Parochialism and voting for the radical-right: How cultural “remoteness” affects voting behavior in Germany

Daniel Ziblatt†
Hanno Hilbig∗
Daniel Bischof‡

August 28, 2019

Abstract

What are the cultural roots of radical-right voting? We propose that the structure of local social ties may make certain communities more susceptible to voting for radical-right parties. We adopt the concept of “parochialism”, describing communities which are marked by higher within-group trust, but lower generalized trust. Individuals in parochial communities may feel more threatened by the prospective arrival of outsiders than those in cosmopolitan regions. As a consequence, they are more likely to support parties that seek to curtail the inflow of outsiders. To test these propositions, we introduce a new measure of parochialism. Based on 50,000 responses to a unique online survey in Germany, we use the strength of local dialects as a measure of parochialism. Using both aggregate and individual-level data, we demonstrate that dialect strength is a strong predictor of voting for the radical-right AfD party. Finally, we show that the effect of parochialism becomes larger as the political salience of the recent refugee crisis increases.

†Department of Government, Harvard University (USA); dziblatt@g.harvard.edu.
∗Department of Government, Harvard University (USA); hhilbig@g.harvard.edu.
‡Department of Political Science, University of Zurich (CH); bischof@ipz.uzh.ch. Daniel thankfully acknowledges funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF Ambizione Grant, NO. 179938).
1 Introduction

A rich body of research seeks to understand various aspects of radical-right voting (Kriesi et al. 2008; Gidron and Hall 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Rydgren 2008; Dinas et al. 2018; Hangartner et al. 2019). The almost classical debate in the literature focuses on the divide between economic grievances versus cultural explanations – with some studies combining these arguments. Yet, one argument frequently used by pundits and journalists remained surprisingly absent from the scholarly debate, namely the idea that regions which are more remote, insulated and provincial might be more likely to vote for the radical-right – specifically in times of economic or cultural crises.

In economics, the concept of provincialism or parochialism has received a considerable amount of attention (Bernhard, Fischbacher, and Fehr 2006; Bowles and Gintis 2004; Yamagishi 2003). Building on arguments by the well-known “minimal group” experiments by Tajfel et al., this strand of research emphasizes that ingroup favoring behavior is stronger in decentralized/insulated groups in an effort to achieve reciprocation of favorable behavior within the ingroup (Bowles and Gintis 2004: 3). This results in norms and regularities being established within a group, which are unknown to most outgroups, leading to their exclusion from economic and social activities.

We argue that parochialism might also affect political behavior, with regions which are more parochial being more likely to vote for the radical-right – particularly in times of perceived crisis. We focus on the idea that some regions are more culturally isolated and distant from the national community – e.g. through cultural ties and local economic networks. In these communities, locals are heavily dependent on parochial networks in their everyday economic and social activities. Parochial networks are frequently accompanied by exclusive cultural markers – such as language, religion or ethnicity, which ensure close local ties while amplifying social and economic distance to the national community. Cultural markers may also result in parochial individuals being stereotyped and excluded by other groups. For instance, research in psychology and economics finds that individuals with strong regional accents are less likely to be successful in job interviews (Giles, Wilson, and Conway 1981; Segrest Purkiss et al. 2006; Rakić, Steffens, and Mummendey 2011), tend to be less mobile (Falck et al. 2018a; Dinas et al. 2018).
1 Introduction

Agrawal, Cockburn, and McHale (2006) and more adherent to local social ties and culture (Tabellini 2010). We argue that, due to the importance of local ties and exclusionary practices, culturally remote communities can be more likely to support radical-right parties in an effort to safeguard their parochial networks. Furthermore, the tendency to vote for radical-right parties should be amplified in moments of intensive economic crises or when facing a large influx of foreigners, which create a sudden and immediate threat to the parochial network.

We test our argument by studying the electoral rise of the radical-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party in the 2010s. To approximate cultural remoteness, we rely about 53,000 geo-coded responses to an online dialect survey (Elspaß et al. 2018; Leemann 2019). More specifically, we measure how distinct a given regional dialect is compared to standard German. We argue that dialectic closeness to standard German is a proxy for the strength of parochialism. Regions which are closer to the national standard dialect likely experienced greater degrees of interaction as well as economic and cultural exchange with the rest of the country. Dialectic similarity to standard German therefore may act as a marker of cosmopolitanism, whereas regions with more distinct accents are likely to be more culturally distant from the national political community.

We match the dialect data with electoral results from recent federal elections and public opinion data from the German Longitudinal Election Study. Using fixed effect regression models, we find support for the hypothesis that more culturally distant regions are more susceptible to radical-right parties. In addition, we present evidence for an “activation” of the parochial identities through an external threat: The correlation between cultural remoteness and radical-right voting is strongest when refugee inflows are at their peak during the recent “refugee crisis”.

