How Stalin and Roosevelt influenced the Federal Elections in 2017 East Germany[*]

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– WORKING DRAFT –

Abstract   Exploiting differences in occupation status in East Germany in the last days of World War II and shortly thereafter, we find that regions which – due to their occupation status – experienced a drastic supply problem caused by the influx of great numbers of refugees fleeing from the Red Army in 1945 had a disproportionate increase in AfD votes from 2013 to 2017. We conclude that the "refugee crisis" in 2015, which dominated the campaign of the federal elections in 2017 and is considered as main determinant of voting for the AfD, activated the collective memory of this long-gone historic event and thereby shaped the current political landscape.

1   Introduction

As in countries all over the globe, right-wing populism is on the rise in Germany. The german right-wing populist party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), was founded in 2013 initially as a Euro-sceptic party under the leadership of some prominent economists. When Germany experienced a seemingly unprecedented influx of refugees mostly from civil war country Syria in 2015, the AfD moved further to the right and along went the social discourse and political dialogue.

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Opinion polls found the most important concern of (potential) AfD voters to be the handling of the "refugee crisis" by the government (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V. 2017, Vehrkamp and Wratil 2017).

Especially in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), the AfD experienced large vote gains both in local and federal elections. However, there is huge variation in AfD vote shares within Eastern Germany, which ranged from 13% in the constituency of Potsdam (Brandenburg) to 35% in the constituency Sächsische-Schweiz/Osterzgebirge (Saxony) in the federal elections in 2017. Saxony, especially its south-eastern parts, were the political heartland of the AfD in 2017 (see figure 1).
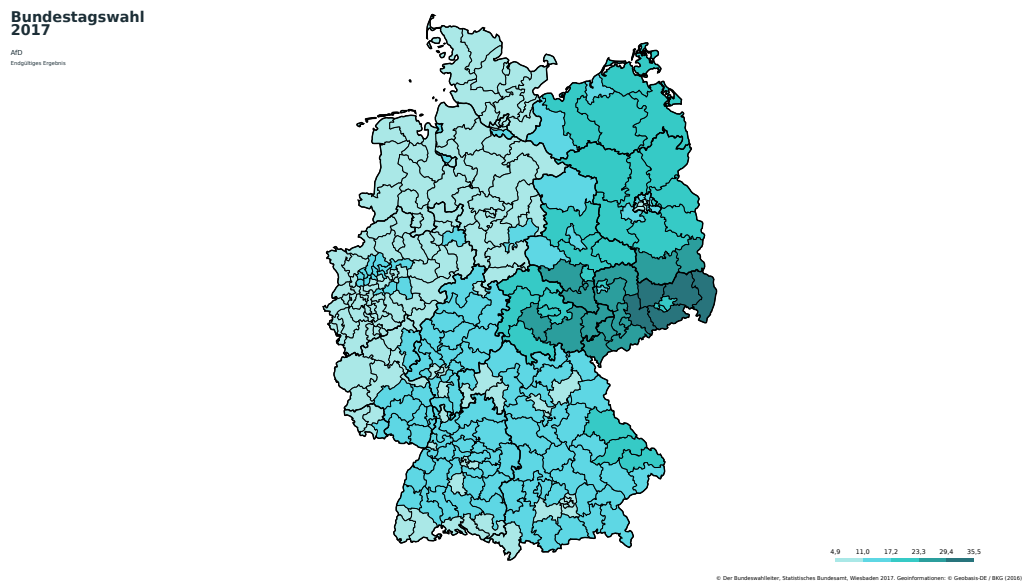

Figure 1: AfD vote shares by constituency, federal elections 2017. The area in east and south Saxony exhibits the highest AfD vote share. URL: `https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/wahlatlas.html`.

In recent years, a vast literature dedicated to explaining the differences in susceptibility to right-wing populism developed. However, most studies on right-wing populist vote and negative attitudes towards migration focus on current determinants, such as labor market conditions (Mayda 2006), the welfare state (Facchini and Mayda 2009), contact with foreigners (Steinmayr 2016), perceived cultural threats (Dilger and Lengfeld 2018), and social capital (Rydgren 2009). These studies, however, ignore historic roots of attitudes and beliefs still shaping present day outcomes.[1] In recent years, a strand of literature argues that long gone historical events can shape present day attitudes and with that political

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[1] Interestingly, Franz et al. (2018) show that AfD vote shares are higher in overaged regions with low population density. Using only current determinants for AfD votes, however, they find that their model underestimates the voting share of the AfD in Saxony considerably.

and economic outcomes, either via path dependency in the evolution of institutions and by altering the structure and organization of society (Acemoglu et al. 2001, Glaeser and Shleifer 2002, Dell 2010, Acemoglu et al. 2011 and Hornbeck and Naidu 2014) or via directly influencing cultural norms, attitudes and beliefs (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011, Becker et al. 2016, Guiso et al. 2016, Fouka and Voth 2016). Regarding the historical roots of political attitudes, Voigtländer and Voth (2012) find regional persistence in anti-semitism in Germany dating back to medieval times. Black Death Pogroms are found to predict higher levels of anti-semitism and NSDAP vote shares in the 1920s and 1930s. In a recent paper, Cantoni et al. (2019) find that AfD votes in the federal elections in 2017 are correlated with NSDAP votes in 1928-1933. Acharya et al. (2016) show that contemporary regional differences in attitudes towards blacks and political preference in the American South are partly explained by the prevalence of slavery in 1860. Ochsner and Roesel (2016) show that regions which experienced an influx of Nazis fleeing from the Soviet takeover of parts of Upper Austria after the second world war have a higher share of right-wing populist votes in the present. Using a regression discontinuity design (RDD) with the World War II battlefront along the "Gothic Line" as geographic divide, Fontana et al. (2017) find that the Communist Party gained votes in post-war Italy in regions especially exposed to the civil war. Avdeenko and Siedler (2017) show that the persistence of cultural traits and political attitudes is ensured by the intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs, for example within family.

While the above mentioned studies assume those historically shaped attitudes to be throughout present and relevant for present political and economic decision making, recent literature indicates that the memory of long gone historic events can come to light after years or decades of being mostly irrelevant. Fisman et al. (2014) find that stock markets reacted to the fact that the Japanese government reauthorized the use of a history textbook in 2005 that, according to critics, whitewashed Japanese war crimes in occupied China in the 1940s, and was followed by Chinese protests and severe disputes over Japanese crimes in World War II. Fouka and Voth (2016) show that German car sales declined more drastically in Greek regions where Nazi troops committed war crimes in World War II when tensions between Greece and Germany rose during the Financial Crisis. Similarly, Ochsner and Roesel (2017) provide anecdotal and statistical evidence that targeted political campaigning can trigger the collective memory of historical events and thereby influence political preferences. When the Austrian populist party FPÖ began its anti-Turkish campaign in 2005 recalling the historical experience of Turkish related atrocities in the wake of the sieges of Vienna in 1529/1683, municipalities that were subject to war related events in those days experienced

a more pronounced increase in FPÖ vote shares than those unaffected by the Turkish invasion.

