

Emigration, Alienation, Protest

On the Complexity of Political Radicalization in East Germany

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Abstract: The chapter explores the political radicalization in East Germany, focusing on the rise of the far-right AfD and the newly established Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW). It argues that historical factors, such as decades of emigration, socio-economic disparities, and alienation from federal politics, have shaped East Germany's distinct political landscape. Despite low migration levels compared to West Germany, anti-migration sentiment is prominent, fueled by structural and cultural differences. The AfD's success in recent elections highlights deep-seated resentment and identity struggles within East German society. The BSW further complicates the political scene by combining welfare state advocacy with migration skepticism.

Keywords: Political Radicalization, East Germany, Alternative für Deutschland, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, Irregular Migration, Societal Disintegration

Introduction

In the fall of 2024, elections were held in the three eastern German federal states of Saxony, Thuringia, and Brandenburg. In all three elections, the AfD, which can be characterized as a far-right party, received between a quarter and a third of the votes cast, and even though the AfD's participation in government was ruled out by all other parties, the party's strength is shifting public discourse towards a migration-sceptical to openly hostile atmosphere, as well as policy decisions such as the introduction of a payment card instead of cash for refugees, which calls into question the integration of refugees and, above all, their treatment as individuals worthy of protection. This has been and continues to be accompanied by high-profile protests against refugee accommodation and, in general, the strong presence of a mixed political scene consisting of the AfD, and youth and grassroots organizations that is open to or part of the far right. As a second 'up-and coming' player the 'Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht' (BSW) which is named after its founding mother and one of the most prominent politicians in Germany – Sahra Wagenknecht, former member of the Left Party and current member of the German Bundestag – changes the political landscape by offering a political package to the voters which is in favor of a strong welfare state, skepticism towards further

migration, and a rather moderate or even apologetic stance on Russia and its role as an aggressor in Ukraine.

However, this strength can only be explained to a limited extent by an actual strain on the public infrastructure for the reception of refugees, even if the influx of forced migrants has increased noticeably compared to the years before 2015 as a result of the forced migration of 2015 and the resulting family reunifications, as well as the war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the proportion of foreign nationals in the eastern German federal states is still significantly lower than in many western German federal states, at just over 5 % compared to, for example, a good 19 % in the city states of Berlin and Bremen or 16 % in Baden-Württemberg (Bundesamt, Statistisches, 2024)¹.

The aim of this chapter is to disentangle the complex causal relationships that can explain this – at first glance paradoxical – situation. The article argues that West German interpretations and categories are only of limited help in understanding the situation in the East German federal states. Instead, historically determined East German particularities in the form of alienation from federal politics perceived as West German, not-belonging and ‘far away’ but also the deeply ingrained experience as a region of emigration and the structural effects thereof must be taken into account. In this way, the article raises awareness of local and historical peculiarities that can be explained in part by specific developments in the *longue durée*, but also in part by the experiences of transformation over the past thirty years after the fall of communism.

In this study, the term East Germany covers the five federal states on the territory of the former German Democratic Republic: Saxony, Thuringia, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania². Despite almost three and a half decades of reunification, this area continues to constitute a distinct social space that differs significantly from West Germany in a number of socio-economic indicators³ and in terms of the history of mentality. The voting behavior of the population also reveals significant similarities within the eastern German federal states as well as striking

¹ The term “foreigners” is used in this article to refer to individuals residing in Germany who do not possess German citizenship. In contrast, individuals with a migration background are typically excluded from this discourse, despite their frequent inclusion in public debates on the subject. However, as the objective here is not to engage with the content of a debate that divides the concept of German identity into two distinct categories, namely “genuine” and “only qua passport,” as espoused by right-wing actors, the distinction is made along the legal criterion of citizenship. This is a particularly salient aspect for the individuals concerned, given its significant legal implications in their daily lives.

² The city-state of Berlin, or East Berlin, is deliberately excluded from this study. Due to the considerable influx and outflow of people since reunification, it is not possible to make a clear East/West allocation, meaning that statistical arguments do not have the necessary significance at this point.

