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The politicisation of European integration in Eurosceptic election campaigns

A multi-level analysis of the German party *Alternative für
Deutschland*



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Abstract

This cross-sectional case study investigates patterns of politicisation in election campaigns of the German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) by means of a comparative multi-level analysis. It adds to the existing literature by examining the Eurosceptic elements of the party's campaign communication across various decision-making levels. It examines EU issue salience, the dimension of mobilisation, and immigration salience in AfD campaigns for the 2019 EP elections, the 2017 German Bundestag elections, and the 2019 state election in Saxony, based on a qualitative content analysis of the AfD's respective party manifestos and all tweets posted on the party's official Twitter account in the two months prior to each election day. The findings show that European integration is most strongly mobilised on the EU level, while EU issue salience is rather limited on the national and the regional level. Apart from in the European arena, the issue of immigration is more frequently mobilised than that of European integration. While immigration has become a continuously cued and politicised topic in AfD campaigns, issues surrounding the EU appear comparatively less frequently in domestic election campaigns. This work supports existing theoretical approaches arguing that both issues pertain to a "newly emerging cleavage of globalisation". The findings for the dimension of mobilisation differ from the expectation in this study: overall, policy issues on the functional dimension are more strongly pronounced than fundamental polity concerns. These results offer scope for compelling future analyses, specifically with a refined coding system for the mobilisation dimension.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, European integration, politicisation, Alternative für Deutschland, multi-level governance

Word Count: 19500

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1 Introduction

“I want my money back!”

It was in 1979 when former British Prime minister Margaret Thatcher voiced her resentment towards the European Community (EC) with this famous claim. Forty years later, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) confirms that opposition towards the European peace project has grown over time to an extent which today threatens the EU at its core. Yet, Euroscepticism is all but a British phenomenon. Among various of the EU’s (now) 27 member states, Eurosceptic voices rise, changing not only structures of domestic politics but also within the European Parliament (EP).

Since the Treaty of Maastricht (TEU) European integration has evolved from what scholars call a “permissive consensus” to a “constraining dissensus” — European issues have eventually been shifted from a depoliticised, elitist sphere to public contestation among European citizens (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 5). After a set of multi-faceted European crises in recent years, polarisation and negative opinions towards European integration have inter alia manifested in the emergence of Eurosceptic parties across the EU’s member states, successfully mobilising the European issue for electoral support (Hoeglinger 2016: 44-45). In Germany, the EU’s most populous country, a tradition of longstanding support for the European project has been disrupted: since its foundation after the Euro-crisis in 2013, the right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland*¹ (AfD) has successfully entered not only the EP and the German Bundestag with an anti-EU agenda, but each of the Federal Republic’s 16 state parliaments (e.g. Grimm 2015, Lees 2018).

This work aims to investigate the politicisation of European integration in campaign communication of one individual Eurosceptic party — the AfD. Moreover, it will highlight the multi-level governance nature of the European Union, underlining its complex setup and various decision-making levels. Therefore, AfD campaigns for the

¹ in English: “Alternative for Germany”

latest elections on the European, the national, and the regional level of politics will be analysed. More precisely, this work examines the AfD's respective party manifestos as well as the party's official Twitter account in the two months prior to the 2019 European elections, the 2017 German federal elections and the 2019 state elections in Saxony.

This case study is guided by three overlying research questions that will be empirically addressed. In order to assess the extent of mobilisation and politicisation of European issues by means of a multi-level analysis, the first research question will be: *RQ1: To which extent is the European Union discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?* Furthermore, to investigate the *type* of EU issue, a second step of analysis aims to detect whether debates on the EU in the AfD's election campaigns refer to more functional policy issues or rather to fundamental questions on European integration. Hence, the second objective of this work is: *RQ2: What type of EU issue is addressed in elections campaigns of the AfD on the European, national, and regional level?* Results deriving from the second research question are expected to provide insightful information in terms of the scope and intensity of the AfD's EU critique across the three different political arenas. Lastly, this study points to an emerging scholarly debate which suspects issue linkages between European integration and immigration as part of a "newly emerging cleavage of globalisation" (e.g. Kriesi 2007, Hoeglinger 2016). To examine the AfD's emphasis on the issue of immigration and to further compare it to the extent of discussed EU issues, the last research question is posed as: *RQ3: To which extent is immigration discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?*