Our study fits in with previous analyses on the historic roots of differences in attitudes and beliefs coming to light after decades of being irrelevant. We argue that the especially sharp increase in AfD vote shares in southern and eastern Saxony from 2013 to 2017 can be traced back to events dating back to the last days of World War II: In these last days, there was a strip of territory in southern Saxony still left unoccupied by both American and Soviet troops. But even after hostilities ceased there remained a so-called *Niemandsland* which neither Soviet nor American troops occupied. The most likely reason for this non-occupation is a misunderstanding. In Yalta, the American and Soviet commander agreed upon to which lines each would advance with the US army advancing up to the rivers Elbe and Mulde. With three rivers in Saxony being named Mulde, the Americans stopped when reaching the most western one, while the Soviets did advance only to the most eastern one, leaving the territory in between unoccupied. Further, since being relatively spared from the war, southern Saxony was already congested with refugees by the time of the Yalta Conference. With the Soviets advancing from the east and north, they were pushing a huge number of refugees fleeing from the Red Army ahead of themselves. Since the still unoccupied territories at the end of the war and especially *Niemandsland* were regarded as safe haven and it was – even after the fighting stopped – still possible to get in, many refugees headed for this territory. It was, however, impossible to get out and move west, since the American lines were heavily guarded. After the war, many thousands of Wehrmacht and SS-Troops also retreated to *Niemandsland* and refugees from Sudeten area and Romania constantly arrived.

We argue that the collective memory of the supply problem amplified by the refugee influx in the end and aftermath of World War II in southern and eastern Saxony was triggered and brought back to light by the "refugee crisis" in 2015 and by the right-wing populist party AfD seizing on the topic. Using Difference-in-Differences (DiD) and Regression-Discontinuity-Design (RDD) estimation methods, this study finds the increase in AfD vote shares to be particularly pronounced in non-occupied regions.

The outline of the study is as follows: Section 2 gives a detailed description of the events in the last days and the aftermath of World War II in south-eastern Saxony. Section 3 describes the utilized data and data sources and our empirical approach. Section 4 presents our results and section 5 concludes.

2 Historical Background

The last days of the World War II in Saxony   Until the beginning of
1945, Saxony and especially its eastern and southern parts were relatively spared
from the war. Refugees from western Germany and children from the cities were
sent to the countryside to escape the bombardment of the cities (the so called
"Kinderlandverschickung"). The estimated number of refugees from the cities
amounts to 300,000 people in the years 1944/45 (Donth 2000, p.49). The Soviet
offensive in January 1945, which led to the ultimate occupation of Berlin in the last
days of the war, triggered millions to flee from the advancing Soviet troops. People
from Pommerania and East- and West-Prussia were mostly fleeing to Mecklenburg
and were partly rescued by the German navy and transported further west. In
the center (i.e. Posen) many civilians had no time to escape because the frontline
was advancing too quickly. In the south, the inhabitants of Silesia were either
fleeing to Bohemia or Saxony.

In February 1945 at the Yalta Conference, the allied commanders had agreed
upon occupation zones and troop advancements. With the Soviets advancing in
the east and north the number of refugees constantly grew in the beginning of
1945. Due to Saxony's geographic location, it was a main entry point for refugees
coming from Poland, Czechoslovakia (CSR) and other eastern countries. The area
located at the border to Poland and the CSR was especially affected (Schwab 2001,
pp.31,34). Although there is no exact number, it is said that Dresden sheltered
huge amounts of refugees by the time of the Dresden bombing in February 1945.
The number of refugees located in Saxony at this time is estimated to be 1.4
million[2].

Figure 2 shows the frontlines in the last days of the war. In April 1945,
American troops advanced to a line that was determined by the rivers Elbe and
Mulde and – with the exception of some expeditions – stopped there. The German
population east of that line had hoped to be occupied by the Americans but was
– as the rest of the German population – unaware of the agreements the allied
commanders had made. As the premier target of the Soviet forces was to occupy
Berlin, parts of Saxony not taken by the American troops remained unoccupied
or were only taken in the last few days of the war. Further, the infrastructure
and particularly the railway system broke down by March/April 1945 (Pritchard
2012, p.110). Transportation of refugees by train now had the lowest priority or
was entirely stopped.[3] Refugees had to find other means of transportation, which

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[2] A report on the situation of refugees notes for Saxony: "Starke Stauung bestand in Sachsen,
von wo 500 000 Schlesier weitergeleitet wurden; hinzu kamen noch 500 000 aus den ostsächsischen
Kreisen und über 400 000 Obdachlose (durch die Luftangriffe auf Dresden und Chemnitz)."
(Schramm 1982, p.1327).

[3] An entry with the date March 6th 1945 in a German war journal notes: "praktisch keine

Figure 2: World War Two Frontlines, 1945. The solid red line represents the frontline as of May 7th 1945. The area between in between the frontlines and the German border in south and east Saxony is classified as *unoccupied*. URL: `https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World`

in many cases meant walking. For refugees moving to the west, the decision of the American troops not to advance any further did pose a serious problem. Actively crossing the frontline (and not waiting for advancing troops to arrive) was extremely dangerous and almost impossible: "All civilian traffic in areas adjacent to the enemy was forbidden on pain of death"(Pritchard 2012, p.61). With the halt of the Americans in April 1945 it therefore became increasingly difficult for refugees from the east to cross the American lines and advance further west.

In the aftermath of World War II When Germany surrendered on May 8th 1945, the state administration particularly in areas which were still unoccupied up to that moment was still functioning, but the NSDAP and their welfare system ("NS-Volkswohlfahrt") which played a central part in dealing with the provisioning of refugees vanished completely (Pritchard 2012, p.69ff.). Being more densely populated than most other areas in eastern Germany and an industrialised region which had to import food even before the war, Saxony was ill prepared to feed and shelter millions of additional people (Schwab 2001, p.34). With an estimated native population of 5.6 million people in July 1945, official documents count roughly 4-5 million refugees in Saxony in July and 4.5 millions in August 1945 (Thüsing and Schrammek 2005, pp.106,125) of whom 2 millions have not had

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Flüchtlingszüge mehr"(Schramm 1982, p.1150).

found shelter (Thüsing and Schrammek 2005, pp.113). Officials constantly warn of outright famines during the summer of 1945 (Thüsing and Schrammek 2005, p.89). Further problems included various epidemics in the summer of 1945[4] and insufficient housing conditions to provide everyone with shelter (Schwab 2001, p.39). The living space per person declined from 16.2 square metres in 1939 to 8.3 square metres in 1945 (Donth 2000, p.137).

Additional factors aggravated the situation. The demarcation line between the American and Soviet troops along the Elbe and Mulde river was closed and could not be crossed until the Red Army took over the formerly American occupied parts of Saxony at the beginning of July.[5] Refugees who waited to cross this line had to be supplied with food and housing.