³ Despite the limitations of this dichotomy, which is characteristic of many such attempts at classification, and the existence of affluent regions in eastern Germany, as well as e.g. the Ruhr area in western Germany, which is among the poorest regions in Germany, the overall picture is clear: when districts and independent cities are sorted by income, the first eastern German district (Potsdam-Mittelmark) is ranked 103rd out of 401.

differences to the western German states, which is particularly evident in the share of votes for the AfD. To illustrate, the share of votes the AfD achieved in the state elections of autumn 2024 were 29.2 % in Brandenburg, 32.8 % in Thuringia, and 30.6 % in Saxony, with a nationwide result of only 10.4 % in the last federal election in 2021. The *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* (BSW) alliance cannot be analyzed comparatively at this stage, as the party has so far only contested state elections in eastern German federal states. The first comprehensive all-German *test of strength* will be the early federal election scheduled for February 2025.

Given the inherently complex and lengthy nature of the socio-historical development under discussion, this article necessarily presents a somewhat preliminary character. However, it is designed to address central questions and provide structured insights. The study is divided into several analytical steps that build on each other. Initially, attitudes towards migration in East Germany are examined. In addition, both high-profile cases of protest against refugees and isolated incidents of terrorism will be introduced to further an understanding of the empirical situation. In a second step, the central migration dynamics to and from East Germany are presented in a systematic manner. The admission figures are set in relation to the overall population trend. This analytical approach pursues a twofold objective: on the one hand, it creates an empirical basis that contributes to a deeper understanding of the East German situation; on the other hand, the migration dynamics of the past decades already function as an initial explanatory factor for the political voting behavior outlined at the beginning. The third step of the analysis is dedicated to the particularities of the German-German unification process and its far-reaching consequences for a significant part of the East German population. The *accession* is critically examined as a formative event with lasting social effects. In the fourth section, the political-structural causes for the strength of migration-sceptical actors in eastern Germany are then briefly discussed. Finally, a conclusion formulates the central findings and reflects on the implications of the relative strength of the AfD and BSW for migrant integration in eastern Germany.

Between resentment and normalization: attitudes towards migration in East and West Germany

It is important to acknowledge that ethnocentric and xenophobic attitudes are not insignificant in both East and West Germany. The *Leipzig Authoritarianism Studies* indicate that East Germany exhibits a consistently higher level of authoritarianism than West Germany. The highest recorded value for the “xenophobia” dimension was 38.5 % in East Germany in 2012 and remained at an exceedingly high 31.5 % in 2024, in comparison to 19.3 % in Western Germany (Decker et al., 2024, 46–49).

A special evaluation by the *Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration* (SVR) on the state of Saxony, which has attracted a lot of media attention and is also notable

for the high election results for the AfD (30.6 % in the 2024 state elections), provides surprising results. The authors of the study found that the so-called *integration climate*⁴ in Saxony improved by 7.8 points between 2017/18 and 2022, disproportionately compared to the national average of 4.6 points (Wohlfahrt, Wittlif, 2022). For the other eastern German federal states, the average value is even 8.5 points higher. This increase is also evident for all social groups in Saxony (Wohlfahrt, Wittlif, 2022). The data thus contradicts the assumption that eastern German federal states or their inhabitants would remain opposed to migration, even if the values are still around 5 points below the national average.

The finding that the refugee migration of 2015/16 increased the proportion of foreigners in eastern Germany disproportionately compared to western Germany suggests that this has contributed to a normalization effect, as suggested by the so-called *contact hypothesis* according to Allport (1979). This assumption is also supported by other studies. Schmidt & Weick, for example, found that attitudes in favor of a complete ban on migration have weakened significantly compared to the 1990 s. The figures for asylum seekers fell from a good 20 % in 1996 to 8 % in the East and 7 % in the West. However, 75 % of the population in the East and 68 % in the West still want to *limit* the influx of asylum seekers (Schmidt, Weick, 2017). Further differentiation shows that there are particularly strong reservations about people who come to Germany for economic reasons. Here, 33 % in the West and 43 % in the East want to prevent this type of migration altogether (Schmidt, Weick, 2017). Non-EU citizens and people from Eastern Europe also tend to be viewed more negatively.