Our research has important implications for several debates in the literature. First, for studies on radical-right voting by bringing in the idea of parochialism. Second, for the burgeon literature on historical persistence by adding a mechanism and channel through which historical legacies persist through time and even through centuries (Voigtländer and Voth 2012; Homola et al. 2019; Cantoni, Hagemeister, and Mark 2017).
Research in political science and economics has analyzed why individuals vote for various types of political parties. A substantial amount of research seeks to understand when and why individuals vote for radical-right or fascist parties (Falter 1991; Norris 2005; Voigtländer and Voth 2012; Adena 2015). Several explanations have been proposed, including economic grievances (Kriesi et al. 2008) and globalization shocks (Colantone and Stanig 2018a,b), cultural factors, historical legacies and religion (Voigtländer and Voth 2012, 2015; Ochsner and Roesel 2018; Homola et al. 2019; Inglehart and Norris 2016; King et al. 2008; Spenkuch and Tillmann 2018), immigration and xenophobia (Rydgren 2008) as well as the influence of the media (Adena 2015).

Due also to its enormous policy relevance, lately a rich amount of research focuses on how the public perceives migrants (Scheve and Slaughter 2001) and reacts to them (Hangartner et al. 2019). Recent research shows that the influx of refugees can lead to increasing votes for radical-right parties. For instance, Dinas et al. (2018) relying on a difference-in-differences and instrumental variable design show that the quasi-random exposure to refugees on Greek islands led to an increase of votes for the Golden Dawn – a fascist radical-right party – of two percentage points Yet, Steinmayr (2016) finds the exact opposite effect again relying on a instrumental variable design for the vote shares of the Austrian Freedom party (FPÖ).

Even though the contexts in which radical-right voting and its linkage to migration is studied vary hugely, current research is rarely interested in understanding how the cultural background of and norms within local communities moderate the public’s reaction to migration. This is puzzling given that a rich amount of experimental research emphasizes that particularly social norms within communities affect how its inhabitants react to influxes of “outgroups” (Choi, Poertner, and Sambanis 2019; Winter and Zhang 2018; Dreu et al. 2010; Bernhard, Fischbacher, and Fehr 2006). Using littering experiments in Germany, studies show that on the one hand ethnic minorities are more likely to be the target of sanctions when littering in public (Winter and Zhang 2018) while on the other hand they become less likely to be targeted if they suppress ascriptive differences (Choi, Poertner, and Sambanis 2019). The latter studies suggest that a major factor bringing about discrimination towards “outgroups”
3 The case for parochialism

in their experimental set-up is parochialism – a preference for favoring the members of one’s ethnic, racial or language group (Bernhard, Fischbacher, and Fehr 2006). While relying on the concept of parochialism conceptually, these studies do not engage with linking parochialism to political behavior neither to they engage with explicitly measuring parochialism. Below we first provide a theoretical framework how parochialism affects voting for radical-right parties before providing a first attempt to measure the concept by relying on linguistic data.

3 The case for parochialism

We argue that the character of local social ties can make certain communities more susceptible to voting for radical-right parties. Particularly vulnerable are what we call culturally “parochial” communities, characterized by higher within-group trust, lower generalized trust, and a deep suspicion of outsiders (Merton 1968; Gans 1962; Winter and Zhang 2018; Choi, Poertner, and Sambanis 2019). In such communities, a sudden arrival of outsiders – whether from abroad or from even within a country – are perceived as a more significant threat, causing greater support for radical-right parties that seek to curtail the inflow of outsiders. In the following, we lay out our argument in more detail.

The starting point for our argument is the observation that stickiness of radical-right voting might be deeply rooted in the cultural and economic structures within a particular locality. Economic and social circumstances are not perfectly stable over time. We can imagine changes in the sectoral composition of a town, e.g. because industries such as mining or agriculture become less important. Also, migration to and from a community affects its socio-economic composition. However, we argue that there are other characteristics which will stay relatively constant over even long spans of time.

One such factor is the culture (i.e. prevailing social behavior and norms) present in a location. We build on what the sociologist Robert Merton (1968) calls “parochialism” or “localism”, concepts intended to describe the fact that communities may differ from each other in the degree to which they are culturally isolated from the larger world, the degree to which residents are primarily concerned with local affairs or “the world outside”, the strength of ingroup ties, the degree to which residents primary social networks are with peers that they have known
their whole lives, and the amount of generalized trust residents have towards strangers.

Communities that are parochial fall at one end of a spectrum: residents’ life experiences are not very mobile – that is, they often live near where they were born, their main peers are people they have known their entire lives, they have high trust towards their own neighbors, and less experience, and therefore, less interest and more suspicion of strangers (Gans 1962). What Merton calls “cosmopolitan” individuals are at the other end of the spectrum: they are those for whom geographic mobility is a given, interest in national or global affairs is higher, peers are not only those one has known one’s whole life, ingroup ties are looser, and generalized trust is higher (e.g. Nelson and Tallman 1969: 196).