Directly after the war, refugees, repatriates and "Displaced Persons" crossed Saxony and kept stuck.[6] Polish authorities closed all crossings into territories east of the Neisse river at the beginning of June, drastically worsening the situation in Görlitz where people from east of the Neisse waited to move back to their homeland (Schwab 2001, p.37). While there were some transports of refugees out of Saxony to areas that had formerly been occupied by the US army after these retreated to their occupation zone in Western Germany in July 1945, most were unable to leave Saxony because of temporarily closed borders e.g. to Thuringia and Brandenburg. Further, Saxony established border controls to prevent refugees from coming back to Saxony (Thüsing and Schrammek 2005, pp.122,132ff.).

Additionally, refugees were constantly arriving to Saxony for instance from the Sudeten area and from Romania (Pritchard 2012, p.110). With the end of the war and the rebuilding of the Czechoslovak Republic, people crossed the border to Saxony either because they fled on their own or they were forced to leave. An estimated number of 450,000 people being forced to leave the CSR went across the Saxonian border between May and August 1945 (Schwab 2001, p.37).

Due to the incessant flow and congestion of refugees in Saxony, supply conditions were tense. In Görlitz, now being border town due to new territory allocations, the situation was particularly dramatic. Görlitz became transit town for refugees coming from the east as well as survivors from concentration and forced labor camps waiting for repatriation (Michelmann 2001, p.174). For May 1945, the small town already registered 55,000 refugees on 20,000 natives. The supply conditions worsened – bread allocation decreased to 250g per week – and infant mortality among refugees rose up to 75% (Thüsing and Schrammek 2005,

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[4] Serious onsets of diphtheria and typhoid fever were registered (Donth 2000, p.132f.).

[5] Refugees trying to cross the line were sent back threatened at gunpoint or even shot (Schwab 2001, p.31).

[6] While there is no central statistic, the amount of "Displaced Persons" in Saxony at the end of the war is estimated to be around 1 million (Thüsing and Schrammek 2005, p.17).

pp.106, 108f. Michelmann 2001, p.176 Anm.158). For Dresden in July 1945 it is noted that due to the immense flow of refugees, food ration cards were limited to those that moved to Dresden before September 1939 (Michelmann 2001, p.161). A further demonstration (and aggravation) of the situation is widespread anecdotal evidence on hungry refugees stealing half-ripe crops from the fields (Schwab 2001, p.35).

Niemandsland   Although the allied forces had agreed upon occupation zones and troop advancement during the Yalta Conference, it is not entirely clear why a territory of roughly 500 square kilometres in Saxony (according to Pritchard (2012, p.2), 600 square-miles) with about 500,000 inhabitants (natives and refugees) remained unoccupied (Pritchard 2012, p.1) until the end of June 1945. There are theories that the American troops wanted to enable the Wehrmacht troops to surrender as whole units and theories that the territory remained unoccupied because of the regrouping of the American troops (Lobeck 2018, p.158ff). The most conclusive theory of why this area remained unoccupied is a misunderstanding between Americans and Soviets with respect to troop advancement. The allied commanders agreed to advance to the river Mulde, with the US army advancing from the west and the Soviet army advancing from the east. There are, however, three rivers with the name Mulde in Saxony. The Americans stopped near the most westward one (Zwickauer Mulde), whereas the Soviets had expected a further advancement of the Americans and stopped at the most eastern one (Freiberger Mulde) (Pritchard 2012, p.55). In early May, the Soviets however advanced a little further and occupied Chemnitz and Annaberg-Buchholz. There is no evidence that either the American or Soviet commander were influenced by or aware of the fact that the western Erzgebirge contained rich deposits of uranium (Pritchard 2012, p.56).

Since south-eastern Saxony was relatively spared from the war and western Erzgebirge had experienced only little air raids until March 1945, it was seen as a safe haven and therefore destination of refugee movements (Pritchard 2012, p.52f.). With an estimated native population of 350,000 in 1939 (Pritchard 2012, p.31), the number of residents rapidly increased by an estimated number of roughly 200,000 refugees in the final days of the war Pritchard (2012, p.59).[7]

The supply situation in the *Niemandsland* was especially tense even after the hostilities had ceased. While it was still possible for refugees to cross American and Soviet lines into *Niemandsland* directly after the war, moving the opposite direction was impossible (Pritchard 2012, pp.68,110). Further, the *Niemandsland*

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[7] The exact number of refugees is unclear and could be lower than the above mentioned estimates suggest (Lobeck 2018, p.180).

was a transit region for thousands of foreign workers and prisoners of war waiting for repatriation. At the same time, many thousands of still heavily armed Wehrmacht and SS-Troops retreated to the *Niemandsland* (Pritchard 2012, p.6, 108ff.).

Especially the *Niemandsland* could not provide enough food for the constantly arriving new refugees and quickly ran out of food supplies. Feeding the population is described as the most pressing problem of that time (Pritchard 2012, pp.95ff.). Due to the tense supply conditions, looting and plundering became a serious problem throughout the unoccupied period and for many months afterwards (Pritchard 2012, p.105). Farmers and locals who were reluctant to hand over their agricultural products were often robbed at gunpoint from foreigners (Pritchard 2012, pp.108f.). With increasing crime rates and stealing of crops from fields, the locals started to turn against refugees, prisoners of war and former slave workers (Pritchard 2012, p.60f.). The administration sometimes undertook harsh measures (confiscation of their belongings, withdrawal of their ration cards) against refugees who could go home but did not want to, since their homes layed in the Soviet occupation zone (Pritchard 2012, p.113). Even those for whom the return to their homes was impossible were forced to move to ensure the supply of the local population. In many cases the refugees were sent back to the communities that had forced them out in the first place (Lobeck 2018, p.183ff.). Thus, the special situation in *Niemandsland* and the strict measures provoked much anger in the population (Pritchard 2012, p.120). But also in other parts of the country where many refugees' basic needs had to be satisfied, the warm welcome and sentiment of helpfulness that had prevailed vanished and was dominated by the battle for scarce resources (Schwab 2001, pp.37f.). In addition, the new administration viewed the refugees as a serious threat, as war criminals and supporters of the Nazi party (Lobeck 2018, p.182).

We argue that the experience with a "refugee crisis" in the last days of the war and shortly thereafter was particularly dramatic in Saxony compared to other regions serving as transit areas. While Mecklenburg-Vorpommern also witnessed a great amount of refugees, the situation was not as tense as it was in Saxony. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was an agricultural region and a large share of refugees from Pommerania, West- and East Prussia was transported further west by the German navy in the last weeks of the war (Schramm 1982, p.1326). Further, the number of refugees from Pommerania and East- and West Prussia was smaller than that of Silesia.[8] Southern Saxony and especially the *Niemandsland* were

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[8] Some regions in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, however, seemed to have hosted a considerable number of refugees. For Greifswald it is noted that half of the 60,000 residents were refugees (Schramm 1982, p.345). In contrast to Saxony, however, there is no record of an acute crisis.

crossed by refugees and repatriates at the same time, who had to persevere in this area until borders were reopened and the transportation system was reinstalled. Due to the tense food supply conditions, crime and plundering prevailed with the result that the locals started to turn against the foreigners. We argue that this experience has inscribed in the collective memory of south-east Saxony and was triggered by the "refugee crisis" in 2015, thus explaining the extraordinary increase in AfD vote shares in this area.