The outcome of this case study is expected to shed light on differences of issue salience and dimensions of mobilisation between various political levels within the complex multi-level structure of the EU. It aims to deliver an in-depth analysis of the AfD's campaign communication, based on the assumption that the electoral setting in which the party competes influences dynamics of EU politicisation and issue salience. In order to do so, it is structured as follows: Chapter 2 of this work will introduce the reader to the academic subfield of Euroscepticism and outline the research puzzle for this study. After emphasising the relevance of further research on Euroscepticism as a

phenomenon that hampers processes of European integration, the state of the art on the academic discourse surrounding Euroscepticism will be presented in the literature review. While different typologies exist to classify the degree of parties' Euroscepticism (e.g. Taggart — Szczerbiak 2002, Kopecký — Mudde 2002), other strains of research, including this work, have focused on underlying societal patterns to investigate the roots of anti-EU sentiment (e.g. Hooghe — Marks 2009, De Vries 2018, Börzel — Risse 2018). Reflecting on existing scholarly work, the lack of comparisons of Eurosceptic election campaigns between the European and the domestic level of politics is identified as a gap in current research. Deriving from this puzzle, the research questions for this study will be formulated and reasoned for.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the theoretical grounds for this work. It will introduce the reader to the “Postfunctional Theory of European Integration” by Hooghe and Marks (2009), who highlight *identity* as a decisive driver of Euroscepticism. Based on this identity approach, this study will further draw on work by Hanspeter Kriesi (2007) who describes European integration, as well as immigration, as “part and parcel of a new globalisation cleavage”. In line with these two underlying theories, an analytical framework for this work will be designed in order to empirically address the three posed research questions. By doing so, hypotheses for each research question will emerge and be tested by this study.

To provide insight into the methodological structure of this work, Chapter 4 will guide the reader through the author's choice of methodological approach, as well as the selection of cases and data. This cross-sectional case study will analyse social media content and party manifestos of the AfD for the three latest elections on the European, the national, and the regional level by means of a qualitative content analysis after Philipp Mayring (2000, 2014). To guarantee a transparent and comprehensive presentation of the obtained findings, the chapter will moreover elaborate on the operationalisation, giving detailed insight into the coding framework that guided the collection of relevant data.

Subsequently, Chapter 5 will present and discuss the findings deriving from this study. Giving a final overview on the structure and results of this study, Chapter 6

further provides an outlook for future research in the field of Euroscepticism and the politicisation of European integration. It is called, inter alia, for an increased focus on the regional level of politics when investigating the issue as an opportunity for insightful differences and facets of Euroscepticism.

2 Problematisation and state of the art

2.1 Relevance of the issue

At the present moment, the European Union is undoubtedly facing one of the darkest times in its sixty-year existence: “Not often in its history has the country bloc looked so economically fragile, [...] so divided over how to tackle the crisis of legitimacy facing its institutions, and so under assault by Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs” (De Vries 2018: 3). Indeed, the Union has been hit by a disruptive set of multi-faceted crises during the last two decades. Since the Maastricht Treaty, events such as the introduction of the Euro, the Eastern enlargement in 2004, and failed attempts for the EU Constitution and the ratification of a reformed version of the Lisbon Treaty have divided opinions among the EU’s member states. More recently, occurrences such as the Eurozone crisis and the so-called refugee crisis have created severe polarisation in positions on the EU (Oğurlu 2018: 25). The developments have culminated in the official withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU in January 2020. Eventually, what was inconceivable for a long time has now become a reality: anti-EU sentiment and scepticism towards the European project are today widely spread both among citizens and in the political landscape of the EU’s member states.

Correspondingly, the results of the 2019 European Parliament elections illustrate and prove that Euroscepticism is on the rise. After the elections of 2014 saw an increase in seats held by Eurosceptic forces both from the right and the left of the political spectrum, statistics on the most recent European elections show that Eurosceptic voices continue to grow within the parliament. While in 2014, anti-EU votes made up 29.29 percent of the total share, the number grew further after the EP elections in 2019 to

33.29 percent (Oğurlu 2018: 29). Hence, Eurosceptic party groups are establishing a more and more profound basis within the political system of the EU and in European member states, illustrating that negative opinions towards the EU have grown and manifested over time among European citizens.

Reflecting on the foregoing, it becomes clear that Euroscepticism constitutes a real threat towards European integration and the European peace project, challenging the Union in its core ideas and values. As the former European Council President Herman Van Rompuy already warned in a speech in 2010: “

have together to fight the danger of a new Euroscepticism. This is no longer the monopoly of a few countries. In every member state, there are people who believe their country can survive alone in the globalised world. It is more than an illusion: it is a lie.” (quoted in: De Vries 2018: 5). Indeed, Euroscepticism has far-reaching implications for the further process of European integration and national politics. On the supranational EU-level, Eurosceptic forces can hamper decision-making and the progression of EU governance. Furthermore, Euroscepticism influences the dynamics of domestic electoral and party systems in European member states. Finally, EU opposition tackles questions of legitimacy regarding the EU’s institutions, policies, and decisions on a normative scale (Vasilopoulou 2017: 22). Thus, Euroscepticism has turned into a “complex dimension of politics” (Oğurlu 2018: 21) and represents a well-established sub-field in academic studies on the EU (ibid.: 21).

