SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY

TERRITORIAL DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES TO THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN GERMANY: THE POLITICAL ASPECT

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The European migration crisis has divided the population of Germany along the lines of the country's migration policy and the attitude to immigrants. The anti-immigrant sentiment, supported by the rhetoric of the extreme right-wing parties and the criticism of current policies, have been growing in the society. This article reviews theoretical approaches to the study of public attitude to migrants proceeding from the effect that immigration has on the socioeconomic development of the host society. The authors propose a mechanism for analysing the political life of a society to develop viable approaches to managing the migration shock and mitigating its effect. The article considers the attitudes of the German population to immigration and immigrants in terms of the transformation of electoral preferences under the influence of the migration crisis. Recent data on the electoral standing of the Alternative for Germany party are used to develop a typology of states, based on the level of support for this party from the local population and on other measures of the migration situation and socioeconomic development. The authors identify northeastern regions with a high probability of popular support for the extreme right views on the migration crisis and northern and southwestern states that are most and least susceptible to the extreme right influence.

Key words: migration crisis in Germany, Alternative for Germany, attitudes to immigration, public opinion, territorial differences of German states

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Theory

Examining the attitudes of a recipient society to immigrants is an integral part of most studies into migration policies and efficient immigration management. The attitudes of recipient societies towards immigrants and refugees are often studied from the perspective of cultural distance

and identity problems, economic concerns and security threats, integration and assimilation problems, etc. Two areas of research have developed in this field [2]. The first one focuses on the attitudes to immigration from the perspective of personal, mainly economic, consequences for an individual [3; 4; 5]. Reception of immigrants has a significant effect on socioeconomic development, namely, the labour market and living standards, regional production and consumption, public sector and social relations, international trade, and technological development [6]. A substantial body of research [7; 8] suggests that negative attitudes towards migrants are often attributed to the expectations of unemployment, lower wages, higher taxes, and reductions in public spending as a result of the inflow of foreign labour force [3; 7; 8; 9]. However, recent studies show that the key factor affecting attitudes to immigration is the conviction an individual has about the cultural/symbolical (national identity) or economic threat to their home region or country [2; 10; 11]. This social-psychological approach lies at the core of the second type of studies into attitudes towards immigration. Recent findings suggest that demands for a tougher immigration policy are associated with major economic shocks and crises. Otherwise, they are characteristic of individuals with negative stereotypes about members of other ethnic groups [2; 13; 14]. Most works in the field analyse the surveys asking respondents about what levels of immigration they deem preferable, whether there is a need to curb immigration, etc. However, such an approach suggests studying only the expressed but not actual attitudes to immigration [15]. Moreover, it is presumed that respondents are familiar with the problem of migration. Voiced attitudes are often divorced from the actual migration situation.

Studies focusing on analysing attitudes to immigration and their correlation with electoral preferences and relevant legislative initiatives have been gaining in popularity of late. Highly instrumental in estimating the effect of immigration on the political scenery, these studies are in high demand today. The government's position on migration is an important political issue. The European migrant crisis has shown that immigration can have a destructive effect on established political alliances and on the agenda of individual activists and elites, and can disturb the balance of power. As a result, unexpected coalitions may emerge [2].

The mechanism governing the effect of migration shock on a society's political sphere can be described as a process of direct and indirect influence on different areas of life (fig. 1). For instance, a mass inflow of migrants who do not enjoy voting rights does not have a direct effect on the political life of the recipient society; however, the very presence of migrants influences opinions in it. The migration shock affects primarily the spheres of direct contact with immigrants — social, economic, and sociocultural (spiritual) ones. This effect determines the response of the 'population' subsystem to the migrant crisis. The population elects certain members of elites, expecting them to make changes to the political sphere to adjust the state's immigration and/or foreign policy. However, the political sphere (elites) may affect the public opinion on migration both negatively and positively [16;

17]. For instance, political parties and leaders may propagate intolerant and even racist slogans — which is the case in Hungary — or even declare immigration a threat to national security [15].
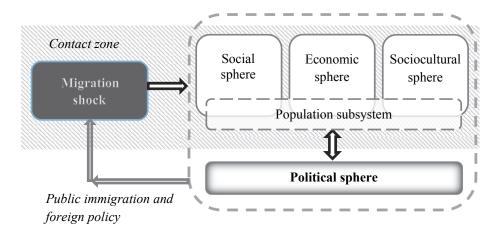

Fig. 1. Direct and indirect effects of migration shock on the major systems of a recipient society

Source: compiled by the authors.