3   Empirical Strategy

This section introduces our data and the estimation strategy. In our baseline estimation, we compare the increase in AfD vote shares on the municipality level before and after the refugee crisis in 2015 in former GDR regions that were occupied and non-occupied in the last days of the war. The specifics of the estimation are shown in section 3.2. Additionally, we use a Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) and exploit the exogenous variation in occupation status in regions left of the Mulde (American occupation zone) and regions right of the Mulde (Soviet occupation zone). The specifics are shown in section 3.3.

3.1   Data

The political history between 1945 and 1990 in the western and eastern allied occupation zones of Germany and afterwards in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was quite different and led to persistent differences in political and socioeconomic attitudes even after reunification (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln 2007, Heineck and Süssmuth 2013). Further, socioeconomic or geographical factors might have very different outcomes in voting behavior in the west and the east. For example, the nouveau experience with unemployment after 1990 in the former GDR may be perceived differently than in west German regions with constantly high unemployment rates since the 1970ies. Since people from the former GDR and FRG may not be comparable due to their different experiences and socialization, we geographically restrict our estimation to the former GDR. We further exclude East Berlin because it has a different political history than the rest of the GDR. For instance, up until 1961 it was much easier to cross from East Berlin to the western part of the city and vice versa than from the GDR to Berlin. Although the East German Government with the consent of the Soviet Union gradually integrated East Berlin into the GDR the process was not completed up until the end of the GDR as for instance western allied forces still had the right to patrol in uniform in the streets of East Berlin.

As dependent variable, we use data on election results for the percentage of valid votes for the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the federal elections (Bundestagswahl) 2013 and 2017 from the Land Statistical Offices as well as structural data from the *Regionaldatenbank Deutschland* which is made available by the German Federal Bureau of Statistics and Land Statistical Offices.

The central explanatory variable of our specification is a dummy variable (*un-occ*) indicating that a municipality remained unoccupied even after the German surrender on May 8th 1945 or was occupied by allied forces only at the very end of the war, i.e. on or after May 7th 1945. As the 7th May 1945 is the date of the unconditional surrender of the German Army to the Western Allies, it was clear to the population that the war was ultimately lost and would terminate within hours. In these last days of the war with all the chaos and disorder it is not always easy to find out when exactly a municipality was occupied by whom. Our main source is Wetzig and Fleischer (1995) for Saxony and Naumann (2018) especially for the Vogtland area. Both are augmented by information found on official websites of the municipality and a variety of sources such as personal memoirs or chronicles published by regional historical societies. Sometimes contradictory information can be found in different sources. In these cases we relied on the most official one.

We further include two dummy variables marking the border territories of the former GDR. *inner_german_border* means that the municipality lies within a 20km band to the border to the FRG (West-Germany). As a result of a treaty between the FRG and the GDR in 1972 citizens of the FRG living near the East German border could cross the border for daily visits ("Kleiner Grenzverkehr"). *eastern_border* means that the distance between the municipality and either the Czech or Polish border is less than 20km. Although officially friends, there were occasionally tensions especially on the Polish border because polish citizens were able to buy rare and subsidized consumer goods.[9]

A further geographic control factor is the binary variable *westTV* which denotes whether for the municipality television reception of west German programs was possible. The indicator on western TV reception was constructed according to Bursztyn and Cantoni (2016). Media consumption in the FRG or GDR arguably had different effects. The viewer of western TV had the opportunity of a reality check especially concerning the political and economic situation.[10]

Further control variables on the municipality level include the unemployment

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[9] Geographical data were taken from the *Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie* (`https://gdz.bkg.bund.de`) and GADM (`https://gadm.org`).

[10] Friehe et al. (2017) show that the reception of western TV channels in the GDR strengthens democratic forces directly after reunification. Vice versa, non-reception of western TV is found to be associated with persistently higher shares of right-wing votes from 1990 onwards.

rate, net domestic migration as a share of population, population density, the share of females and the share of people aged ≥75. Those receiving asylum benefits as a share of population, the share of retirees receiving basic pension, GDP per capita and average municipal debt per capita (in thousands), and the share of school graduates receiving no degree and abitur were available only on the level of administrative districts. For each control variable, we construct the average values for 2012-2014. Table A.1 shows the summary statistics for the full sample on the municipality level.

(a) World War II Frontlines, May 6th 1945   (b) *Niemandsland*
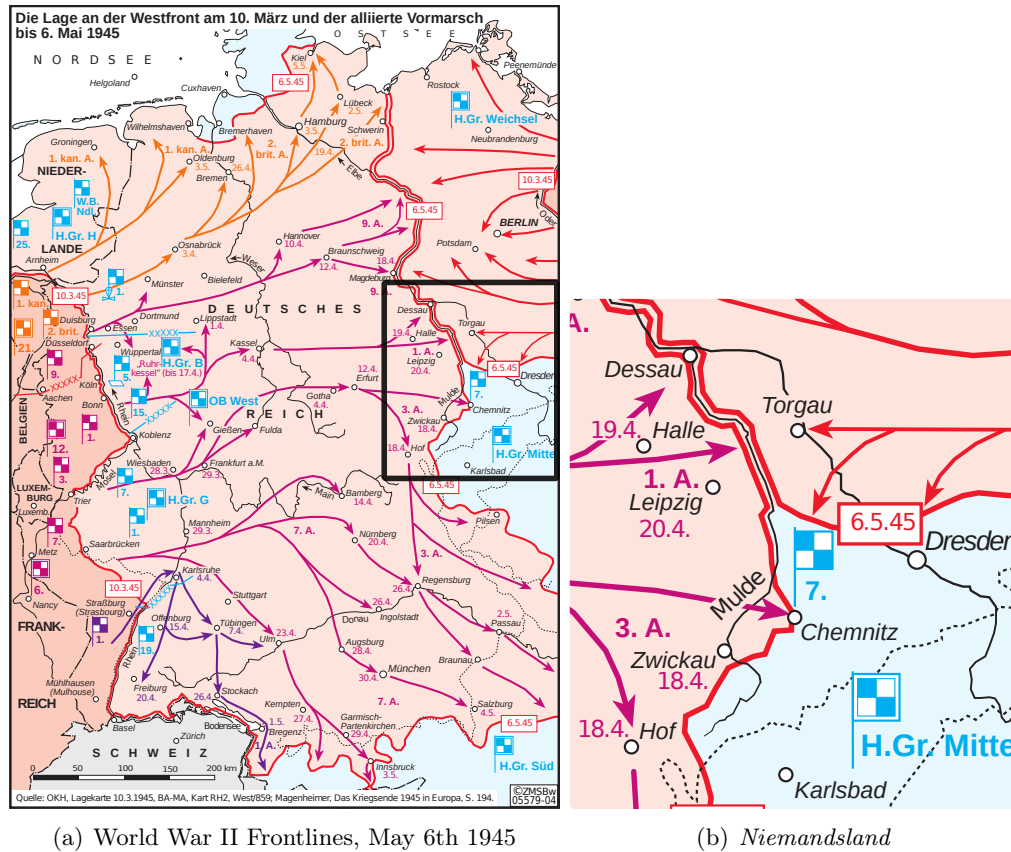
Figure 3: World War II Frontlines, May 6th 1945 and the *Niemandsland*. The Mulde constitutes a sharp division between American and Soviet occupation north of Chemnitz, but not south of Chemnitz. The *Niemandsland* extends from Chemnitz and Zwickau to the German-Czech border. Source: Vogel (2015).