The following section offers a review of the academic discourse on Euroscepticism as a political science problem deserving further research and investigation. After a brief discussion of existing typologies and definitions of party based Euroscepticism, the literature review will guide the reader through the current academic discourse on public based Euroscepticism and the politicisation of European integration.

2.2 Literature review

Generally speaking, Euroscepticism could describe any kind of negative opinion towards European integration. Paul Taggart (1998) provides the groundwork for research in the field with his overarching definition of Euroscepticism as “[...] the idea of contingent or qualified opposition as well as [...] outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart 1998: 366). As this description of the phenomenon illustrates, attitudes towards the EU and European integration may vary in their intensity of opposition. Therefore, in a comparative analysis of Euroscepticism in various member states, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) distinguish between “hard and soft Euroscepticism”. Hard Euroscepticism describes a more radical version of EU-opposition, in which political and economic integration as well as EU membership are fully rejected (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002: 10). Hence, it implies a total denial of the European Union as such (Oğurlu 2018: 22-23). Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) define it as the “[...] outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to their country joining or remaining members of the EU”. Contrastingly, soft Euroscepticism represents not general opposition to the Union and EU membership, but criticism towards further integration policies or attempts of deepening federal structures within the EU. It therefore can be viewed as a milder form of anti-EU sentiment (Oğurlu 2018: 23).

The framework by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) was criticised by Kopecký and Mudde (2002) who argued that it was too wide and deficient in providing tangible criteria of categorisation. Moreover, the authors claim that with by applying the hard/soft distinction, all critique towards the EU might be considered as Euroscepticism. They point to an early concept by Easton (1965) and classify Euroscepticism into four categories of party positioning towards the EU, namely Euroenthusiasts, Europragmatists, Eurosceptics and Eurorejects (Vasilopoulou 2017: 23). The categorisation by Kopecký and Mudde (2002) offers “[...] an alternative two-dimensional, ‘strategically driven’ typology which analyses Euroscepticism referring to

the types of public support, i.e. the diffuse and specific support/opposition for EU/rope” (see Oğurlu 2018: 23).

Sofia Vasilopoulou (2011) develops categories of party positioning towards European integration and the EU based on four indicators: “common cultural definition of Europe”, “the principle of cooperation at a European multilateral level”, “the EU policy practice”, and “the desire to build a future European polity” (Vasilopoulou 2017: 24). Vasilopoulou’s indicators show that the drivers for Euroscepticism vary across different party families. While radical right parties share a cultural understanding of Europe based on religious, historical, and cultural links, for other party groups the definition of Europe is rooted in economic or geographical concerns (Vasilopoulou 2017: 24).

This brief review of definitions and typologies shows that no single framework can conclusively define the term of Euroscepticism in academic literature. The original, ideological hard/soft distinction by Taggart and Szczesbiak (2002) has been further differentiated into more strategic and utilitarian approaches to explain and define attitudes towards European integration. Moreover, the outlined works primarily focus on Euroscepticism on the party level, thus providing classifications and tools for the categorisation of party groups at the national and the European level. In recent years, however, other strains of research have focused on Euroscepticism not on the party level, but on the public level. The aim here is not to explain *how*, but rather *why* Euroscepticism is on the rise — ergo, what might cause certain attitudes toward European integration among citizens. This body of literature will be briefly outlined in the following.

European integration has for a remarkably long time been portrayed as an uncontested and depoliticised political process. Both a “permissive consensus” among citizens, as well as the lack of communication of European issues towards the public by intermediary organisations — national parties, social movements, and the mass media — can be regarded as characteristics of this depoliticised dynamic of European integration (Adam et al. 2009: 78-79). However, the outdated image of public scepticism towards the EU as a “sleeping giant” (van der Eijk — Franklin 2004: 2) no longer holds in

academic discourse. Today, scholars in the field largely agree that the “sleeping giant” has finally awoken, and that political entrepreneurs succeeded in exploiting and mobilising the issue of European integration (e.g. De Vries 2007, Kriesi 2007). This politicisation of European integration has inspired a body of research crucial to this work. The politicisation of EU issues is evident and irrevocable, yet its future implications remain unclear (Hoeglinger 2016: 44).

Earlier research focused mainly on the politicisation potential of European integration issues, hence the possible transfer of debates on the EU from an elitist to the public sphere. Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) predict that it is only a matter of time until party groups will no longer avoid placing European issues on the agenda, but rather use the opportunity to politicise the pro/anti EU dimension. The result of this would be a new pro/anti EU dimension in party systems, disrupting the linear left/right concerns that previously informed voters’ decision (Van der Eijk — Franklin 2004).