The cultural isolation of parochial communities often leads to the exclusion of individuals living in parochial communities by the remaining country. We believe that this is the case because “remote individuals” are subject to strong bias by others if their “remote” or “culturally different” background is explicitly visible. In many cases, this background becomes salient through language (accents), atypical behavior in social group settings, or absence of ties within broader social networks. Historical research has shown this dynamic at work in the 19th century state-building experiences (Weber 1976). And psychological research also has found strong evidence for this pattern. For instance, individuals with strong accents are far less likely to be successful in job interviews (Giles, Wilson, and Conway 1981; Segrest Purkiss et al. 2006; Rakić, Steffens, and Mumendey 2011).

As a result of their remoteness and the negative stereotyping that accompanies it, culturally distant communities are more likely to rely on parochial networks in their social and economic behavior (Bowles and Gintis 2004). This means that individuals living in remote places create close-knit networks characterized by exclusive cultural markers, such as language, religion or ethnicity. These cultural markers are relevant because while separated from the larger national community, attachment to a parochial community is not, economists and sociologists have argued, “irrational”: there are benefits to being part of such a relatively closed network (Hechter 1990; Bowles and Gintis 2004). High ingroup trust lowers transaction costs for daily economic and social interactions. Informal or unwritten contract mechanisms exist within such a community if an ingroup shares common exclusive trait, which lowers transaction costs for basic
everyday economic, social and political interactions. By contrast in “cosmopolitan” communities, within-group trust is lower, transaction costs of every-day interactions are higher but access to a national market is also easier.

The notion that in parochial communities strong ingroup ties accompany a deep suspicion of outsiders is a classic one in sociology. It is captured most evocatively in Hans Gans’ (1962) work on an Italian-American immigrant community in West Boston, a group he calls urban villagers, urban residents, not isolated and anonymous but instead emmeshed in local, neighborhood social ties, but also deeply “suspicious of anyone and anything outside their neighborhood” (Gans 1962: 45). In subsequent experimental work, psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated the presence of what has been called “parochial altruism” – altruism towards ingroup members but antagonism toward outgroup members (Tajfel, Billig, and Bundy 1971; Bernhard, Fischbacher, and Fehr 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2014). Whether or not the roots of “parochial altruism” is most fruitfully understood as the outgrowth of a strictly economic logic (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 2004) or is better understand as having psychological roots activated by levels of oxytocin in respondents (Dreu et al. 2010), this point is clear: strong parochial ingroup attachments are associated with outgroup antagonism.

To summarize, in the context of the sudden arrival of a group of immigrants, we argue that in contrast to cosmopolitan communities, in parochial communities, antagonism towards outsiders are more likely to be activated, in turn prompting anti-immigrant radical-right voting. Following the literature, we expect to find this pattern in culturally isolated parochial communities, where exclusive cultural markers are present, where contact with the outside world is lower, and especially where in-group trust is high and generalized outgroup trust is low.

Finally, one important caveat about our argument is that following the classic literature, (Merton 1968; Gans 1962), we contend these patterns are distinctly cultural: they do not simply reflect the objective levels of education, income, urbanization, or geographic distance from the cultural center of a country. While these important structural factors undoubtedly matter as well, our aim is to probe the independent impact of local culture itself on radical-right voting.
4 Data

To test our argument, we combine electoral results from the two most recent German general elections with a new measure of parochialism. Our measure of the strength of parochialism or the cultural distance to the national community is based on dialect similarity between German regions and standard German. To put it differently, we are measuring the strength of a dialect in a given region. We argue that the strength of the local dialect captures a large set of features that we ascribe to parochialism. It serves as a cultural marker of in-group membership, and is likely the result of the degree to which a given region interacted with other parts of the country. We employ two data sources to measure how similar a given dialect is compared to standard German. One of them is based on a contemporary data collected by the German magazine Der Spiegel (see: Elspaß et al. 2018; Leemann 2019), while second other relies on a survey of about 40,000 schools in the late 19th century. We use the contemporary dialect data as a proxy for parochialism in our main analyses. The historic data serves as evidence for the validity of the contemporary dialect data.

4.1 Cultural remoteness: contemporary data

To the best of our knowledge, the most comprehensive mapping of current regional German dialects is a unique online survey conducted by the German magazine Der Spiegel (see Elspaß et al. 2018). Der Spiegel created a publicly accessible dialect quiz, where individuals answer a number of questions related to regional differences in dialect\(^1\). Quiz respondents are shown a description of a verb, noun or adjective. They are then asked to select the regional version of the word from a list of choices. An example is a question on the informal version of the verb ‘to chat’: In East Germany, the majority of respondents use ‘quatschen’, speakers closer to the North-Western coast employ ‘schnacken’ and Bavarians use ‘ratschen’\(^2\). In total, respondents answer 24 questions, each aimed at the regional version of a specific noun, verb or adjective. While the quiz was not created for scientific purposes, the 24 questions are directly based on

\(^1\)https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/dialekte-quiz-wo-spricht-man-so-wie-sie-a-1030362.html
\(^2\)The Spiegel quiz is partially based on a similar quiz created by the New York Times. In the American context, an example of regional lexical difference is the use of the words ‘pop’ and ‘soda’ to refer to a sweetened carbonated drink
a prior linguistic research project aimed at describing regional differences in German dialects, the *Atlas der Deutschen Alltagssprache* ("Atlas of Colloquial German", see Elspaß 2005).

