protest data

and the possibility of a spillover effect, as voters may attend protest events outside their electoral districts.¹¹ Nevertheless, these limitations suggest that the effect sizes may be even more substantial if we were able to account for all potential biases or shortcomings in the data. What remains unknown is whether these mechanisms apply to other countries with different electoral or party systems as well. Future scholarship could engage in more (comparative) research that unites questions about the protest landscape, political behavior, and party politics to shed light on these remaining open questions.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Swen Hutter, Christin Jänicke, Charlotte Kuberka, Hanna Schwander, and Carina Siebler for their valuable advice on earlier drafts of the manuscript. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *Colloquium on Center for Civil Society Research* at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. We thank the participants for their helpful comments. Additionally, we are deeply grateful to our research assistants, Valerie Voskamp and Marie Weis, for their invaluable support throughout the writing process.

Supplementary Material

The Online Appendix of this article can be accessed at <https://osf.io/mhsgu>.

¹¹For an extended discussion of the limitations see Appendix A.6.

References

- About-Chadi, T. and R. Finnigan (2019). Rights for same-sex couples and public attitudes toward gays and lesbians in europe. *Comparative Political Studies* 52(6), 868–895.
- Alternative für Deutschland (2020). "Black Lives Matter" ist Afrika-Schuld kult! – Dr. Gottfried Curio – AfD-Fraktion im Bundestag. url: <https://afdbundestag.de/black-lives-matter-ist-afrika-schuld kult-dr-gottfried-curio-afd-fraktion-im-bundestag/>.
- Angkasa, W. (2023). Synchronous Chanting in Indonesian Social Movement Repertoires: A Tool for Emoting and for Manipulating Emoters. *Human Arenas*, 1–20.
- Ansolabehere, S. and M. S. Puy (2018). Measuring issue-salience in voters' preferences. *Electoral Studies* 51, 103–114.
- Bauer, J., E. Stowell, A. Nair, and A. Kamal (2024). Don't Rain on My Protest: The Effect of Anti- Racism Protests on Democratic Vote Shares in Midwestern Suburbs. *Case Western Reserve University Journal Of Economics* 2(1), 37–49.
- BBC (2020). Moria migrants: Fire destroys Greek camp leaving 13,000 without shelter. url: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54082201>.
- Béland, D., A. L. Campbell, and R. K. Weaver (2022). *Policy feedback: How policies shape politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bittner, A. and E. Goodyear-Grant (2017). Digging deeper into the gender gap: Gender salience as a moderating factor in political attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 50(2), 559–578.
- Borbáth, E. (2023). Differentiation in protest politics: participation by political insiders and outsiders. *Political Behavior* 46, 727–750.
- Bornschier, S. (2010). *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right: The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Boulding, C. (2014). *NGOs, Political Protest, and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Branagan, M. and B. Boughton (2020). How do you learn how to change the world?: learning and teaching in Australian protest movements. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 43(3), 346–360.
- Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2022). Die Bundestagswahl 2021 in Ostdeutschland. url: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/343667/die-bundestagswahl-2021-in-ostdeutschland/>.
- Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2023). Etappen der Parteigeschichte der Grünen. url: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/gruene/42151/etappen-der-parteigeschichte-der-gruenen/>.
- Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (2020). Rechtsextremismus. Black Lives Matter. url: <https://www.gruene-fraktion-bayern.de/themen/gegen-rechtsextremismus-antisemitismus/2020/black-lives-matter/>.

- Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (2021). Deutschland. Alles ist drin. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2021. *Parteiprogramm*. url: https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/assets/Wahlprogramm-DIE-GRUENEN-Bundestagswahl-2021_barrierefrei.pdf.
- Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (2024). Gedenken an die Opfer des Attentats von Hanau. <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/rechtsextremismus/im-gedenken-an-die-opfer-des-attentats-von-hanau>.
- Caren, N., K. T. Andrews, and M. H. Nelson (2023). Black lives matter protests and the 2020 Presidential election. *Social Movement Studies* 0(0), 1–18.
- Carey, T. E., R. P. Branton, and V. Martinez-Ebers (2014). The influence of social protests on issue salience among Latinos. *Political Research Quarterly* 67(3), 615–627.
- Casquete, J. (2006). The power of demonstrations. *Social Movement Studies* 5(1), 45–60.
- Colombo, F., A. Ferrara, E. Dinas, F.-M. Vassou, and F. Bernardi (2024). From the Streets to the Voting Booth: The Electoral Effect of Grassroots Mobilization Against the Far Right. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 88(3), 1032–1043.
- Correctiv (2024). Secret plan against Germany. *correctiv.org*. <https://correctiv.org/en/latest-stories/2024/01/15/secret-plan-against-germany/>.
- Corrigall-Brown, C. (2011). *Patterns of Protest: Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- De Chaisemartin, C. and X. d’Haultfoeuille (2023). Two-way fixed effects and differences-in-differences with heterogeneous treatment effects: A survey. *The Econometrics Journal* 26(3), C1–C30.
- Della Porta, D. (2000). Immigration and protest: new challenges for italian democracy. *South European Society and Politics* 5(3), 108–132.
- Dennison, J. (2019). A review of public issue salience: Concepts, determinants and effects on voting. *Political Studies Review* 17(4), 436–446.
- Ellinas, A. A. and I. Lamprianou (2024). Movement versus Party: The Electoral Effects of Anti-Far Right Protests in Greece. *American Political Science Review* 118(2), 687–705.
- Fabel, M., M. Flückiger, M. Ludwig, H. Rainer, M. Waldinger, and S. Wichert (2022). The Power of Youth: Political Impacts of the ”Fridays for Future” Movement. Working Paper 9742, CESifo Working Paper.
- Franz, C., M. Fratzscher, and A. Kritikos (2019). At opposite poles: How the success of the Green Party and AfD reflects the geographical and social cleavages in Germany. *DIW Weekly Report* 9(34), 289–300.
- Franzmann, S. T., H. Giebler, and T. Poguntke (2020). It’s no longer the economy, stupid! Issue yield at the 2017 German federal election. *West European Politics* 43(3), 610–638.
- Gause, L. (2022). *The advantage of disadvantage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Gessler, T. and S. Hunger (2022). How the refugee crisis and radical right parties shape party competition on immigration. *Political Science Research and Methods* 10(3), 524–544.
- Giebler, H. and A. Wagner (2015). Contrasting First- and Second-Order Electoral Behaviour: Determinants of Individual Party Choice in European and German Federal Elections. *German Politics* 24(1), 46–66.
- Grande, E., T. Schwarzbözl, and M. Fatke (2019). Politicizing immigration in Western Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy* 26(10), 1444–1463.
- Guardian (2020). Germany shooting: far-right gunman kills 10 in Hanau. url: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/19/shooting-germany-hanau-dead-several-people-shisha-near-frankfurt>.
- Guardian (2021). One year on, how George Floyd’s murder has changed the world. url: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/22/george-floyd-murder-change-across-world-blm>.
- Guardian (2024a). About 200,000 people protest across Germany against far-right AfD party. url: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/03/germany-berlin-latest-rally-protests-against-far-right-afd-party>.
- Guardian (2024b). About 200,000 people protest across Germany against far-right AfD party. url: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/03/germany-berlin-latest-rally-protests-against-far-right-afd-party>.
- Hainmueller, J. (2012). Entropy balancing for causal effects: A multivariate reweighting method to produce balanced samples in observational studies. *Political Analysis* 20(1), 25–46.
- Hainmueller, J. and D. J. Hopkins (2014). Public attitudes toward immigration. *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, 225–249.
- Hart, M. t. (2007). Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction. *International Review of Social History* 52(S15), 1–20.
- Harteveld, E., A. Kokkonen, and S. Dahlberg (2017). Adapting to party lines: the effect of party affiliation on attitudes to immigration. *West European Politics* 40(6), 1177–1197.
- Heinze, A.-S. and M. Weisskircher (2021). No strong leaders needed? AfD party organisation between collective leadership, internal democracy, and “movement-party” strategy. *Politics and Governance* 9(4), 263–274.
- Hooghe, L. and G. Marks (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe’s crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy* 25(1), 109–135.
- Hutter, S. and H. Kriesi (2022). Politicising immigration in times of crisis. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(2), 341–365.
- Hutter, S. and I. Schäfer (2020). Cleavage politics and European integration. In N. Brack and S. Gürkan (Eds.), *Theorising the crises of the European Union*, pp. 63–80. London: Routledge.