De Vries (2007) re-evaluates the “sleeping giant” metaphor and investigates how European integration affects voting choices in national elections, a phenomenon she refers to as “European Union issue voting”. The author finds that EU issue voting is more likely to take place when both the degree of EU issue salience *and* the extent of partisan conflict over European integration are high. In simple terms, citizens have to care about Europe whilst parties simultaneously have to provide them with the according electoral choice. This combination allows for an electoral connection between European and national politics and gives political parties, in particular those on the far right and far left of the political spectrum, the opportunity to mediate and exploit Euroscepticism.

In their ‘Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration’, Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that the years of “permissive consensus” have finally reached their end. While in previous years elites were not set under public pressure when negotiating European issues, since the Treaty of Maastricht, they “must look over their shoulders” (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 5). The EU has thus entered an era of “constraining dissensus” where voters’ opinion towards European integration affects political action. The authors state that accordingly, Euroscepticism and EU critique can

have various sources. Reasons for anti-EU sentiment can stem from economic or social factors, political and institutional discontent, concerns over a democratic deficit, or conflicts over identity and sovereignty (Oğurlu 2018: 24).

Generally speaking, the research on public opinion towards the EU can be distinguished into two strains of literature: the utilitarian and the identity perspective. The utilitarian approach assumes support for the EU to be higher in countries with better economic positions.² Based on the concept of economic voting, support or opposition towards the European project can therefore be explained by a cost-benefit calculation. Additionally, in regard of human capital theory, this approach sees EU support more pronounced where skill level and capital access are high. According to this, high-skilled workers with capital *benefit* from the removal of trade barriers, as they take opportunities from the increasingly liberalised markets. Therefore, support for the EU would be higher among this group than among lower-skilled people (De Vries 2018: 14-15).

However, some researchers have found solely utilitarian explanations for EU support or EU opposition insufficient, and have emphasised identity as a driver of Euroscepticism (e.g. Hooghe — Marks 2009). Here, the attachment of people to the concept of “their” nation, and the perception of people from different backgrounds as “the others” play a crucial role. As Sean Carey (2002) finds, Euroscepticism is closely linked to the concepts of national identity and pride. Hence, the phenomenon is more likely if individuals feel strongly attached to one single national, territorial identity, rather than to more cosmopolitan feelings and self-perceptions (De Vries 2018: 14-15). Moreover, studies have proven a correlation between Euroscepticism and negative attitudes towards minority groups and immigrants (ibid.: 15). This approach is able to capture the complex interplay between self-perception, national identity, and Euroscepticism and thus convincingly emphasises underlying societal dynamics. Providing the theoretical basis for this work, the identity approach will be frequently referred to and further elaborated on in Chapter 3 of this study.

² meaning preconditions as for example improved trade systems, accession to the European Single Market or the receiving of structural funds

This section has given a brief overview of the academic subfield of Euroscepticism as relevant to this work. While a large body of literature has created typologies to classify political parties by their position towards the European project³, a smaller but still substantial amount of work has been dedicated to identifying the factors that drive Euroscepticism. Here, Euroscepticism is closely linked to politicisation theory, which aims to analyse the involvement of the general public in (European) politics. Indeed, this research has built on existing theories of Euroscepticism and politicisation to investigate larger issues such as party and voter behaviour, election campaigning, societal movements and decision-making processes in national and European institutions.

In her comparative literature analysis, Sofia Vasilopoulou (2017) provides an overview on existing publications on Euroscepticism to “[...] consolidate existing knowledge, identify research gaps and make recommendations for future study” (Vasilopoulou 2017: 22). The next section will outline her work and reflect on her findings in order to identify remaining gaps in the research and open questions that motivate this study.

2.3 Research gap

“What next in the study on Euroscepticism?” Sofia Vasilopoulou (2017) reaches out to the academic community and calls, *inter alia*, for more analysis of Euroscepticism in its consequences on domestic politics. Following the multiple crises post-Maastricht, the salience of EU issues⁴ seems to rise among European member states. It therefore should be, *inter alia*, investigated how and to which extent the European Union is portrayed in national election campaigns, in order to understand which consequences the post-Maastricht polarisation of attitudes towards the European project has for electoral competition and issue mobilisation of actors not only on the European level, but also within the EU’s member states. The author specifically suggests a comparison of post-

³ e.g. the hard/soft distinction by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002)

⁴ also referred to as “EU issue salience”

and pre-crisis times for this question (Vasilopoulou 2017: 32). However, the emergence of Euroscepticism and its effects on national politics and election campaigns has been considered not only in pre- to post-crisis comparisons, but also through other approaches in recent research.

Hanspeter Kriesi (2007) offers a comparative analysis of newspaper data in six Western European countries, examining how and to what extent political parties have addressed the process of European integration in national election campaigns since the 1970s. He finds mixed support for the “new-cleavage” theory which supposes conservative and right-populist parties to be the main driver of Euroscepticism (ibid: 83).