If one moves beyond the pure measurement of attitudes and considers the forms of political will formation and expression, questions about protests and political violence arise. Here, Hutter and Schäfer show that protest events in East Germany between 1990 and 2018 did not differ quantitatively from those in the West (Schmidt, Weick, 2017). In addition, violent protests have decreased since a peak in the early 1990 s when particular violent events occurred, such as in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Solingen or Mölln (Maubach, 2022; Steuwer, Kössler, 2022). However, it should be noted that there have been several very high-profile xenophobic and violent protests, including terrorist acts, in the years since 2015. For example, crimes motivated by right-wing extremism, including xenophobic crimes, rose from 17,020 in 2014 to 22,960 in 2015 and 23,555 in 2016 during the years of the so-called *migration crisis* (Backes et al., 2018). This high figure remained largely constant in the following years up to and including 2023 and has recently even risen significantly (see Table 1).

4 "Integrationsklima" is an indicator that measures attitudes and opinions towards immigration and integration.

Table 1 Development of nationwide right-wing motivated crimes in the years 2014–2023
Source: BMI (2024) own compilation

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Right-wing crimes	17.020	22.960	23.555	20.520	20.431	22.342	23.604	21.964	23.493	28.945

(Development of nationwide right-wing motivated crimes in the years 2014–2023, source:, BMI (2024) own compilation)

Additionally, Backes et al. indicate that the eastern German federal states exhibit a notably elevated ratio of violent crimes per capita, as evidenced by their findings presented (BMI, 2024). These quantitative surveys coincide with the violent protests in places such as Heidenau, Freital, Bautzen, and Tröglitz (BMI, 2024), which received considerable media attention. Additionally, the so called *Gruppe Freital*, a group of people from the small city of Freital close to Dresden which perpetrated several explosive attacks on refugee shelters and other violent crimes, was legally convicted as a terrorist organization.

In conclusion, the investigation of diverse elements pertaining to attitudes towards migration and foreigners in eastern Germany can be encapsulated as follows: It is an irrefutable observation that sentiments of resentment and xenophobia are pervasive in East Germany. Nevertheless, research findings also present a more nuanced portrayal of these attitudes. Evidence suggests the existence of deeply entrenched racist attitudes, which are manifested in a considerable number of politically motivated violent crimes. Additionally, there is a discernible tendency to view specific immigrant groups, such as those arriving in Germany for economic reasons, with a high degree of skepticism and disapproval. Conversely, immigration is becoming increasingly accepted, accompanied by a decline in rejection and a more favorable view of integration prospects. This trend is evident across Germany, though negative attitudes toward migration remain more prevalent in eastern Germany than in the west. In this regard, it would be inaccurate to suggest that there are fundamental differences between the eastern and western regions with regard to this issue. Nevertheless, the persistence of negative attitudes toward migration and the high election results for parties critical of migration (particularly the AfD) in eastern Germany remain a subject of investigation, as they present a challenge to social cohesion.

Social Development and Political Radicalization in East Germany: An Analysis of Demographic, Social and Political Factors

The initial stage of the investigation will concentrate on the demographic evolution of East Germany and elucidate the profound social consequences of decades of emigration. Subsequently, the lives of East Germans who “joined” will be discussed, specifically how the mode of reunification in 1990 contributed to feelings of inferiority among significant proportions of the East German population in comparison to West Germany. These dynamics persist and continue to impede social integration. Finally, this section will examine the particular structural strength and focus of right-wing populist and far-right actors and parties. This is because the undoubtedly existing voter potential in eastern Germany has been specifically addressed and mobilized by these forces for decades.

Demographic shifts and their consequences: On the formative role of population development in East Germany

Migration to and from East Germany is a complex demographic process that characterizes East Germany as a traditional emigration region. Since the founding of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949, the region has experienced three significant waves of emigration: The first wave of migration occurred between 1949 and 1961, when the Berlin Wall was constructed. The second wave took place between 1989 and 1994. The third wave of migration began around 2000 and continued until 2008, during which time, in particular, well-educated women were among those who migrated (Martens, 2020). The GDR can be regarded as a distinctive case within the context of industrialized societies, exhibiting a persistently negative population trend. From an initial 19.1 million inhabitants, the population declined to 16.4 million by the end of the state in 1989 (Martens, 2020). While the decline in births contributed to this decline, the majority of this development can be attributed to emigration (Martens, 2020). The initial significant wave of emigration prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall had a particularly notable and enduring impact. For instance, in the year of the uprising of 1953, 331,000 individuals departed from the GDR, a considerable proportion of whom were young and/or well-educated individuals (Martens, 2020). The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent fall of the *Iron Curtain* in 1989 led to a second significant wave of migration. During the 1980s, a considerable potential for dissatisfaction had built up in the East German population, which could now migrate unhindered to the West. As a result, East Germany as a geographical area lost a total of around 4.6 million people between 1949 and the dissolution of the GDR. From 1990 to 2022, the population declined by an additional 15 %, reaching approximately 12.6 million (Bundesamt, 2024). In contrast, there was only one relatively short period of