- Hutter, S. and R. Vliegenthart (2018). Who responds to protest? protest politics and party responsiveness in western europe. *Party Politics* 24(4), 358–369.
- Imbens, G. W. (2024). Causal inference in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Statistics and Its Application* 11, 123–152.
- Jasper, J. M. (1998). The emotions of protest: Affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements. *Sociological Forum* 13(3), 397–424.
- Klüver, H. and I. Sagarzazu (2016). Setting the agenda or responding to voters? political parties, voters and issue attention. *West European Politics* 39(2), 380–398.
- Kriesi, H., E. Grande, M. Dolezal, M. Helbling, D. Höglinger, S. Hutter, and B. Wüest (2012). *Political Conflict in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krzyżanowski, M. (2020). Discursive shifts and the normalisation of racism: Imaginaries of immigration, moral panics and the discourse of contemporary right-wing populism. *Social Semiotics* 30(4), 503–527.
- Kustov, A. (2023). Do anti-immigration voters care more? Documenting the issue importance asymmetry of immigration attitudes. *British Journal of Political Science* 53(2), 796–805.
- Lagios, N., P.-G. Méon, and I. Tojerow (2022). Is demonstrating against the far right worth it? Evidence from French presidential elections. *IZA Discussion Paper* (15589), 1–38.
- Levi, E., I. Sin, and S. Stillman (2024). The lasting impact of external shocks on political opinions and populist voting. *Economic Inquiry* 62(1), 349–374.
- Lipset, S. M. and S. Rokkan (1967). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives*. New York: Free Press.
- Manow, P. and H. Schwander (2022). Eine differenzierte Erklärung für den Erfolg der AfD in West-und Ostdeutschland. In H. U. Brinkmann and K.-H. Reuband (Eds.), *Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland: Wahlverhalten in Zeiten politischer Polarisierung*, pp. 163–191. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Marien, S., M. Hooghe, and E. Quintelier (2010). Inequalities in non-institutionalised forms of political participation: A multi-level analysis of 25 countries. *Political Studies* 58(1), 187–213.
- Marks, G., D. Attewell, J. Rovny, and L. Hooghe (2021). Cleavage theory. In R. Marianne, J. Tronda, and A. Newsome (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*, pp. 173–193. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Matas, D. (1994). Racism and migration. *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees/Refuge: Revue canadienne sur les réfugiés* 13(8), 15–19.
- McAdam, D. (1999). *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- McCarthy, J. D. and M. N. Zald (1977). Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 82(6), 1212–1241.
- Miller, J. M., J. A. Krosnick, and L. R. Fabrigar (2016). The origins of policy issue salience: Personal and national importance impact on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional issue engagement. In J. M. Miller, J. A. Krosnick, and L. R. Fabrigar (Eds.), *Political Psychology: New Explorations*, pp. 139–185. New York: Routledge.
- Nieto, T. C. (2020). Learning through Protest: The Language of Critique and the Language of Possibility. *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal* 5, 2–27.
- Polletta, F. (1998). “It Was Like A Fever...” Narrative and Identity in Social Protest*. *Social Problems* 45(2), 137–159.
- Porta, D. d. and M. Diani (2009). *Social Movements: An Introduction*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Pro Asyl (2021). Flucht aus Afghanistan – Was Deutschland jetzt tun muss. url: <https://www.proasyl.de/pressemitteilung/flucht-aus-afghanistan-was-deutschland-jetzt-machen-muss/>.
- Raleigh, C., R. Linke, H. Hegre, and J. Karlsen (2010). Introducing ACLED: An armed conflict location and event dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5), 651–660.
- RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland (2024a). Geheimtreffen der Rechtsextremen: Auch AfD-Chef Tino Chrupalla beteiligt? url: <https://www.rnd.de/politik/geheimtreffen-der-rechtsextremen-auch-afd-chef-tino-chrupalla-beteiligt-F2Q7GOG7ZBGXLJT-BGEWYNPDEQY.html>.
- RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland (2024b). Großdemos gegen rechts: Hunderttausende Menschen in Deutschland auf den Straßen. url: <https://www.rnd.de/politik/grossdemos-gegen-rechts-hunderttausende-menschen-in-deutschland-auf-den-strassen-AQDB7PJHNBHKZMSFF6EF4JJKFM.html>.
- Reif, K. and H. Schmitt (1980). Nine second-order national elections—a conceptual framework for the analysis of European Election results. *European Journal of Political Research* 8(1), 3–44.
- Rucht, D. (2003). The changing role of political protest movements. *West European Politics* 26(4), 153–176.
- Rucht, D. (2013). Demokratie ohne Protest? Zur Wirkungsgeschichte sozialer Bewegungen. *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 26(3), 65–70.
- Schürmann, L. (2024). The impact of local protests on political elite communication: evidence from Fridays for Future in Germany. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 34(3), 510–530.
- Schürmann, L., J. Schwalbach, and N. Himmelrath (2024). Location matters! Geospatial dynamics of MP responses to Covid-19 protests in multilevel systems. *European Journal of Political Research* 0(0), 1–22.