Silke Adam et al. (2009) investigate the role of Eurosceptic fringe and mainstream parties not in national, but European elections. They analyse campaigning communication leading up to the 2009 EP elections by means of a systematic, comparative content analysis in eleven European countries. The authors show that especially fringe parties on the edges of the political spectrum open up the debate on European issues and openly criticise the EU (Adam et al. 2009: 78).

Hoeglinger (2016) contests the assumption of increasing politicisation and EU issue salience. The author assesses the salience of European integration in domestic election campaigns with a media content analysis across six Western European countries from the 1990s to the 2000s. He states that compared to other political issues, the salience of Europe in election campaigns continues to be limited. Additionally, Hoeglinger finds that ideological aspects represent an important factor in explaining EU issue salience. According to his findings, more culturally conservative parties are associated with a stronger emphasis on the EU in their domestic election campaigns (ibid.: 44).

Leading back to the research gap of EU issue salience in national election campaigns, it can be found substantial effort to approach the many open questions in this academic sub-field. Nonetheless, research to date has mainly conducted quantitative analysis, while qualitative approaches remain rather limited. Moreover, most research has focused on cross-country comparison, involving the party groups within various

domestic political systems. Addressing EU issue salience and the politicisation of European integration in different member states, most studies prove one main assumption: parties in the right-wing spectrum and culturally conservative parties are the main drivers of politicisation and EU issue salience (e.g. Vasilopoulou 2017).

Despite the insightful findings to date, the current state of the art lacks more in-depth analysis of EU issue salience in the election campaigns of individual Eurosceptic parties. As has been repeatedly shown, it is particularly the “new” wave of (populist) right-wing party groups which communicate strong anti-EU sentiment. As these Eurosceptic parties become increasingly embedded in European and national party systems, the rise of Euroscepticism is obvious and irreversible (Statham — Trenz 2013: 1). Therefore, it is worth investigating in detail how EU issue salience and opposition to European integration occur within one specific Eurosceptic party. As the existing research calls for an increased focus on EU issue salience in national election campaigns, the question of how these compare to other electoral processes, such as EP or regional elections, remains inconclusive. As the EU builds on a multi-level set-up and organisation, a multi-level analysis of EU issue salience and attitudes towards European integration seems reasonable and instructive for future research on Euroscepticism. Hooghe and Marks (2009) note that due to the EU’s nature of a multi-level governance, regional integration visualises “the articulation of authority across jurisdictions at diverse scales” (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 2). The authors find that the increasing politicisation of European integration causes growing influence of domestic politics and regional integration on the European level. In line with their identity approach, Hooghe and Marks (2009) claim that: “*identity* is decisive for multi-level governance in general and for regional integration in particular” (ibid 2009: 2). Hence, it can be assumed that including various political levels in research on Euroscepticism shall contribute to a full picture of the phenomenon and will thus form substantial grounds for the design of this study.

This work will address research questions resulting from the presented puzzle. Having highlighted the gap in current research on Euroscepticism, the following section of this work will formulate research questions and elaborate on their objectives.

2.4 Objective and research questions

This work aims to further embed and integrate research on Euroscepticism into the study of European integration and national politics. As outlined above, scholarly work in the field lacks focus on EU issue salience in national election campaigns. Adding to existing studies, this research will discard cross-country comparison to provide an assessment of one specific and evidently Eurosceptic party by means of a multi-level analysis. More specifically, it shall be investigated if and how a single party differently addresses the EU and European integration across European, national, and regional election campaigns. More simply put, it will not be investigated how various party groups articulate EU-sentiment in the same elections, but rather how one specific Eurosceptic party mobilises EU issues across different sets of elections. Contributing to existing research and filling current gaps, this research aims to highlight the multi-level character of the European Union and simultaneously of Euroscepticism.

This study will examine the campaign communication of the German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the run-up to various elections on different political levels. Six years after its foundation, the AfD can be defined as one of the “[...] classical right-wing populist parties in Europe” and represents “[...] a critical juncture in the development of the party system and the contestation of European Union (EU) integration in Germany” (Lees 2018: 297). The reasons for choosing this case will be further elaborated on in a Chapter 4 of this work. However, the research design of this work could also have been applied to other Eurosceptic parties in EU member states.

Firstly, this study shall investigate EU issue salience in election campaigns of the AfD on the European, national, and regional level. As already outlined in the literature review, Euroscepticism and therefore EU issue salience is generally expected to be higher in campaign communication of culturally conservative and right-wing populist parties based on the identity approach and a “new globalisation cleavage” (e.g. Hooghe — Marks 2009, Kriesi 2007). This relies on the assumption that the politicisation of European issues follows above all an ideological pattern. As a consequence, the political

sphere can no longer be seen as a solely two-dimensional (left/right) space but as being enhanced by an additional economic and cultural axis, described as follows:

“The economic left–right axis sees adherents to market intervention and an encompassing welfare state opposed to proponents of market liberalisation and lean government. The cultural axis has changed its meaning over time: with the waning of the religious cleavage, it currently stretches from traditional, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) values to green, alternative and libertarian (GAL) views” (Hoeglinger 2016: 47).