After completing the quiz, a predictive algorithm then estimates the region where the person is from. Finally, respondents are asked to evaluate the accuracy of the prediction, and can enter their hometown. A sizable proportion of all respondents enter their hometown, allowing us to trace responses to a specific location. In total, about 53,000 respondents indicate where they are from. We use this information to create county-level measures of dialectic distance between a given county and Hannover, the region that is most strongly associated with standard German. As a first step, we obtain the most common (modal) answer in each county for each of the 24 dialect questions that are part of the *Spiegel* quiz. For each county *i*, the modal answer to quiz item *k* takes on the value *X*^k^_i^.. In the following, we will refer to the modal answer in each county as a county-specific dialect characteristic. Depending on the dialect characteristic, *X*^k^_i^ can take between 2 and 24 different values. In standard German, the *k*-th dialect characteristic takes on the value *X*^k^\_Standard German. We define the similarity between a given regional dialect and standard German as follows:

\[
d_i = \sum_{k=1}^{24} \mathbb{1} \left( X_i^k = X_{\text{Standard German}}^k \right)
\]

Our dialect similarity measure therefore counts the number of times a region shares a dialect characteristic with standard German, ranging from 24 (the local dialect is the same as standard German) to 0 (the local dialect shares no characteristics with standard German). We chose this measure of dialectic similarity in accordance with prior work on the effect of dialects, chiefly Falck et al. (2012), who use the same definition of similarity in conjunction with the 19th-century data described in Section 4.2. A potential drawback of our method is that it requires dialect characteristics to be exactly the same to count towards the similarity measure. To ensure that the results are not driven by our choice of the dialect similarity measure, we also calculate the dialect similarity using the average Jaro-Winkler distance between the prototypical characteristics. The Jaro-Winkler similarity accounts for cases when dialect characteristics are similar, but not exactly the same. Reassuringly, the correlation between the two measures is high, and our results remain unaffected by the choice of the distance measure.
In Figure 1, we present the county-level similarity to standard German across Germany. Unsurprisingly, the counties surrounding the Hannover region (shaded in white) are most similar to standard German. We also observe a pronounced North-South divide: Southern German dialects are markedly more different from standard German than in the Northern part of the country. The two Southernmost states, Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg exhibit the greatest distance to standard German. To ensure that our results are not driven by the apparent North-South divide, we estimate all models with state fixed effects. The fixed effects allow us to analyze dialectic variation within states, rather than across states.

We expect that our dialectic distance measure is negatively correlated with support for radial right parties, with localities with weaker dialects being less likely to support radical-
right parties.

4.2 Cultural remoteness: historic data

As a secondary data source, we use historical dialect data from the Deutscher Sprachatlas (‘Atlas of the German Language’, see Falck et al. 2012; Lameli et al. 2014). Originally conducted in the late 19th century, the linguist Georg Wenker surveyed over 40,000 elementary schools across the German Empire, asking students and teachers to translate 40 German sentences into the local dialects. Much like the 24 dialect characteristics in the Spiegel data, Wenker’s successor Ferdinand Wrede used Wenker’s surveys to identify 66 ‘prototypical characteristics’ of the German language. We elaborate more on the details of the Wenker data in Section A.2 in the Appendix. Falck et al. (2012) aggregate the prototypical characteristics to the level of the county. The result is a similarity matrix between all possible county pairs in Germany. The dialect similarity measured used by Falck et al. (2012) follows the same principle as described in the previous section. Two counties are considered to be similar in dialects if they share a larger number of prototypical characteristics. Based on the Falck et al. (2012) data, we use the similarity to Hannover as a proxy for dialectic similarity to standard German.

Before turning to our main results, we use the historic dialect data to validate our contemporary measure. We emphasize that the contemporary measure, while based on linguistic research, serves mainly journalistic and entertainment purposes. To ensure that it is indeed an appropriate measure of dialect strength, we examine the correlation between the contemporary and the historic dialect similarity. While we expect that dialects change over time, they will likely not diverge completely. Indeed, the correlation between the 19th-century Wenker data and the Spiegel quiz data is 0.74. The high correlation confirms that the contemporary measure indeed picks up on variation in dialects, in part going back more than 100 years.