positive net migration after reunification: Between 2017 and 2022, 18,000 more individuals migrated to eastern Germany than emigrated, although this leveled off again in the following years (Bundesamt, 2024). Additionally, there are notable discrepancies between the western and eastern regions of Germany with regard to the proportion of foreign residents. At the end of 2022, individuals of non-German nationality constituted approximately 16 % of the population in the western region, in comparison to just 7 % in the eastern region. In western Germany, approximately one-third of these 16 % originated from former guest worker countries (Turkey, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Croatia), whereas refugees from Syria and Afghanistan represent the majority in the east. It is also noteworthy that 19 % of foreign residents in western Germany have been living there for at least 30 years, whereas this is the case for only 3 % of foreign residents in eastern Germany (Bundesamt, 2024).

Looking back at the GDR, we can see that GDR citizens generally had little experience of living with foreigners. Although almost 100,000 people were living in the GDR in 1989 as so-called contract workers, they were hardly integrated into GDR society. Contacts with Germans required permission, unless they took place in the workplace. Combined with the extremely limited travel opportunities for East German citizens, they could hardly come into contact with foreigners for any length of time or in any depth, let alone develop friendships or romantic relationships (Glorius, 2020)

A number of interesting conclusions can be drawn from this brief overview. Fundamentally, East Germany has an unbroken, decades-long tradition of emigration, which in the early phase of the GDR mainly involved many young people and in the 2000s an above-average number of women. Mai then formulates it pointedly: “The overwhelming trend was the exodus from East Germany [...]” (Mai, Michel, 2008, 27). The resulting demographic challenges are further exacerbated by below-average immigration from abroad, as the eastern German federal states have the lowest absolute and relative immigration from abroad of all the federal states, as Mai and Micheel show (Mai, Michel, 2008, 26). The history of emigration with a simultaneous absence of social impulses through immigration has several long-term and profound effects. These include a gender gap, meaning that there are significantly more men than women living in certain regions, gaps in provision, and ultimately a widespread feeling of being left behind. In contrast, the transformation of East German society from a highly homogeneous to a somewhat more heterogeneous society is a relatively recent phenomenon. This transformation can be attributed, in particular, to refugee migration after 2015, but also to returnees from the West and a general increase in immigration. While the data presented at the outset of this article tentatively suggest that this is occurring in East German societies, at least in part, the extent to which this phenomenon is also mitigating the long-standing structural consequences of being a region of emigration remains uncertain.

Collective experiences of disintegration – socio-historical analyses of the East German societal development

The situation during the fall of communism was characterized by a society that was under massive (economic) pressure to adapt and whose social institutions were largely dissolved and called into question. Two large social groups met here, which had become massively estranged during the forty-odd years of division and in some cases had developed in opposite directions.

In addition to the special situation of GDR citizens with regard to immigration and emigration, as well as travel and contact opportunities with non-Germans, as already mentioned in the previous section, the politically enforced *de-bourgeoisification* or leveling of the GDR society is of great relevance (Mau, 2019, 44). This social development can only be briefly outlined here: The politically intended realignment of GDR society along the lines of a socialist ideal of equality meant that although there was hardly any fear of poverty, there were also hardly any opportunities for distinction at the top and bourgeois habitus characteristics could only be preserved as residues (Großbölting, 2008). This is also due to the fact that these (partial) societies did not meet on an equal footing; instead, the winners were already determined beforehand, as it was not a matter of unification but of accession. Born sees a twofold dynamic at play here: This means that both the “mutual expectations of similarity between East and West Germans are collectively disappointed”, but also that East Germans “tend to be at a disadvantage as ‘foreigners’ and ‘laymen’ compared to West Germans as ‘natives’ and ‘experts’ due to the unequal distribution of power of definition in the new Federal Republic.” (Born, 2019, 98) This process can be seen as the nucleus for the frequently perceived and expressed feelings of significant proportions of the East German population as “second-class citizens”, which are still articulated in various ways today: On the one hand, there are individual media phenomena such as the resounding success (in East Germany) of Leipzig professor Dirk Oschmann, who angrily denounces the alleged and actual unequal treatment of the East by the West in his best-seller *Der Osten: eine westdeutsche Erfindung* which roughly translates to ‘East Germany: A West German invention’ (Oschmann, 2024). This assertion can be substantiated with greater scientific rigor through an examination of data pertaining to public satisfaction with the democratic process. While there has been an improvement in this regard in both regions of the country, the level of satisfaction remains considerably lower than that observed in West Germany during the same period (Rippl, 2020, 358). Qualitative findings can also contribute to this. In a study on the perception of elites among East Germans, Lerche and Schaller report that older people in particular are highly skeptical of *elites*, i. e. the holders of top positions in central social institutions: “Differences were particularly evident between older and younger participants: Older respondents with a great distance to members of the elite in their everyday lives are predominantly very critical, referring to both the term (or more precisely: their conceptualization of)