A vast body of research has been carried out in this area. Most studies focus on migration laws and the political sphere of recipient societies [15]. Of special interest are extreme right parties, migratory regulation being a central theme of their election campaigns [18]. Today, amid the migrant crisis, the right movement is gaining in popularity in many European countries — Germany, Hungary, and others [19; 20]. For instance, Matt Golder concludes that one of the reasons behind the popularity of extreme right parties is the growing anti-immigrant sentiment in society — a result of concern over increasing unemployment and threats to national identity and culture among the recipient population [21]. Analysing an econometric simulation of the effect of increasing proportion of immigrant population and growing unemployment on the number of votes cast for extreme right parties in Germany, France, and Austria in 1960—1999, Terri Givens concludes that a 1% increase in the proportion of foreigners translates into a 0.7—0.8% rise in the popularity of such parties. In Germany, this effect was not pronounced [21]. However, one can assume that there is certain indirect influence. Voters in the regions with a small proportion of immigrants can vote for the extreme right out of concern about a possible inflow of migrants. For instance, the data compiled by the TARKI group show that, during the migrant crisis in Hungary, people who had never spoken to migrants or refugees had the most negative opinion about them [22]. Current Russian studies into the development of Germany's political party system under the impact of continu-

ing inflow of refugees demonstrate increasing popularity of extreme left parties, which take advantage of anti-immigrant sentiment of part the electorate [20; 23; 24].

The current study focuses on attitudes to immigration and immigrants. However, it is proposed to consider such attitudes from the perspective of transformations in the electoral preferences of the population under the impact of migration shock as a manifestation of the recipient society's views on immigration. Moreover, the authors strive to fill in the gap in geography-based studies and to provide a typology of German states by the occurrence of extreme right views on immigration among the recipient population. This will be done through estimating the electoral popularity of the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland,* the AfD) party. The article will also describe the migration situation and socioeconomic conditions in each region.

Methodology

This study analyses data on the electoral standing of the AfD party, based on the results of recent surveys (September 2016 — February 2017) conducted by German public opinion research organisations — Infratest dimap, INSA, the University of Hamburg, and Forsa.

A typology was constructed to identify patterns in the formation of attitudes to the current migration shock, broken down by Germany's federal states. One of the key classification properties was regional support for the AfD estimated with the help of the data on the proportion of votes for the party, and the number of seats it holds in a *Landtag*. Secondary, or contextual, criteria were the commonly used measures of regional migration situation and socioeconomic development — the proportion of foreign-born residents (percent of the total population), concentration of asylum seekers (number of first-time asylum applications per 1,000 population), asylum seeker quota, gross regional product (thousand euro at basic prices, GRP), and unemployment rate [25].

Germany's migrant crisis in figures

The notion of migrant crisis does not have a precise definition in international law. A relatively new term to the international political community, it sparks off heated debates on 'crisis-driven', i. e. forced migration. The 'migration' crisis is yet another proof. Experts on migration believe that, in a broad sense, the migrant crisis is the movement of people forced to migrate by threats to their lives posed by changes in living conditions [26]. Key concepts of forced migration were outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. The refugee is a person 'who owing to a well-founded fear of being perse-

cuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' [27]. The Collins dictionary gives this definition of a migrant crisis: 'increasing numbers of migrant arrivals which is a combination of refugees and economic migrants' [28]. Today's migrant crisis in Europe and in Germany demonstrates that economic migrants can pass as forced migrants, i. e. migration may be voluntary. Here, the term refugee will not apply. A more appropriate term is asylum seeker: 'a person who is seeking protection as a refugee and is still waiting to have his/her claim assessed'. This article will discuss the migrant crisis with a particular focus on asylum seekers.