3.2 Difference-in-Differences

Using a Difference-in-Differences framework, we test whether AfD vote shares increased disproportionately in response to the refugee crisis in 2015 in areas that were unoccupied or occupied only in the last days of the war. Occupational status thereby proxies the historic experience of an uncontrolled flow and high

concentration of refugees in 1945 and the resulting supply problem.

To this end we estimate the following baseline model:

$$\text{afd\_share}_{it} = \alpha + \beta\text{unocc}_i + \delta\text{postRefCrisis}_t \tag{1}$$
$$+\gamma(\text{unocc}_i * \text{postRefCrisis}_t) + X'_i\zeta + \epsilon_{it},$$

where afd_share_{it} is the AfD vote share in municipality i at point t with $t \in \{2013, 2017\}$, unocc_i is a dummy indicating whether the municipality was non-occupied until May 7th 1945 or remained unoccupied and postRefCrisis_t equals one after the "refugee crisis" in 2015 and is zero before. γ then measures the effect of the collective memory activation in unoccupied areas through the new "refugee crisis". α is a constant, X'_i is a vector of structural control variables at the municipality or district level and ϵ_{it} are i.i.d. standard errors. The DiD-equation is estimated via Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) with standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

Equation 1 is estimated 1) for the whole GDR sample and 2) for a subsample including only municipalities that remained unoccupied until July 1945, the so-called *Niemandsland*. The *Niemandsland* territory expands south-west of Chemnitz, the areas bordering to the west were occupied by the Americans and serve as control group (see figure 3)[11].

In order for our estimates to be unbiased, several assumptions must be met. First, treatment and control group have to share the same trend in advance to the treatment. In our case, however, the AfD vote share is already by roughly 30% higher in 2013 in the treatment group (see table A.2). By 2017, the AfD vote share was by roughly 40% higher in the treatment group. This disproportionate increase in AfD votes from 2013 to 2017 in the treatment group suggests that they reacted more strongly to events happening in between the two federal elections. Controlling for geographic factors and using county fixed effects, the difference is not significant prior to 2017 (see figure 5). Further, there is no evidence on a long-standing tradition of voting for right-wing parties in the treatment region compared to the control region. Cantoni et al. (2019) show that the high share of AfD votes in southern and eastern Saxony in 2017 cannot be sufficiently explained by NSDAP votes in the elections of 1928-1933. Interestingly, the territory in

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[11] As outlined above, the allied commanders agreed upon troop advancement up to the rivers Mulde and Elbe at the Conference of Yalta in February 1945. By May 7th 1945, however, there still was a part of the Erzgebirge left unoccupied which remained self-governed for the next 42 days. The most highly-traded theory why parts of Saxony were not occupied is a misunderstanding as to which Mulde river was meant exactly. While the Americans stopped at the western branch of the river (Zwickauer Mulde), the Soviets advanced to the eastern branch (Freiberger Mulde), leaving the territory in between largely unoccupied.

Saxony with the most consistent pattern of high right wing vote shares is the Vogtland area with Plauen. This territory was occupied by American forces at the end of WWII and therefore serves as control group. For the success of the NSDAP in 1928-1933 especially in this territory two factors can be put forward. First Plauen had together with Chemnitz the highest unemployment rate of all German cities during the Great Depression in 1931 and second, it was home town to the Nazi leader (Gauleiter) Mutschmann (Karschl and Schäfer 2007, p. 182,197). Further, there is no evidence of higher right-wing voting from earlier federal elections (see figure 5). Franz et al. (2018) find that vote shares for the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD), a German rightwing party founded in 1964, have only limited explanatory power for voting behavior in AfD heartlands such as south-east Saxony.

The second point relates to differential developments. There is some evidence on changes in observable characteristics over time (see table A.2). For example, while the unoccupied area had a lower share of people receiving asylum benefits in 2013, there is no significant difference in 2017. GDP per capita developed better in unoccupied areas and the share of graduates receiving no degree declined more strongly.

Third, the assignment of a treatment has to be exogenous. As outlined above, there is no clear cut evidence on why south-east Saxony remained unoccupied or was only occupied in the last days of the war. For the Soviet troops, occupying south-east Saxony was of minor interest since their main goal was to seize Berlin. For the US army, it is most likely that their troop advancement stopped before Germany surrendered on May 7th, because all the territory they could occupy in east Germany would be occupied by the Soviets after the armistice anyway. There is no evidence that leaving south-east Saxony unoccupied up until the last days of the war was something other than a military strategical choice.

Lastly, another identifying assumptions is that the treatment of one unit has no effect on the outcome for another unit, the so-called stable unit value treatment assumption (SUTVA). Non-occupation of south-eastern Saxony should thus not interfere with the outcome of the occupied area. The parallel transfer of a collective memory in occupied an unoccupied regions is favored by several facts. Internal migration within the GDR was very low due to strict housing regulations governing every personal move. Furthermore, most of the refugees were transferred to other regions of the GDR so that Saxony was afterwards the region with the lowest share of refugees. With the end of the GDR there was considerable migration from the East to the West but not the other way round. We can therefore assume that most of the people now living in south-eastern Saxony were living there in 1945 or are direct descendants of the population of 1945.

3.3 Regression-Discontinuity-Design

Occupational status is an imprecise proxy of exposure to a refugee crisis in the end of and shortly after the war and there are numerous reasons why occupational status could translate into different political beliefs.[12] To reduce the noise included in the measure of occupational status and rule out those alternative explanations, we construct a second subsample along the Mulde river from Dessau in the north to Wechselburg in the south. North of Wechselburg, the Mulde constitutes a sharp dividing line between American and Soviet forces. In the South, however, the dividing line is more fuzzy and the Zwickauer Mulde cannot serve as assignment rule and thus as an instrument for being occupied in a 2SLS Regression Discontinuity Design.[13]

The motivation of using this additional subsample is the following: When the Soviets advanced from the east, they pushed ahead thousands of refugees. The refugees, however, could not cross the Mulde to get further to the west since the Americans closed the frontline and did not let pass civilians. Refugees thus piled up east of the Mulde as anecdotal evidence suggests.[14]

From Dessau in the north to Wechselburg in the South, the location with respect to the Mulde fully determines the treatment in this sample, which therefore qualifies for using sharp RDD. Thus, treatment status is a deterministic and discontinuous function of a covariate, x_i with

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[12] One could also think of a "undefeated on the battlefield" mentality passed on to the next generations. For example Bautzen, notoriously known for attacks on refugee shelters, was reconquered by the German Wehrmacht and not passed to the Soviet Army until capitulation. In contrast, the mythos *Niemandsland* was established as a flagship of antifascist self-government by the GDR government. Further, we cannot test for the effect of Soviet exterritorial uranium mining (Sowjetisch-Deutsche Aktiengesellschaft Wismut) in this area especially during the first years of the GDR period (Karschl and Schäfer 2007, 248f.). As the western border of the mining area roughly coincides with the western border of *Niemandsland* some of the effects could also be a attributed to this activity.