- Seebrücke (2021). Deutschlandweite Proteste für die sofortige Aufnahme der Geflüchteten aus Moria und die Evakuierung der griechischen Lager. url: <https://www.seebruecke.org/aktuelles/deutschlandweite-proteste-fuer-die-sofortige-aufnahme-der-gefluechteten-aus-moria-und-die-evakuierung-der-griechischen-lager->.
- Sharpe, E. K. (2008, May). Festivals and Social Change: Intersections of Pleasure and Politics at a Community Music Festival. *Leisure Sciences* 30(3), 217–234.
- Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder (2024). Bundestagswahlen: Wahlberechtigte, Wahlbeteiligung, gültige Zweitstimmen nach ausgewählten Parteien. Wahltag. Regionale Tiefe: Kreise und krfr. Staedte. url: <https://www.regionalstatistik.de/genesis//online?operation=tablecode=14111-01-04-4bypass=truelevelindex=1levelid=1713530226839abreadcrumb>.
- Stjepandić, K. (2022). Hanau ist überall. Der Aufbau von Solidaritätsnetzwerken nach den rassistischen Anschlägen in Hanau als postmigrantische Mobilisierung. In J. Glathe and L. Gorriahn (Eds.), *Demokratie und Migration*, pp. 326–351. Baden-Baden: Nomos Publishing House.
- Tagesschau (2020). Nach Anschlag in Hanau: bundesweite Demos gegen Rassismus. url: https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/sendung/tagesschau_20_uhr/video-664739.html.
- Tagesschau (2024). "Gehen oder bleiben? url: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/gruene-jugend-mitglieder-100.html>.
- Tilly, C. and L. J. Wood (2015). *Social Movements, 1768-2012*. Routledge.
- Valentim, A. (2023). Repeated exposure and protest outcomes: How Fridays for Future protests influenced voters. *OSF preprint*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/m6dpg>.
- Van De Velde, C. (2024, September). The power of slogans: using protest writings in social movement research. *Social Movement Studies* 23(5), 569–588.
- Verbalyte, M., D. Bonansinga, and T. Exadaktylos (2022, January). When emotions run high: affective responses to crises in Europe. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 35(1), 1–13.
- Walgrave, S. and R. Vliegthart (2012). The Complex Agenda-Setting Power of Protest: Demonstrations, Media, Parliament, Government, and Legislation in Belgium, 1993-2000. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 17(2), 129–156.
- Walgrave, S. and R. Wouters (2014). The Missing Link in the Diffusion of Protest: Asking Others. *American Journal of Sociology* 119(6), 1670–1709.
- Weaver, D. (1991). Issue salience and public opinion: Are there consequences of agenda-setting? *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 3(1), 53–68.
- Weisskircher, M. (2022). Politik auf der Straße? Zum Forschungsstand zu sozialen Bewegungen, Protest und Zivilgesellschaft. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 16(3), 581–598.

- Wilde, P. d., R. Koopmans, W. Merkel, O. Strijbis, and M. Zürn (2019). *The Struggle Over Borders: Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, C. J. and S. Hunger (2022). How challenger party issue entrepreneurship and mainstream party strategies drive public issue salience: evidence from radical-right parties and the issue of immigration. *European Political Science Review* 14(4), 544–565.
- Zajak, S., E. Steinhilper, and M. Sommer (2023). Agenda setting and selective resonance—black lives matter and media debates on racism in germany. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 10(4), 552–576.
- Zeit (2020). Zehntausende Menschen protestieren deutschlandweit gegen Rassismus. url: <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2020-06/demonstration-anti-rassismus-polizeigewalt-deutschland-protest-black-lives-matter>.
- Zeit (2024). Grüne legen Aktionsplan gegen Rechtsextremismus vor. url: <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2020-02/hanau-anschlag-gruene-aktionsplan-gegen-rechts>.