As a final note, we again observe very different patterns in East and West Germany. While the historic-contemporary correlation is 0.8 in the West, it is -0.26 in the territory of the former GDR. Apparently, the geographic distribution of dialects has changed much more in the East than in the West. In Figure A.1 in the Appendix, we visualize the change over time. Since the two data sources do not measure the sample dialect characteristics, we can only speak to
changes in the relative similarity to standard German. While West German counties generally remain similar in their distance to standard German, East German dialects change greatly. What is more, we observe that the distribution of East German dialects decreases in variance, indicating that East German dialects have become more homogenous over time.

5 Empirical strategy

We model the electoral success of the radical-right AfD party as a function of parochialism, as approximated by the dialect similarity between a given county and standard German. County-level AfD vote shares in the most recent federal elections (2017) are our dependent variable. In addition, we add a number of relevant covariates. We focus on potential confounders that have previously been shown to predict voting for radical-right parties.

To complement the aggregate electoral results, we use data from three different surveys: The German Longitudinal Election Study ( GLES), the Ethnic Diversity and Collective Action Study (EDCAS), as well as the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). Across all three surveys, the general empirical strategy is similar. We select relevant outcomes, and then examine the association between the local strength of parochialism and the outcome in question. Using ordinary least squares, we estimate a set of models which can be represented as follows:

\[ y_{i,j} = \alpha + \gamma_j + \tau d_{i,j} + \beta' X_{i,j} + \epsilon_{i,j} \]

Here, \( y_{i,j} \) is the outcome of interest for unit \( i \) in state \( j \), which is either radical-right voting or individual attitudes. Our main independent variable is \( d_{i,j} \), the dialectic similarity between a given county \( i \) and standard German. To ease interpretation, we have elected to standardize \( d_{i,j} \) in the majority of our model. We also include a vector of covariates \( X_{i,j} \) as well as state fixed effects \( \gamma_j \). In the models relying on actual election results, we include GDP/capita, wages, population density, unemployment rate, total population, the percentage of catholics in a district and per-capita refugees as covariates. The exact formal definition of our specification changes according to the data that we use – we have tried to make this as explicit as possible in the tables and figures we provide.

We concede that causal identification is difficult in the context our research question. We
6 Results

6.1 Voting for the AfD

In Table 1, we demonstrate that there is a significant and negative association between dialectic similarity to standard German and the electoral success of the AfD. Depending on the specification, a one standard deviation increase in similarity to standard German is associated with a 0.67–0.89 percentage point decrease in the voting for the AfD. The observed effect corresponds to a decrease of about 0.2 standard deviations in AfD voting\(^3\), confirming that dialectic similarity is a substantively meaningful predictor of radical-right voting. This relationship holds both when comparing across German states (model 1) and within states (model 2). In addition, we also examine the relationship between the 19\(^{\text{th}}\)-century dialect data and radical-right voting in models 3 and 4. We find comparable results, both in terms of direction and magnitude\(^4\). We account for time-invariant regional differences by including state fixed effects. As a consequence, the effect is not simply an artifact of a North-South or East-West divide. Taken together, the results suggest that there is a robust correlation between parochialism and radical-right voting.

Did the refugee crisis amplify parochial sentiments? In Figure 2, we present the results from additional specifications which consider the change in AfD voting between 2013 and 2017. This specification is motivated by our theoretical framework. We argue that parochialism should only affect the propensity to vote for radical-right parties if parochial communities are faced with a threat to the parochial status quo. The 2014 refugee crisis may have been such an event. In 2013, the AfD campaigned primarily on a Eurosceptic platform. In 2017,

\(^3\)The standard deviation of the dependent variable in model 2 is 5.3

\(^4\)We stress that all covariates and the state boundaries used for the fixed effects are post-treatment with respect to the historic dialect similarity measure. Therefore, the results in model 4 should be treated with caution.
Table 1: Parochialism and AfD Voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contemporary Data</th>
<th>Historic Data</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity to Standard German</td>
<td>−0.670***</td>
<td>−0.889***</td>
<td>−0.898***</td>
<td>−0.615***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard German</td>
<td>(0.265)</td>
<td>(0.345)</td>
<td>(0.264)</td>
<td>(0.270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean of DV</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>13.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard errors are shown in parentheses. The dialect similarity is standardized. The first two models use contemporary dialect similarity as the independent variable, while the latter two use the 19th-century measure. The county-level covariates are GDP/capita, wages, population density, unemployment rate, total population and % catholic. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

6 Results

anti-immigrant policies had become the AfD’s core issue. We find that similarity to standard German has a negative effect on the change in AfD voting between 2013 and 2017. This is the case for both the party vote and the candidate vote[^5], although the estimates for the candidate vote are imprecise. We interpret this as additional evidence that parochial sentiments may be triggered through external threats to the parochial equilibrium, such as the refugee crisis.