[13] The area further to the south also constitutes the *Niemandsland* sample. As shown in figure 3, unoccupied municipalities lie west as well as east of the Zwickauer Mulde. While it may be true that there was a misunderstanding between Americans and Soviets in troop advancement – the Mulde splits 10km south of Grimma into the Zwickauer Mulde (western branch) and Freiberger Mulde (eastern branch) – the Germans surrendered before the Americans occupied all the territory west of the Mulde in southern Saxony. In addition, the Soviets also crossed the Freiberger Mulde and occupied territory up to Chemnitz and Annaberg-Buchholz and the Americans crossed the Zwickauer Mulde as well. Since the situation west of Chemnitz is somewhat unclear and not stable (e.g. the Americans handed over Limbach-Oberfrohna to the Soviets one week after the armistice) we exclude this territory.

[14] For example, one of the transition points from the Soviet-occupied to the American-occupied territories and vice versa for "displaced persons" had been established in Dessau which lies west to the Mulde. Everyone who wanted to pass the narrow provisional bridge had to be registered. Thus, in Waldersee and its surroundings east to the Mulde many thousands of people had to be sheltered and cared for in the open air under the most primitive conditions (*Archivale des Monats Juli 2018 - Stadtarchiv Dessau-Roßlau* 2018).

$$D_i = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ if } x_i \geq x_0 \\ 0 \text{ if } x_i < x_0 \end{cases}$$

Treatment D_i takes the value 1 if a municipality lies east of the Mulde.[15]

We argue that using the geographic location with respect to the Mulde induces exogenous variation in present day voting behavior that can be traced back to historic circumstances relating to the tense supply situation caused and amplified by the accumulation of refugees at the eastern bank of the Mulde.

The Mulde is no boundary river between present day administrative districts or cultural or ethnic groups. Thus, there should be no present day confounding factors driving the correlation between geographic location and AfD vote shares. Again, the municipalities east to the Mulde do not have a long-standing tradition in voting right-wing extremists (Franz et al. 2018, Cantoni et al. 2019).

4 Results

4.1 Difference in Differences

For the full sample, results from a DiD framework show that the AfD disproportionately gained votes in regions which were unoccupied or only occupied in the last days of the war (table 1, columns (1)-(3)). While unoccupied regions seem to display a higher share of AfD votes already in 2013 (column (1)), this difference disappears and even turns around when controlling for socio-demographic and geographic factors. Unsurprisingly, a higher unemployment rate is associated with higher AfD vote shares. Regions with a higher share of people with abitur have significantly lower AfD vote shares, as do regions bordering the former FRG and more densely populated regions. Municipalities which share a border with Poland or the Czech Republic exhibit significantly higher AfD vote shares. Speaking in favor of the contact hypotheses, exhibiting a higher share of people receiving asylum benefits is negatively correlated with AfD vote shares. Counterintuitively, the share of retirees receiving basic pension is negatively and GDP per capita is positively related to AfD vote shares. Average municipal debts, however, are positively related to AfD vote shares[16]. Overall, the signs of the control variables

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[15] Some municipalities lie directly at or include the Mulde. Since sharp RD requires that there is no value of x_i at which we get to observe both treatment and control observations, we use the geographical location of the town center with respect to the Mulde as assignment rule. However, some municipalities east of the Mulde were taken by the Americans. For example the American troops occupied Colditz where a war prison for American soldiers was located. Since these municipalities were handed over to the Soviets in early May, they are nonetheless coded as Soviet territory.

[16] This fits to recent literature relating the Brexit votes to austerity policies in the UK (Fetzer 2019).

show that AfD vote shares cannot be sufficiently explained with economic factors.

Table 1: DiD Results.

	Dependent variable:				
	afd_share				
	full sample			niemandsland sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
unocc:postRefCrisis	7.73***	7.71***	8.14***	1.32**	1.27**
	(0.40)	(0.39)	(0.44)	(0.66)	(0.61)
postRefCrisis	17.80***	17.81***	16.06***	20.05***	20.10***
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.29)	(0.33)	(0.28)
unocc	1.84***	−1.79***	−2.17***	1.07***	1.01**
	(0.13)	(0.28)	(0.36)	(0.30)	(0.48)
westTV			−1.52***		
			(0.37)		
popdens		−1.67***	−1.27**		−4.30***
		(0.41)	(0.50)		(1.14)
share_75p		−0.03	0.06		−0.14*
		(0.03)	(0.05)		(0.08)
share_fem		−0.09*	−0.17		−0.18
		(0.05)	(0.11)		(0.13)
netmig_pc		0.02	−0.27*		0.28*
		(0.06)	(0.14)		(0.17)
unemp_r		0.06**	0.05		0.54***
		(0.03)	(0.04)		(0.11)
asyl_sh		−1.56***	−0.12		0.40
		(0.41)	(0.73)		(1.21)
basicpension_sh		−0.74***	−0.91***		3.99***
		(0.11)	(0.21)		(0.61)
bippc		0.13***	0.04		−0.33***
		(0.02)	(0.04)		(0.12)
debts_pc		2.18***	0.82**		3.12***
		(0.22)	(0.37)		(0.82)
no_degree		−0.11**	0.02		0.04
		(0.04)	(0.08)		(0.08)
abitur		−0.12***	−0.07*		0.09
		(0.02)	(0.04)		(0.09)
eastern_border		2.14***	1.31***		0.35
		(0.22)	(0.31)		(0.46)
inner_german_border		−1.70***	−1.34***		−0.09
		(0.18)	(0.29)		(0.33)
Constant	5.78***	13.33***	19.21***	6.32***	8.26
	(0.05)	(2.60)	(5.40)	(0.13)	(6.33)
State FE	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	5,246	5,210	4,900	862	854
R^2	0.81	0.85	0.90	0.84	0.88

Note: Standard errors clustered at the municipal level in parentheses.
Control variables are average values from 2012-2014
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Interestingly, AfD vote share do not seem to be higher in overaged municipalities. which suggests that regions where the memory of the refugee crisis at the end and shortly after the war is still directly present and alive, AfD vote shares are not higher. As a first robustness check, we control for the reception of west TV during GDR times, since the "valley of the clueless" partly overlaps with the unoccupied area. Despite the reception of west TV being negatively related to AfD vote shares, the interaction term only increases in size and is not reduced in terms of statistical significance.