Findings suggest that this cleavage is prominently mobilised by culturally conservative TAN parties. The politicisation of the EU and thus EU issue salience are mainly shaped by ideological factors, and are thus expected to be stronger in such parties (e.g. Kriesi 2007, Hoeglinger 2016: 47).

It is worth investigating EU issue salience in an openly Eurosceptic party through a more differentiated lens. This work aims to determine to what extent the electoral setting is associated with higher EU issue salience and the politicisation of European integration in the campaign communication of a culturally conservative TAN party. To examine such differences, it should be also considered the distance to the EU in elections with regional elections being furthest and European elections being closest. How is EU integration politicised by a culturally conservative TAN party which should theoretically already put a strong emphasis on European issues? In a first step, it will be analysed how strongly the EU is mobilised as a topic in the respective election campaigns of the AfD on EU, national, and regional level. Hence, the first research question will be:

RQ1: To which extent is the European Union discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?

The answer to this question will visualise EU issue salience as a whole, thus providing information on *how much* the party is speaking about the European Union. This will reveal the extent of politicisation across the three political levels.

However, this work additionally wishes to examine *what type* of EU issue AfD campaigns tend to focus on. It follows the research design of Adam et al. (2009) and differentiates here into polity issues and policy issues. To add a dimensional aspect of Euroscepticism, EU-relevant issues will be separated into functional aspects (policy issues) and aspects related to Europeanisation (polity issues) concerning the shape and reach of the EU. In general, Eurosceptic parties are expected to most intensively articulate polity issues as these issues “raise the fundamental questions of EU integration” (Adam et al. 2009: 82). Again, it is conducted a multi-level analysis, now attempting to associate the three political levels with the dimension of mobilised EU issues. Hence, the second research question will be:

RQ2: What type of EU issue is addressed in elections campaigns of the AfD on the European, national, and regional level?

This will determine whether different electoral settings provoke more functional or fundamental questions on the EU. If it is assumed that more a fundamental discussion of the EU on the Europeanisation dimensions implies stronger anti-EU sentiment, the findings to this question will shed light on the intensity of Euroscepticism at the different political levels.

Finally, it will be evaluated how the issue of *immigration* is politicised in relation to European integration in AfD election campaigns. As Hoeglinger (2016) states, “[...] Europe remains in the shadow of immigration, an issue that is also part and parcel of an emerging new cleavage between the winners and losers of globalisation [...] and which is also strongly culturally driven” (Hoeglinger 2016: 46). Hence, immigration constitutes a “twin issue” to European integration and is in similar ways culturally driven and

theoretically part of a “new globalisation cleavage”. Studies to date find that parties in the spectrum of culturally conservative TAN parties still tend to stress immigration more than European integration (Hoeglinger 2016: 48). It will be tested if Hoeglinger’s assumption holds on different levels of elections. To analyse if immigration remains a more strongly politicised issue than the EU in election campaigns of the AfD, the third and last research question will be:

RQ3: To which extent is immigration discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?

The last research question will clarify the extent to which the AfD mobilises the issue of immigration across the different political levels. Moreover, the findings will provide insight into the interrelation and proportionality of the “twin issues” of European integration and immigration. In their capacity to assess the politicisation of both issues, the derived findings will contribute to an additional research gap:

“If those who contest migration are the same as those who contest European governance and they do so in similar ways, the politicisation of European governance is likely to ‘survive’ as long as migration is a contested issue in European societies. However, this linkage begs more research on the politicisation of European governance of migration.” (de Wilde et al. 2016: 15-16).

2.5 Shortcomings

The research questions hence address three issues: to what extent is the EU discussed in the AfD’s campaign communication in the run-up to elections on the European, the national, and the regional level? If articulating EU issues, which mobilisation dimension do these questions refer to? And finally, how salient is the issue of immigration in AfD election campaigns on the respective political level and in relation to EU issue salience?

The author of this work is however well aware that this work includes, as all academic research, limitations and shortcomings. Firstly, the focus of this case study lies

on a single Eurosceptic, right-wing populist party within the German political landscape. Therefore, on the one hand, aspects such as party competition over European issues and partisan co-orientation (Adam et al. 2009: 96) of parties located in different political spectrums (left/right, GAL/TAN) cannot be captured by this analysis. On the other hand, it will not be investigated how different Eurosceptic parties across the EU's 27 member states emphasise and mobilise issues in respective election campaigns. Hence, this work is limited in regard to partisan contestation over European integration within the German political landscape as well as it cannot deliver a comparison of various Eurosceptic forces within the EU.