We now examine the relationship between dialect similarity and a range of individual-level outcomes. We begin with panel evidence of the German Longitudinal Election Survey (GLES). We use the survey data to complement the aggregate electoral results discussed in the previous section. While aggregate data is informative, the question remains whether the observed association remains when we control for individual level characteristics such as income, education or social class. Most importantly, the correlations between parochialism and voting for radical-right parties might be subject to omitted variable biases on the individual level. One such potential confounder is nationalism. In addition, the GLES panel allows us to examine the effect of parochialism over the course of the German refugee crisis. We are interested in analyzing whether the correlation between parochialism was stable as refugees first started entering Germany, or whether it changed over time.

[^5]: In general elections in Germany, constituents have two votes. The vote for a party list and a district candidate.
Notes: Effect of standardized linguistic similarity on the p.p. change in AfD vote shares between 2013 and 2017. The horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals. We consider the both votes in the general election, the party vote and the candidate vote. The covariates are given in Table 1.

We rely on individual level data taken from the GLES study – as discussed above. The GLES survey data includes information on the electoral districts where respondents reside. Accordingly, we aggregate the Elspaß et al. (2018) dialect quiz responses to the level of the electoral districts. There are 299 electoral districts in Germany, which means that each district contains, on average, about 1.3 counties. Aside from the changing level of aggregation, the definition of the dialect similarity measure remains the same. We count the number of dialect characteristics that are the same in a given electoral district and standard German, as approximated by the Hannover electoral district. From the GLES, we select (1) two items asking about vote intentions in the next general election and (2) an item that asks respondents to report positive or negative feelings towards the AfD party. The vote intention items simply ask respondents to indicate their most likely vote choice for both the district candidate and the party vote choice in the next general elections. The party attitude item asks respondents to rate the AfD party on a 11-point scale\(^6\). In a first step, we pool 18 GLES waves between

\(^6\)The exact wording is "Was halten Sie so ganz allgemein von [der Afd]?", which translates to "What do you think of / what is your attitude towards the AfD party". Respondents answer on 11-point scale, ranging from
June 2013 and March 2018. We then estimate the effect of dialect similarity on individual vote intentions and attitudes towards the AfD party.

Across 18 waves of the GLES, we find that dialect similarity to standard German predicts a decrease in the likelihood to vote for the AfD party. Likewise, respondents are less likely to rate the AfD favorably when dialects in their electoral district are weaker. We control for respondent gender, age, education, employment status, income, the urbanity of their location and separately also for their self-rated nationalism. The main results are statistically different from zero and mirror the findings in Section 6.1, where we document similar patterns on the aggregate level.

We emphasize that our conclusions remain unchanged when we control for nationalistic attitudes. In two GLES waves, respondents are asked to share their opinion on three items relating to nationalistic ideology. To form a composite scale of nationalism, we sum those three items\(^7\). Possibly, what we call ‘parochialism’ may well be just nationalism. By controlling for nationalism among the GLES respondents, we show that parochialism and nationalism are two distinct concepts. Our results remain substantively meaningful even when we condition on nationalism. Taken together, the survey results suggest that the association between parochialism and radical-right voting appears both in aggregate and individual-level data.

Finally, we exploit the panel structure of the GLES data to better understand how the correlation between parochialism and favorable attitudes towards the AfD varies across time. We focus on a pivotal time period in recent German history, the German refugees crisis. Instead of pooling all 18 waves, we estimate model 3 from Table 2 separately for each GLES wave. In Figure 3, we report the association between dialect similarity to standard German and favorable attitudes towards the AfD party, across all 18 waves.

We find suggestive evidence for a stronger correlation between parochialism and favorable attitudes towards the AfD as the refugee crisis becomes more salient. In 2013 political elites and the media did not heavily engage with questions of migration, the term “refugee crisis”

\(^7\)The index is a 15 point scale based on three questions. The questions are: (1) “how important is being German for your identity”, (2) "how likely are you to use the word ‘we’ versus ‘they’ when speaking of the German people” and (3) "how well does the adjective ‘German’ suit you?". Each item allows respondents to pick from five answer categories, each measuring different levels of agreement with the survey question. As a result, our composite index ranges from one to fifteen, with greater values indicating higher degrees of nationalism.
6 Results

Table 2: Pooled panel survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarity to</th>
<th>Candidate vote</th>
<th>Party vote</th>
<th>AfD scalometer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard German</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean of DV</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>31,019</td>
<td>3,414</td>
<td>31,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique respondents</td>
<td>2,089</td>
<td>1,992</td>
<td>2,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.0147</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.0155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East-West FE</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate: nationalism</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The first two models are linear probability models that predict the likelihood of intending to vote for the AfD in the next general election. The third model uses dialect similarity to predict positive attitudes towards the AfD party. We pool 18 waves of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). Standard errors, clustered by respondent, are shown in parentheses. The dialect similarity is standardized. The covariates are respondent gender, age, education, employment status, income, nationalistic attitudes and urbanity of the place of residence. **p < .01; *p < .05; *p < .1