Experts date the beginning of Germany's migrant crisis differently. According to official statistics on arrivals and registrations in the EASY system, a steep increase in the number of immigrants was observed in June 2015. In the three summer months, the monthly migrant inflow was 3.2 times that of 2014 and the first five months of 2015 (fig. 2). The inflow of migrants hit its peak in November 2015 to reach 206.1 people. However, the number of asylum seekers calculated based on first-time applications was rising as early as the first months of 2015 (fig. 2).
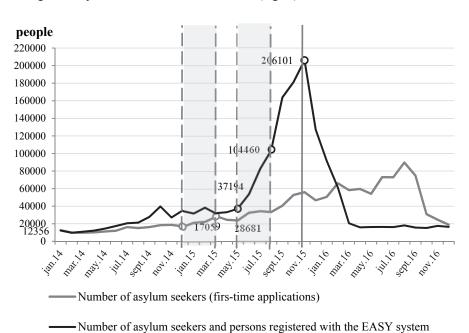

Fig. 2. The number of asylum seekers, persons registered with the EASY system, and asylum applicants

Source: [29—32].

Germany's population started to react to the increasing inflow of migrants when the first signs of the imminent migrant crisis became visible. Survey data suggest that the problem of migration and integration came to the fore as early as September 2014, shadowing such major issues as unemployment and pensions (fig. 3). The first steep monthly increase in the number of asylum seekers — by 30—40% — was observed in September-October 2014. However, this growth was just a 'ripple' in comparison to the 'surge' that came in summer-autumn 2015 (fig. 2). By the end of 2015, 80% of the local population were concerned about the migrant crisis and its consequences.
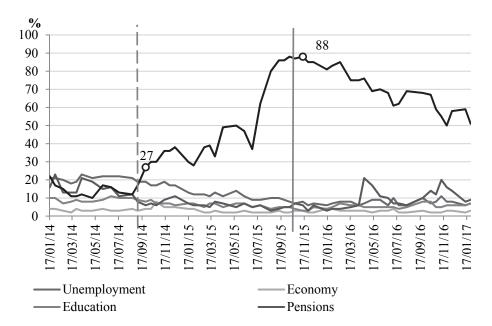

Fig. 3. Germany's most important problems, according to the country's population

Source: [33].

Thus, from the end of 2014, Germany has been experiencing the largest inflow of forced migrants since the 1990s. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, over 1 m people entered the country and registered with the EASY (*Erstverteilung der Asylbegehrenden*, First distribution of asylum seekers) system. This number was 3.5 times that of the previous year. However, not even half applied for asylum. This is explained as follows. Firstly, some migrants could be double-registered because of flaws in the EASY system. Secondly, many migrants were not accounted for by the end of the year, since an average period between applying for and receiving asylum took 5.3 months. Therefore, such migrants had to be accounted for next year [34]. The latter argument is supported by the 2015 statistics — the number of immigrants who had applied for asylum was twice that of immigrants who had entered the country (fig. 4).
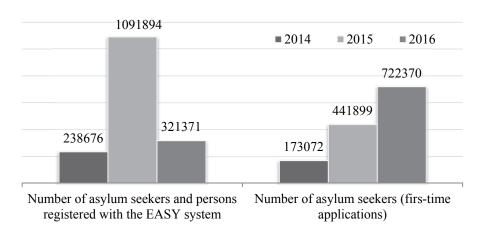
Fig. 4. The number of persons seeking asylum in Germany,
registered with the EASY system, and applicants for asylum in 2014—2016, persons

Source: [29—32].

As the monthly immigration rate started to decrease at the end of 2015 (according to the number of migrants registered with EASY), public concern over migration, integration, and refugees lessened. However, persistently high numbers of asylum seekers, despite a significant decrease in the number of arrivals, will remain a major concern for Germany's population.

However, the large inflow of migrants has to be distributed evenly across the country. To that end, the Königstein quota (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*) system is used. It distributes asylum seekers based on the population of a state (which counts for one third of the quota) and regional tax revenues (two thirds). According to 2015 quotas, three regions — Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and North Rhine-Westphalia — accounted for half of all asylum seekers (fig. 5). Nevertheless, these states do not stand out in terms of migrant concentration. According to 2015 statistics, the heaviest migrant load is carried by the northeastern states — Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt, and Brandenburg — and the city-states of Berlin, Bremen, and Hamburg. In 2015, high concentration of immigrants is observed in the Saar with 10 asylum seekers per 1,000 population. The concentration of migrants registered with the EASY system in 2015 was even higher and it exceeded 20 persons per 1,000 population in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, the Saar, and Berlin.