For the *Niemandsland* sample south-west of Chemnitz (columns (4)-(5)), the interaction term is statistically significant on the 5% level even when controlling for sociodemographic, economic and geographical factors, though smaller than for the full sample. However, unoccupied regions seem to display a higher share of AfD votes already in 2013 which makes the common trends assumption for this sample questionable. Thus, we cannot rule out that confounding factors other than the activation of the collective memory of the refugee crisis in the last days of the war cause the correlation between geographic location in the *Niemandsland* and the disproportionate increase in AfD votes from 2013 to 2017.

4.2 Sharp RD

Table 2: Sharp Regression Discontinuity: Mulde, 2017.

	Dependent variable:			
	afd_share			
	<50km	<40km	<30km	<20km
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
eastToMulde	1.87***	1.84***	2.40***	2.34**
	(0.65)	(0.66)	(0.66)	(0.98)
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	155	126	97	64
R^2	0.49	0.54	0.60	0.51

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls for socio-demographic, economic and geographic characteristics included in all columns. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

To reduce the omitted variable bias probably resulting from alternative variables correlated with occupational status and AfD vote shares, we study differences in AfD vote shares in 2017 east and west of the Mulde from Dessau in the north to Wechselburg in the south. We study municipalities with an absolute distance of 50, 40, 30 and 20 kilometres to the Mulde, respectively. All regressions use contemporaneous values of the above mentioned control variables. We find that
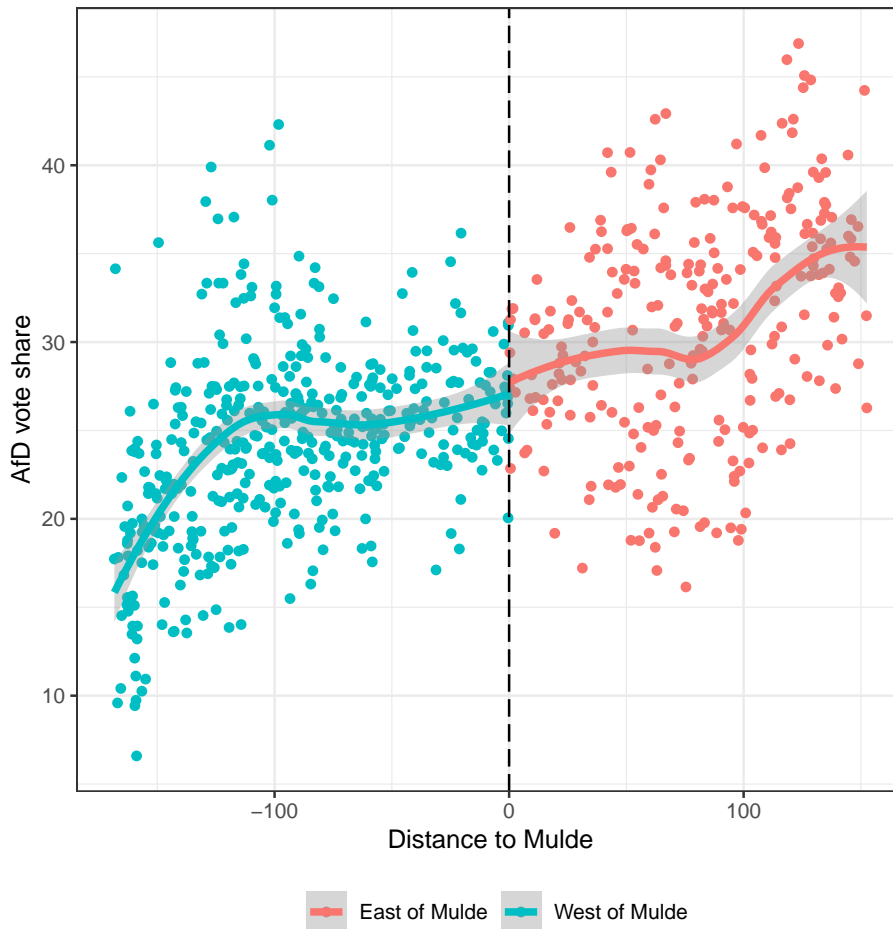
Figure 4: AfD vote shares by distance to the Mulde in 2017. The sample extends from Dessau in the north to Wechselburg in the south. Lines were fitted with a *loess* method incorporated in R's ggplot package.

region east of the Mulde exhibit a significant higher share of AfD votes in the federal elections in 2017 for all distance bands (table 2). Interestingly, the coefficient slightly increases the more narrow the sample is defined. This implies that the difference between AfD vote shares east and west to the Mulde becomes more pronounced the closer the municipalities lie to the Mulde. A graphical depiction (figure 4) shows a slight difference between AfD vote shares east and west of the Mulde. While AfD vote shares steeply increase with distance to the inner german border and again with decreasing distance to the eastern border, they are roughly constant within a band of 100 km west and, with a slightly higher value, 80 km east of the Mulde.

AfD vote shares did, however, not differ east and west of the Mulde in 2013 (table A.4). Vote shares for right-wing parties including AfD however differed up to an absolute distance of 30 km, but not for municipalities lying within a

20 km band to the Mulde (table A.5), which were most heavily exposed to the refugee crisis in 1945. The difference in right wing vote share in 2013 also suggests that regions east to the Mulde are more receptible to anti-migration campaigning which the AfD started only in 2015.

As another robustness check, we test for differences in AfD vote shares in 2017 east and west to the Saale, a river which runs in parallel to the Mulde roughly 40 km to the west and thus lies in the American occupation zone (table A.3). Indeed, municipalities east and west to the Saale differ in AfD vote shares within a band of 30 km absolute distance to the Saale. For the 20 km distance, however, the estimation shows no significant difference. In addition to decreasing statistical significance, the coefficient decreases as well. Though the evidence is not clear-cut, the results speak in favor of our hypothesis that the exposure to the refugee crisis of 1945 east of the Mulde makes the population living there more receptible to anti-immigration campaigning and triggered increasing AfD vote shares in response to the "refugee crisis" in 2015.

5 Conclusion

In 2015, Germany experienced a sharp increase of asylum applications. Although the influx of refugees was exceptional, this event was not historically unique. In the last days of World War II and in the subsequent years, especially regions at the eastern border of today's Germany experienced waves of refugees fleeing from the advancing Red Army or being expulsed from former German territory. Those regions, which served as reception camps, were among the political heartlands of the right-wing populist party AfD in 2017.

With our DiD strategy we could show that the AfD vote share disproportionately increased from 2013 to 2017 in areas that experienced considerable difficulties caused by the influx of great numbers of refugees in 1945. With about 7 percentage points, this effect is considerable and explains most of the gap which up until now remained unexplained in other models (e.g. Franz et al. 2018, Cantoni et al. 2019).

Comparing municipalities in the so called *Niemandsland*, where the supply conditions were especially tense, with municipalities occupied by the American troops adjacent to the west, we find a positive and significant higher vote share for the AfD in *Niemandsland* in 2017. However, we cannot confirm that the effect is only emerging in 2017, since the AfD seems to have higher vote shares in 2013 already. In this area, other factors might also play a role (e.g. uranium mining by the Soviets and their strict regime at the beginning of the GDR period).