“elite” and its actual representatives. In the elite-population relationship, they identify an almost antagonistic contradiction between the representatives of (political and economic) elites and “the average person” (Lerche, Schaller, 2023, 354–55). As a result, an “[...] apparently solidified alienation of East Germans from the institutions and elites of West German democracy in the order of 30 to 50 percent of the adult resident population” can be observed (Kollmorgen & Schaller, 2024, 15). Schneickert et al. posit that the extent to which individuals experience feelings of devaluation is contingent upon their respective social circumstances. They assert that factors such as educational attainment, income, employment status, and home ownership are particularly salient and, thus, constitute socio-economic characteristics in which East Germans, on average, exhibit disadvantages relative to West Germans (Schneickert, Delhey, Steckermeier, 2019).

Over the past three decades, an anti-establishment and anti-West sentiment has thus developed in considerable parts of the East German population, which has been taken up by political actors such as the AfD and used for their political purposes. Interestingly, it is only of secondary importance whether East Germans are actually too little involved in decision-making and interpretation contexts or political decision-making. In fact, East Germans are significantly to seriously underrepresented in top positions in the judiciary, the military, but also in business or the media (Vogel, 2024) – but this is not made the subject of scandalization as it is almost always about the political elite, in which East Germans are not only slightly overrepresented, but have also had a lasting influence on the fate of the entire Federal Republic. Angela Merkel or Joachim Gauck as former *Bundespräsident*, but also Matthias Platzeck as former chairman of the SPD are prominent examples. West Germans such as AfD leader Björn Höcke or former AfD federal chairman Alexander Gauland, on the other hand, who are by no means from East Germany but use the rhetoric of “West bashing”, deliberately tap into these long-staked sentiments and are subsequently generously accepted ‘into their own ranks’: “In addition to the empirical contradictions regarding the elite underrepresentation or paradoxical re-ethnification of elite members, attention should be drawn here to the contradiction between a complaint of insufficient assertion of East German interests – due to supposedly too few political East German leaders – and the documented presence of the topic of East Germany in public discourse since 2016/17 – as well as to the mobilization of extensive financial transfers and regional development projects, for example in connection with the phase-out of fossil fuel power generation or the federal government’s innovation and high-tech strategy. The interests of other minorities or voter groups are by no means recognized and taken into account to the same extent” (Kollmorgen, Schaller, 2024).

The emergence of *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* (BSW), named after the prominent leftist politician and ex-member of the Left Party Sahra Wagenknecht, represents the advent of a second political force on the national stage that invokes anti-liberalism, anti-“wokeism” (i. e., culturally conservative positions), scepticism or hostility towards

migration, and rejection of the West as a political programme. The BSW thus achieved 11.8 % (Saxony), 15.8 % (Thuringia) and 13.5 % (Brandenburg) in the East German state elections in the fall of 2024, making it a junior partner in two federal states (Brandenburg, together with the SPD, and together with the CDU and SPD in Thuringia) in the first election after its foundation. This double success – after all, the combined results of AfD and BSW account for more than 40 % of all votes in each of the three federal states, and as much as 48.6 % in Thuringia – points to the deep alienation of a significant proportion of East Germans from the overall German political offer.