Figure 3: Effect of standardized linguistic similarity on AfD “likability”. The vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

was not yet topical at the time. Similarly, the correlations between our similarity measure and the AfD likability are not significant for some of the GLES waves before 2014. Starting with the eighth wave in 2014 we find a substantially meaningful and statistically significant
correlation between our measure and the likability of the AfD. The first reports about a large influx of refugees to Europe and Germany started in 2014, when the amount of asylum-seekers started to increase significantly in comparison to 2013 with 627'000 people seeking asylum across Europe. Thus, the findings we report here can be read as suggestive evidence in line with our mechanism that the perception of crisis leads to a stronger relationship between parochialism and voting for radical-right parties. Notice, however, that of course several other factors change between 2013 and 2018, such as e.g. political elites engaging differently with the topic of migration and the AfD becoming a viable alternative for many voters during the crises. However, these factors apply to the entire nation and, thus, cannot explain the changing pattern between more and less remote communities.\footnote{In the long run we want to augment the individual analysis by using the individual perception of the asylum topic ("most important issue question"). Unfortunately the GLES currently does not provide the data for the mii question. Only the first 8 waves report the mii, which is a mistake the GLES seeks to address.}

6.2 Mechanisms

Based on our theoretical framework, we now analyze the mechanisms that underlie the association between parochialism and radical-right voting. Broadly speaking, our theoretical framework predicts that parochial communities are marked by (1) close-knit ingroups, (2) lower transaction costs as well as higher capabilities for cooperation and collective action, (3) rejection of outsiders as a threat to the parochial equilibrium and (4) a rejection of national identity and national political elites. When the inflow of foreigner threatens parochial communities, we posit that parochial individuals will react by voting for the party that promises to curtail future immigration.

To shed more light on potential mechanisms, we select a set of survey items from the GLES, EDCAS and CSES surveys. Our goal is to examine whether our theoretical predictions are reflected in individual attitudes and behavior. From the EDCAS survey, we select a number of items relating to the strength of ties within a small geographic units, as well as several survey items that measure the capacity for collective action. We draw on the CSES and GLES studies to measure attitudes towards elites and immigrants. We standardize all outcomes and then regress them on the standardized dialect similarity to standard German. In addition, we
6 Results

control for GDP/capita, wages, population density, the unemployment rate, total population and the shares of Catholics. All specifications include state fixed effects. We present the results in Table 3. Here, each row represents a separate regression.

Broadly, our findings confirm our theoretical account of the relationship between parochialism and radical-right voting. We find that identification with neighbors, as well as trust in neighbors is weaker in regions with weaker dialects. While the observed effect is imprecise, it aligns with the hypothesis that parochial individuals are embedded in a dense local networks that are marked by higher in-group trust. Relatedly, we also find strong evidence pointing to higher civic engagement and stronger norms of collective action in parochial communities. The second set of results in Table 3 shows that a stronger dialect is correlated with greater engagement in the civic and cultural realm. In addition, respondents in parochial communities are more likely to agree that public good provision has a higher priority than individual utility. We argue that these result provide further evidence for potential benefits of parochialism. Individuals are more willing to provide public goods when those goods primarily benefit the parochial community. When parochial individuals believe that the inflow of outsiders endangers the mechanisms for cooperation and public good provision, they turn to radical-right parties.

We find no evidence that parochialism is associated with higher diegrees of nationalism. What is more, parochial individuals tend to be more distrusting of national elites. Given the potential benefits they derive from parochialism, individuals with stronger dialects are more likely to agree that people, rather than elites, should make decisions. In a final set of results, we directly test for an association between parochialism and attitudes towards outgroups. We demonstrate the parochial individuals support further limitation of immigration. What is more, they are more likely to state that the local culture is harmed by immigrants. While this is only speculative, the emphasis on local culture might be indicative of the threat to parochial communities. Rather than a more general concern for the negative effect of immigrants for the whole country, individuals seem to be particularly concerned about their more immediate community.
Table 3: Mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local networks (EDCAS)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of identification with neighbors</td>
<td>-0.045</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of trust in neighbors</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective action &amp; cooperation (EDCAS)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in the social realm</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in the cultural realm</td>
<td>-0.133***</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in other civic realm</td>
<td>-0.098*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone should engage for the public good, even if it costs something</td>
<td>-0.077**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National identity (EDCAS)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German identity is important to me</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elite attitudes (CSES)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People, not elites, should make policy decisions</td>
<td>-0.094**</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elites are trustworthy</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outgroup attitudes (CSES &amp; GLES)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration of foreigners should be limited</td>
<td>-0.220***</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of immigrants is important</td>
<td>0.182***</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration to Germany is important</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minorities should adapt to the customs and traditions of the majority</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local culture is harmed by immigrants</td>
<td>-0.122**</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The tables show results from regressing selected survey items on dialect similarity to Hannover. Standard errors are shown in the third column parentheses. The results are from separate models, where the independent variable is always the standardized contemporary dialect similarity. All outcomes are standardized. All models include the following covariates: GDP/capita, wages, population density, unemployment rate, total population and % catholic. All models include state fixed effects. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