In order to check if the effect is a consequence of the refugee crisis in 1945 and

is not caused by confounding factors correlated with non-occupation and AfD vote shares (like e.g. stronger nationalist tendencies), we chose an additional sample including municipalities along the Mulde river, which served as demarcation line between American and Soviet forces from May to July 1945 and where refugees could not advance further and accumulated. Using a regression discontinuity frame with the Mulde as sharp dividing line, we find significant differences in AfD vote shares for the areas west and east to the Mulde in 2017, an effect which was not present in 2013. Interestingly, the effect is increasing with decreasing distance to the river, speaking in favor of people living in areas that were exposed to this historical refugee crisis being more receptible to anti-immigration campaigning.

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A   Appendix

Table A.1: Summary Statistics.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
afd_share	5,296	15.17	10.45	0.00	50.00
popdens	5,294	0.10	0.17	0.01	2.53
share_75p	5,294	10.94	2.66	2.44	21.47
share_fem	5,294	49.70	1.68	40.06	58.87
netmig_pc	5,292	−0.36	1.15	−10.81	8.37
unemp_r	5,272	7.12	3.03	1.36	23.80
asyl_sh	5,294	0.30	0.15	0.11	0.86
basicpension_sh	5,294	3.72	1.29	1.96	8.63
bippc	5,294	22.38	2.57	18.16	37.04
debts_pc	5,292	1.10	0.42	0.19	2.67
no_degree	5,294	9.02	2.13	4.19	15.44
abitur	5,294	29.74	4.96	21.55	57.81
westTV	4,982	0.81	0.39	0.00	1.00
eastern_border	5,286	0.12	0.32	0.00	1.00
inner_german_border	5,286	0.18	0.38	0.00	1.00

Notes: The table shows the summary statistics for all municipalities in East Germany. Data covers the federal elections from 2013 and 2017, sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables averaged from 2012-2014, and time-invariant geographic controls.

Table A.2: Differences in Covariates before and after the Refugee Crisis.

	2013 (1)	p-value (2)	2017 (3)	p-value (4)	DiD 2017-2013 (5)	p-value (6)
afd_share	1.84	0	9.57	0	7.73	0
popdens	0.11	0	0.10	0	-0.00	0.00
share_75p	1.89	0	2.08	0	0.19	0.01
share_fem	0.79	0	0.74	0	-0.05	0.26
netmig_pc	0.05	0.52	-0.08	0.35	-0.13	0.23
unemp_r	-0.83	0.00	-0.78	0	0.05	0.77
asyl_sh	-0.07	0	0.01	0.01	0.09	0
basicpension_sh	-1.32	0	-1.32	0	0.01	0.41
bippc	-0.87	0	-0.27	0.07	0.60	0
debts_pc	-0.44	0	-0.46	0	-0.02	0.00
no_degree	0.41	0.00	-0.33	0.00	-0.73	0
abitur	-3.33	0	-2.77	0	0.56	0
westTV	-0.24	0	-0.24	-	-	-
eastern_border	0.54	0	0.54	-	-	-
inner_german_border	-0.20	0	-0.20	-	-	-

Notes: Columns (1) and (3) show the mean differences in covariates and AfD vote shares between occupied and non-occupied municipalities for 2013 and 2017, respectively with associated p-values in (2) and (4). Column (5) depicts the respective difference-in-differences values with associated p-values in column (6).

Table A.3: Placebo Sharp Regression Discontinuity: Saale, 2017.

	Dependent variable:			
	afd_share			
	<50km	<40km	<30km	<20km
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
eastToSaale	2.56***	2.19***	1.31*	0.63
	(0.62)	(0.64)	(0.67)	(0.78)
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	248	202	144	95
R^2	0.23	0.22	0.20	0.17

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls for socio-demographic, economic and geographic characteristics included in all columns. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.4: Sharp Regression Discontinuity: Mulde, 2013.

	Dependent variable:			
	afd_share			
	<50km	<40km	<30km	<20km
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
eastToMulde	−0.03	0.06	0.21	0.23
	(0.22)	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.45)
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	156	126	97	64
R^2	0.39	0.27	0.23	0.25

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls for socio-demographic, economic and geographic characteristics included in all columns. $^*p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

Table A.5: Sharp Regression Discontinuity: Right Wing Parties incl AfD. Mulde, 2013.

	Dependent variable:			
	right_wing_w_afd			
	<50km	<40km	<30km	<20km
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
eastToMulde	0.71**	0.89**	1.12**	0.68
	(0.32)	(0.38)	(0.44)	(0.56)
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	156	126	97	64
R^2	0.55	0.49	0.45	0.32

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Controls for socio-demographic, economic and geographic characteristics included in all columns. $^*p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$
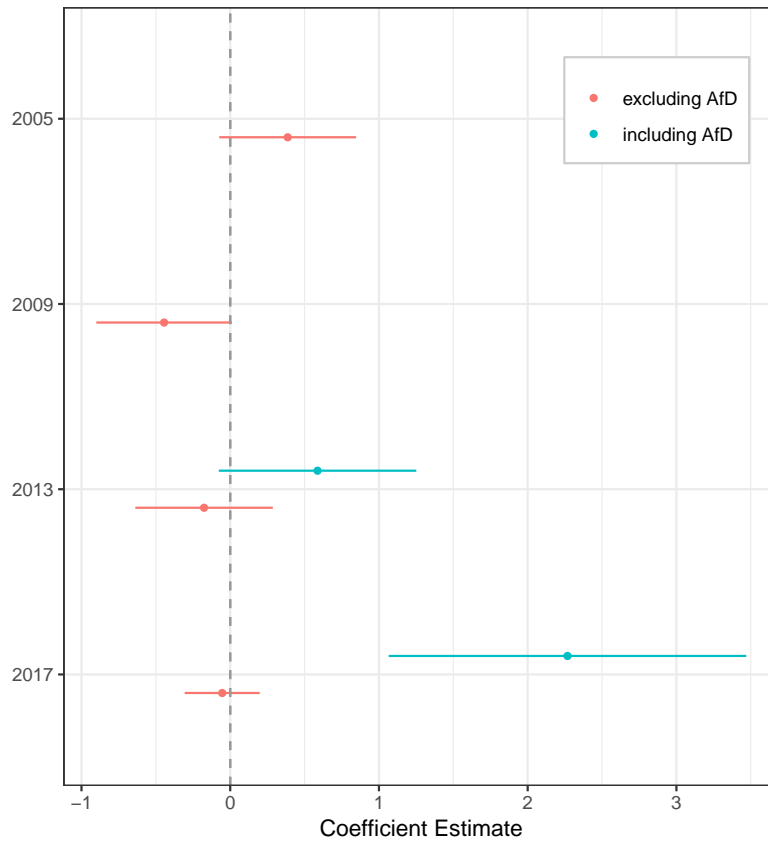
Figure 5: Effect of occupational status on right wing vote shares by year. Coefficients from regressing right-wing vote shares on *unocc* for each year separately. Geographic controls and state fixed effects included.