The migrant crisis, regardless of its causes, is having a dramatic effect on the public consciousness of the receiving society. Since 2015, surveys have shown that, for most Germans, negatives outweigh positives when it comes to immigration [36]. At different points, 33—44 % of the population shared this opinion. A further 14—18 % of the population believe that immigration has both negative and positive consequences [36]. For a long time, Germany has been one of five European countries, where a vast majority of population (over 60 %) associate terrorism with migrants [37]. The proportion of Ger-

mans who are afraid of large numbers of incoming refugees, terrorist attacks, and a growing crime rate is increasing. Their share rose from 45 % at the beginning of 2014 to 77 % in July 215 [36; 38]. After a slight reduction, it reached 62 % after the terrorist attack at the Christmas market in Berlin in December 2016 [36]. Discontent among the population is explained by various reasons: a lack of public confidence in the integration of such a large number of migrants with different religious and social backgrounds, fears about increasing crime rates, and disappointment in the state's migration and integration policy, including the inability to curb the number of incoming humanitarian migrants. Other reasons include concerns over changes in one's own socioeconomic position following an increase in expenditure on refugee distribution and growing competition in the labour market, etc. [39—40].
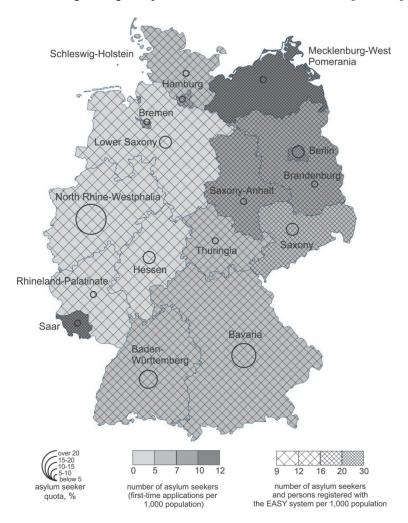

Fig. 5. Key measure of asylum seeker distribution,
broken down by federal states, 2015

Source: compiled by the authors based on [35].

German attitudes to the migrant crisis

Such public perception of the migrant crisis resulted in dwindling support for the immigration policy pursued by the government headed by Mrs Angela Merkel. Recent surveys show that 52 % of Germans were satisfied with the chancellor's policies, whereas in October 2014, this figure stood at 70 % [36].

Thus, in anticipation of the 2017 election campaign, a number of political parties espoused an anti-immigrant rhetoric and the extreme right parties — fervent supporters of restrictive immigration policies — reinforced it. The greatest success was a young radical party — the Alternative for Germany (the AfD). It calls for introducing a selective immigration policy, restricting the number of humanitarian migrants, abandoning the Schengen agreement, re-establishing control along the country's border, and limiting income benefits for the refugees to the standards of their home countries. Strange as it may seem, these simple mottos repudiating the policies pursued by the ruling coalition are embraced by many Germans today. At the same time, the AfD party 'feeds' on the support of the most radical part of the population. The number of crimes against immigrants and volunteers helping them has increased of late.

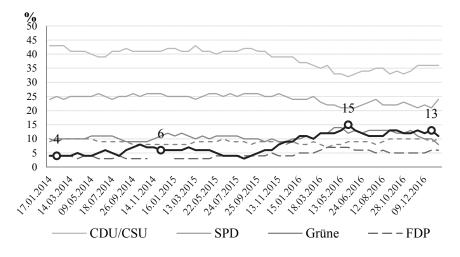Recent surveys show that the AfD enjoys 13 % support as compared to 6 % in November 2014 (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. The electoral standing of Germany's political parties in 2014—2016

Comment: CDU stands for Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*), CSU for Christian Social Union in Bavaria (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*), SPD for Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), FDP for Free Democratic Party (*Freie Demokratische Partei*), Piraten for Pirate Party Germany (*Piratenpartei Deutschland*), and the AfD for Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*).
Source: [41].

The AfD supporters are not distributed evenly across the country. When it comes to support for the party, there are regional differences along socio-economic and geographical lines (fig. 7).