7 Conclusion

How can local culture explain support for radical-right parties? We propose that ‘parochial’ communities – defined by their greater cultural distance to the national political community – are more likely to feel threatened by a future inflows of outsiders, such as refugees. Conversely, these communities become more likely to vote for populist parties, which promise to curtail the inflow of outsiders. We introduce a new measure of parochialism, the strength of local dialects. Based on an online dialect survey of about 50,000 respondents, we are able to precisely map variation in dialect strength across Germany. Dialects can serve as a cultural markers, demarcating distinct local cultures even among natives. We find that regions where the local
dialect is closer to standard German are less likely to vote for radical-right parties. We draw on electoral results and survey data to show that the association between parochialism and radical-right voting holds both on the aggregate and on the individual level.

Our findings suggest that the literature on radical-right voting may need to pay more attention to within-country variation in local culture. Previous work has generally considered natives to be a relatively homogeneous group. In turn, radical-right-voting is often seen as a result of differences in economic standing or attitudes towards immigration. We show that natives may vary greatly in how they react to the prospective arrival of a new outgroup population, even when holding constant a number of relevant background characteristics.

References


References


References


Steinmayr, Andreas. 2016. “Contact Matters: Exposure to Refugees and Voting for the Far-Right.”.
References


A Appendix

A.1 Tables & Figures

Figure A.1: Two measures of dialect similarity

Note: The figure shows the relationship between the Wenker dialect similarity and the Spiegel measure. Greater values on both axes indicate greater linguistic similarity to standard German. Note that both measures have different ranges. We split the sample into East Germany (the former GDR) and West Germany.
Figure A.2: Dialect similarity and AfD vote shares in 2017

Note: Greater values on the x-axis indicate greater linguistic similarity to standard German.

Figure A.3: Dialect similarity and AfD vote shares in 2017

Note: Greater values on the x-axis indicate greater linguistic similarity to standard German. We split the sample into East Germany (the former GDR) and West Germany.
A Appendix

Table A.1: Remoteness and AfD Voting: East and West Germany.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarity to Standard German</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean of DV</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>11.37</td>
<td>22.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>0.670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Similarity is standardized. Covariates include GDP/capita, wages, population density, unemployment rate, total population, % catholic. ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1
A.2 Cultural remoteness: historic data

It is taken from the *Deutsche Sprachatlas* (see Falck et al. 2012; Lameli et al. 2014), a large-scale survey of the German language that was originally conducted in the late 19th century. Based on the survey, we use a measure of *dialectic similarity* between the dialect spoken in a given region, and the standard German dialect that is spoken in the Hannover area in Northern Central Germany. This dialect similarity measure serves as a proxy for cultural remoteness, our main independent variable.

Initiated by the Georg Wenker in 1879, the *Deutscher Sprachatlas* survey was aimed at documenting differences between regional dialects. Wenker surveyed over 40,000 elementary schools across the whole German Empire, asking students and teachers to translate 40 German sentences into the local dialects. Respondents were specifically asked to use phonetic spelling when translating the example sentences, preserving regional differences in pronunciation. In the first panel of Figure A.4, we show an example of the survey questionnaire as well as a map the regional variation in the word *Kleid* (cloth or dress). Based on the survey results, Wenker’s successor Ferdinand Wrede then identified 66 ‘prototypical characteristics’ of the German language, relating to spelling, pronunciation, grammar and differential use of cases. For each of the 66 characteristics, Wrede created maps that document their geographic variation within the German Empire.

Figure A.4: Questionnaire and map by Georg Wenker

We do not have direct access to the original surveys or the prototypical characteristics. Rather, we rely an aggregated data set compiled by Lameli et al. (2014). They aggregate the Wenker surveys to the level of contemporary German counties. For possible pair between two counties, Lameli et al. (2014)
create a measure of dialect similarity. We use part of this data to ascertain how close a county is to the standard German dialect that is spoken in Hannover. We measure dialect similarity between a given region and standard German through the variable $d_i$, which is constructed as follows:

In Figure A.5, we present the geographic distribution of the dialect similarity measure across Germany. Unsurprisingly, the counties surrounding the Hannover region (shaded in white) are most similar to standard German. We also observe a pronounced North-South divide: Southern German dialects are markedly more different from standard German than in the Northern part of the country. To make sure that our results are not driven by this North-South divide, we estimate all models with state (Länder) fixed effects to pick up on variation within states.