Moreover, this study exclusively investigates the AfD's campaign communication in the three latest elections on the European, the national, and the regional level. Since the AfD only exists since 2013, only one federal election was held since the party's foundation. It thus cannot be delivered a longterm comparison of developments over time. The benefits of a cross-sectional study will however be further elaborated on in Chapter 4 of this work, where the research design of this study will be outlined and reasoned for.

Not least, due to the researcher's limited resources, the case selection for the regional level of this multi-level analysis solely comprises the 2019 state elections in Saxony. Hence, the resulting data and findings will cover only one of 16 federal states within the German federal republic and consider it as representative of the regional level. However insightful the results in Saxony may prove, it should be emphasised that for a complete picture of the situation, data from all 16 *Länder* should be considered. Nonetheless, it is assumed that the selection of the three cases relevant for this study provides an in-depth analysis of a Eurosceptic party and its campaign communication on different decision-making levels, capturing the multi-level nature of the EU. Yet to differentially investigate regional integration, future research might include data deriving from various elections on the regional level to compare them to national and European, but also other federal state elections.

Chapter 2 of this study briefly outlined Euroscepticism as a political science problem and its surrounding academic discourse, as well as the aspired research

objectives and shortcomings of this study. The next section will guide the reader through the underlying theoretical groundwork and analytical framework for this study.

3 Theory and Analytical Framework

This chapter will offer comprehensive insight into the theoretical groundwork of this study. More specifically, the reader will be introduced to the identity approach of European integration politicisation by Hooghe and Marks (2009) which shall then be complemented by Kriesi's (2007) theoretical assumptions of a "new globalisation cleavage". Next, an analytical framework for the assessment of each research question will be presented, comprising the measurement of EU issue and immigration salience as well as the determination of EU issues' mobilisation dimension.

3.1 Politicisation of European integration

This work does not classify a party within the different types and definitions of Euroscepticism. Rather, it aims to explain *how* an evidently Eurosceptic party performs in different political settings. It seeks reasons and explanations for a party's behaviour in underlying societal structures. In the process, this study draws and relies on politicisation theory of European integration. This issue has been extensively discussed in academic literature, most prominently through the groundbreaking work of Hooghe and Marks (2009) in their post-functionalist theory of European integration, as well as through the "new globalisation cleavage" by Hanspeter Kriesi (2007). Combining both theories can offer compelling insight and will thus form the theoretical backbone of this work.

Drawing on the grand theories of European integration, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, the postfunctional identity approach by Hooghe and Marks (2009) is one of many attempts to explain Euroscepticism in its occurrence. It seems useful to apply their theory in this work, as the authors also base their assumptions on the multi-level setup of the EU. They argue that: "[...] identity is decisive for multi-level governance in general, and for regional integration in particular" (Hooghe — Marks

2009: 2). The challenge of multi-level governance and regional integration lies in the mismatch between efficiency and structures of authority. As the preference for autonomy is viewed as inconsistent with the functional need for regional authority, it is important to find out *why* and *how* identity is mobilised in order to explain European integration (ibid.: 2).

Hooghe and Marks (2009) build on the idea that not solely economic aspects such as market integration play a role in shaping attitudes toward the EU, but that identity and mutual obligation can be seen as key drivers for Euroscepticism. Hence, as outlined in the literature review, these studies employ not a purely utilitarian, but rather an identity-based approach to seek explanations for the phenomenon of Euroscepticism (De Vries 2018: 14-15). According to this theory, two main factors influence the politicisation of European integration and cause Euroscepticism: peoples' attachment to their nation and their perception of people from other cultural backgrounds. Theoretically, Euroscepticism should be most prominent among individuals that have an exclusive view of their national identity compared to other territorial identities. It should be least prominent among cosmopolitan individuals who have multiple cultural or territorial identities. The second driver, namely the perception of people from other cultural backgrounds, complements findings that have related Euroscepticism to negative feelings towards immigrants and minorities (ibid.: 15).

Over the years, the EU has developed into a political system in which membership not only concerns economic benefits, but corresponds to multi-level governance which increases immigration and undermines national sovereignty. People who are not positively affected by the economic effects of EU-membership, referred to as "economic losers" by Hooghe and Marks, are most likely to feel culturally threatened. To understand the effect of identity on public opinion on the EU, it is decisive to understand how different groups of identity correlate and whether they are mobilised by elites or not (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 11-12) A crucial aspect here is the mobilisation of European integration by political actors, such as parties. Hence, identity has to be politically constructed. This construction occurs through: "[...] priming (making a consideration salient), framing (connecting a particular consideration to a political

object) and cueing (instilling a bias)” (see *ibid.*: 13). This means that identity only begins to play an explanatory role for attitudes towards the EU when it is actively called upon by a party. Therefore, this approach observes a close link between party cueing and public opinion on the EU, assuming that support for the European project is shaped by political elites who mobilise issues and subsequently opinions (De Vries 2018: 20).