This study shows that Germany's sixteen states can be divided into three subgroups (A, B, C) as regards their support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis (fig. 7; table).
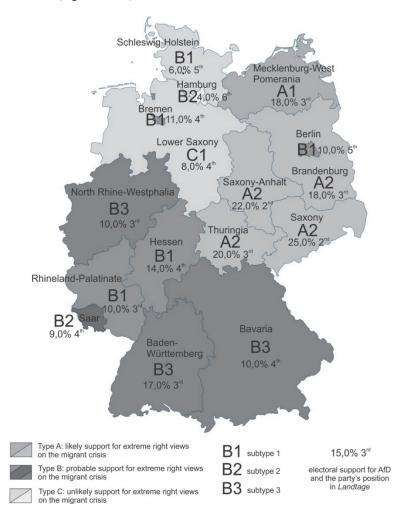

Fig. 7. Types of Germany's federal states by the electoral standing of the AfD, migration situation, and socioeconomic development, 2015—2017

Comments: the map uses the results of surveys held on September 15, 2016 in Baden-Württemberg; January 11, 2017 in Bavaria; February 27, 2017 in Berlin; January 18, 2017 in Brandenburg; January 19, 2017 in Bremen; October 24, 2016 in Hamburg; January 12, 2017 in Hessen; January 19, 2017 in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania; January 20, 2017 in Lower Saxony; February 19, 2017 in North Rhine-Westphalia; December 15, 2016 in Rhineland-Palatinate; January 26, 2017 in the Saar; October 22, 2016 in Saxony; October 22, 2016 in Saxony-Anhalt; December 9, 2016 in Schleswig-Holstein; and December 2, 2016 in Thuringia.

Source: compiled by the authors.

Description of types and subtypes of Germany's federal states by the electoral standing of the AfD, migration situation, and socioeconomic development, 2015—2017

Type	Subtype	Federal state	the AfD's electoral standing (2016—2017)	Migration situation (2015)			Socioeconomic development (2015)	
				Proportion of foreign-born population, %	Number of asylum seekers (first-time applications) per 1,000 population, persons	Asylum seeker quota, %	GRP per capita, thousand euro	Unemployment rate, %
A. Likely support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis	A1. Highest concentration of asylum seekers	Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	18.0 %, 3rd largest in the *Landtag*	3.4	11.8	2.00	22.4	10.4
	A2. Moderate concentration of asylum seekers	Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia	18.0—25.0 %, 2nd or 3rd largest in the *Landtag*	3.1—3.5	6.2—7.6	2.72—5.08	22.6—25.0	7.4—10.2
B. Probable support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis	B1. Maximum proportion of foreign-born population	Berlin, Bremen, Hessen, Rhineland-Palatinate	10.0—14.0 %, 3rd-4th largest in the *Landtag*	9.3—15.4	4.4—9.6	0.96—7.36	29.5—45.8	5.2—10.9
	B2. High concentration of asylum seekers	Saar	9.0 %, 4th 3rd largest in the *Landtag*	9.9	10.2	1.22	31.8	7.2
	B3. Maximum refugee quota	Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia	10.0—17.0 %, 3rd-4th largest in the *Landtag*	11.8—13.7	3.8—5.3	12.86—21.21	32.8—38.8	3.6—8.0
C. Unlikely support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis	C1. Minimum concentration of asylum seekers	Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein	6.0—8.0 %, 4th-5th 3rd largest in the *Landtag*	6.3—7.9	4.4—5.5	3.40—9.30	27.1—29.6	6.1—6.5
	B2. Maximum proportion of foreign-born population	Hamburg	4.0 %, 6th largest in the *Landtag*	15.2	7.0	2.53	55.6	7.4

Type A is characterised by a high probability of support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis. It brings together the regions where the support for the AfD exceeds 18.0 %, the party being second or third largest in the *Landtag*. The proportion of foreign-born population is rather low, which may be explained by a low asylum seeker quota. The concentrations of immigrants increased three or fourfold in such regions in 2015 as compared to 2014, which reinforced the anti-migrant sentiment and secured additional support for the restrictive immigration policy promoted by the AfD. Moreover, these regions are the poorest states of Germany with a GRP 22 % below the national average and lower (as of 2015, the average level was 32.2 thousand euro) and an unemployment rate reaching up to 40 %. These are the former GDR states situated in the country's north-east. Historically, local residents have demonstrated negative rather than positive attitudes towards the country's open immigration policy. There are A1 and A2 subtypes, which differ in the expression of these characteristics.

Type B. The population of these states is less prone to supporting anti-migration views of the AfD party. However, the influence of the party is strong. Its support ranges between 5 to 10 % across the group and is likely to grow. The proportion of foreigners in these regions is rather high. There are established ethnic groups, most residents are accustomed to ethnic diversity, and they are tolerant of immigrants, whom they consider part of the community. At the same time, a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers (3.9-fold in the Saar and two-three-fold in the other states as compared to 2014) might have mobilised the part of population that deems a further increase in the number of foreign-born population inaccessible and is dissatisfied with the immigration policy of the ruling coalition.