Between Protest and Establishment – Social Anchoring Strategies of Right-Wing Movements in East Germany

A final aspect, which relates less to macrostructures and more to actor constellations, is the relative establishment and resulting political, economic and cultural strength of right-wing actors. Right-wing and far-right actors have been trying for many years to gain a foothold in eastern Germany and establish counter-hegemonies (Stöss, 2007). A significant element in this context is the notable involvement of right-wing extremist actors from West Germany since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. They have identified East Germany as the primary field of their activities and have devoted more intensive efforts to it than other political forces. This is particularly evident in the West German origins of many leading figures in the extreme right. Prominent examples include Björn Höcke, a figure of identification for the far-right camp in the AfD, and Götz Kubitschek, originally from Ravensburg, who has lived in Schnellroda in Saxony-Anhalt for years and is an influential publisher in the far-right scene. In addition to a personal presence, there is also a strategy of local anchoring. Right-wing actors invest specifically in tangible assets such as youth and education centers, which serve as focal points in communities and facilitate the normalization of right-wing ideologies (Michelsen et al., 2017). In doing so, these groups have been able to capitalize on the deficiencies in democratic forces, often stemming from factors such as underdeveloped membership bases or inadequate financial resources. Another salient aspect pertains to the comparative strength of right-wing protest cultures. For an extended period, right-wing actors have demonstrated a capacity to orchestrate protests against migration, state representatives, and measures. The PEGIDA protests in Dresden during the early 2010 s functioned as a trailblazer, serving as a networking platform that mobilized up to 25,000 individuals between 2014 and 2020 (Schaller, 2021). In contrast to the openly neo-Nazi demonstrations of the 1990 s and 2000 s, these protests appeal to a much broader audience. It is not uncommon to see entire families, including young children, at such demonstrations. This reinforces the discursive effect in society and creates a legitimizing mechanism for extreme right-wing actors by creating a connection to the middle-class milieu. This strategy is supported by the local social engagement of AfD

representatives in community-building institutions in rural areas, such as sports clubs or the volunteer fire department (Hafeneger, Becker, 2008). The interaction of these aspects creates spaces in which right-wing actors can challenge cultural hegemony and underpin it with economic and political strength. This happens through the operation of restaurants, security services, fashion brands and other service companies, as well as through a strong presence in local political bodies. Right-wing positions, discourses and the people who support them thus enter the mainstream, become normalized and tend to be perceived as belonging. As a result, voting for the AfD becomes socially unproblematic. Appeals from (West German) leading politicians come to nothing, as the experiences of foreignness and alienation of the past decades prevent greater social integration – casting votes for the AfD can effectively be turned into an identity-creating “East German otherness”.

Historical trajectories and current political formations: An interpretative conclusion

This article attempts to contextualize and explain the conspicuous electoral behaviour in East Germany, particularly with regard to the significant performance of the AfD and the Sahra Wagenknecht coalition (BSW). At the center of the argument are the long-term effects of historical configurations that go back to the GDR period and whose impact is particularly evident in the post-reunification period. The core argument postulates that East Germany’s special historical role continues to have a serious impact on the attitudes of the population socialized there and that these imprints are directly reflected in political voting behaviour. The individual mechanisms of action were only briefly outlined, but with the aim of making the overarching line of argument plausible. The interpretation of these findings suggests that the integration process between East and West is more complex than is often assumed. The voting decisions for AfD and BSW result from a multiple bundle of causes – migration is one factor, but not the only one. Rather, these election results reflect a complex network of historical experiences, social transformation processes and struggles for recognition. Nevertheless, these political developments have significant consequences, especially for marginalized groups. The political agenda is increasingly dominated by a pronounced anti-migration sentiment, which manifests itself in so-called “chilling effects” for progressive migration policies. A paradigmatic example is the introduction of the so-called “payment card” for refugees which was – in the case of Brandenburg – primarily driven by the SPD – evidently in response to political pressure from right-wing populist forces. It is reasonable to predict that progressive political initiatives will continue to be overshadowed by such restrictive approaches in the future, even if the AfD does not assume direct government responsibility. The discursive shift and the political pressure to act are already having a preventative effect and are transforming

the political field of action in the long term. This analysis underscores the necessity of comprehending political phenomena within their historical and genetic contexts, and of adopting a nuanced perspective on the intricate interplay among social transformation processes, collective experiences, and political preferences.

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