Subtypes B1, B2, and B3 differ in terms of socioeconomic development and migration situation. The B1 subtype states demonstrate the highest proportion of foreign-born population (the only exception is the Rhineland-Palatinate). These states traditionally attract many migrants and have a very low unemployment rate. The Saar, which comprises the B2 subtype, ranks second among all the states in terms of new arrivals per 1,000 population. At the same time, it has one of the lowest asylum seeker quotas. The B3 subtype brings together Germany's largest states in terms of both area and population, which have the highest asylum seeker quotas and the lowest concentration of asylum seekers.

Type C comprises three northern German states, most of whose population do not share extreme right views on the migrant crisis. The electoral standing of the AfD party is rather low, with support ranging from 4 % to 8 %. The party is poorly represented in the *Landtage*. In these regions, the refugee quota is very low and the unemployment rate is around 7.4 %, which is below the national average of 7.5 %. However, the party's popularity is growing, which is explained by a slight — but still twofold — increase in the number of asylum seekers.

It is possible to distinguish between the C1 and C2 subtypes, which differ in ethnic composition. The C1 states have a small proportion of foreign-born population not exceeding 6—8 %. Therefore, a small inflow of refugees (4—5 persons per 1,000 population) was accepted by the local society. A significant increase in popular dissatisfaction can be provoked by low li-

ving standards, since the regions' GRP per capita is well below — by 8—16 % — the national average. The C2 subtype comprises the rich city of Hamburg, whose GRP reaches the national maximum with 55.6 thousand euro per capita. The city has one of the highest shares of non-German population standing at 15.2 %. The remarkable ethnic diversity observed over the past years could have contributed to rather tolerant attitudes to migrants. The support for extreme right views decreased threefold throughout 2016 — from 13 % in January to 4 % in November.

Conclusions

It seems that the migration shock currently experienced by Germany has affected all the systems of the receiving society and changed attitudes to immigrants and refugees. As a result, the German society is ready to revise its political views and make changes to the country's political party system. The research shows that the proposed approach contributes to regional analyses and provides a valuable supplement to the existing national and international research as it studies the attitudes to immigration based on the electoral preferences of Germans, namely, their support for extreme right players in the political space, who focus their campaigns on restrictive migration regulation.

The proposed methodology for federal state typology has been tested and proved applicable to such studies, since it takes into account key factors affecting popular attitudes to migrants and makes it possible to compare relative measures. The analysis of the effect of such factors on the growing popularity of extreme right views on immigration helped to identify patterns behind the formation of negative attitudes to immigrants and refugees in certain German regions. For instance, the increasing support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis in the former GDR and the improving position of the radical AfD party in *Landtage* are largely explained by the significant rise in the number of asylum seekers, relatively low standards of living, and a high unemployment rate observed in such states.

The commitment to the AfD's anti-immigrant slogans is characteristic of states that have been experiencing a high migration load over a long time, namely the country's southwest, and the cities of Berlin and Bremen. However, the authors understand that the effect of these factors is not permanent, nor is it unambiguous. Thus, the electoral standing of extreme right parties does not fully reflect the receiving society's support for a restrictive migration policy. Indeed, a more detailed and comprehensive study into the regional patterns behind the attitudes to immigrants must take into account additional factors, such as the impact of migration on the sociocultural sphere of the receiving society and the criteria for assessing legislative proposals on immigration.

Thus, the above typology of Germany's states can be used in studying regional variations in the population's support for extreme right views on the migrant crisis, as the migration and socioeconomic situation changes. The obtained results can be of interest in developing and implementing a 'smart' migration policy taking into account such regional variations. It is important to improve Germany's current system of asylum seeker distribution to pre-

vent a further increase in radical attitudes in selected regions. The asylum seeker quota must take into account the migration situation and the level of regional socioeconomic development. Even if the migration situation is kept at bay, it is important to take urgent measures to defuse tensions in the society. This will require pursuing a consistent integration policy at regional and municipal levels and involving established diaspora groups and organisations. Turning a blind eye to adaptation and integration problems, especially during the current crisis, will lead to further radicalisation of attitudes to migrants and thus affect the political sphere.

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