However, identity is not only seen as affecting public opinion, but simultaneously shaping the debate among political parties. This became clear when the authors supplemented the classical economic left/right dimension of the political spectrum by a non-economic left/right axis, which comprises green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) parties on the one, and traditionalism/authority/nationalism (TAN) parties on the other hand. This new cleavage of party-positioning with the added variable of national identity extends the notion of EU-politicisation which was previously considered as a sole conflict between regulated capitalism and market liberalism (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 17). Hence, contesting the prominent view that the politicisation of European integration is mainly driven by economic factors, scholars now increasingly argue that it is closely linked to the cultural axis of the new cleavage concept (Hoeglinger 2016: 47). Especially populist TAN parties such as the AfD are seen as promoting the politicisation of European integration and negative feelings towards the EU, ergo Euroscepticism. These parties oppose European integration, perceiving it as bringing in external ideas and threatening national sovereignty and autonomy (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 17). As Hooghe and Marks (2009) state: “They oppose European integration for the same reasons that they oppose immigration: it undermines national community” (*ibid.*: 17).

Hanspeter Kriesi (2007) picks up a similar line of argumentation and conception of party-positioning, but adds the assumption of a nascent globalisation cleavage. This “new globalisation cleavage” describes attitudes and opposition towards European integration as part of a contestation between so-called “winners” and “losers” of globalisation and denationalisation. This theory acknowledges that cultural aspects strongly influence the politicisation of Europe, but also stresses the importance of economic factors. It hence combines the premise of a purely identity-based approach with a utilitarian point of view. Some key aspects of the dispute, for instance

deregulation and the opening up of formerly closed markets, are rooted not only in cultural, but also economic grounds. Thus, Kriesi (2007) confirms again that TAN parties are the main driver of the politicisation of European integration, successfully mobilising the issue in primarily cultural terms. Hence, even if ideological — ergo cultural and identity-based — factors seem to mainly shape the politicisation of European integration, economic reasons should also, albeit to a lesser extent, be considered as explanatory variables (Hoeglinger 2016: 47).

To conclude, this work bases its research on the assumption that the politicisation of European integration does not happen randomly or incidentally, but that it has to be discussed and mobilised — cued — by political actors. Moreover, the extent of EU politicisation, also addressed by RQ1, depends on the underlying dynamics of the mobilisation process. While some scholars argue that EU issue salience is a purely strategic, utilitarian decision of oppositional parties, it is assumed in line with Hooghe and Marks (2009) as well as with Kriesi (2007), that it is based on more fundamental concerns of identity. In this theory, peoples' attachment to their nation and their perception of people from other cultural backgrounds are two chief drivers of the politicisation of European integration. However, according to Kriesi's (2007) conception of a newly emerging globalisation cleavage, this work suspects economic factors to play an additional, albeit smaller, role for the mobilisation of EU issues. Economic "losers" of globalisation should therefore be more likely to oppose European integration. As this identity-based approach emerges from the idea of European governance as a complex multi-level setup, it is promising for an analysis of politicisation of European integration on the European, national, and regional level. Including the complexity and dimension of national identity in the theory on EU politicisation, this approach is expected to open up possibilities for a comprehensive analysis of different electoral settings within the multi-level structure of the EU.

Having introduced the theoretical grounds underlying this work, the next section will examine each research questions and develop hypotheses in order to provide an analytical roadmap for this study.

3.2 EU issue salience

As has also been employed in previous studies outlined above, one main indicator to assess the extent of politicisation of European integration is the *salience* of EU-issues, which RQ1 aims to investigate. In more simple words, increasing issue salience on a specific matter, as for instance the EU, supposes consequentially a higher level of politicisation (Börzel — Risse 2018: 85). Salience can be defined as the importance attributed to the EU and European integration (De Wilde — Leupold 2016: 6). Especially during election campaigns, visibility and public attention, therefore politicisation, are crucial for parties' success. This is why many scholars have focused on salience when investigating the politicisation of Europe (Hoeglinger 2016: 49).

For the empirical observation of politicisation in general, De Wilde and Leupold (2016) involve three aspects of analysis: “(a) the growing salience of European governance, involving (b) a polarisation of opinion, and (c) an expansion of actors and audiences engaged in monitoring EU affairs” (De Wilde — Leupold 2016: 4). *Salience* becomes the centre of attention for this research, as it evaluates Euroscepticism within one specific party group, rather than public opinion among citizens or party competition of various actors. To investigate the extent of politicisation of European integration, it is crucial to understand in which political settings the phenomenon can be observed and located (ibid.: 5).

Important to note is that an increase of issue salience does not imply increasing support for the EU. Even though for a long time it was assumed that higher salience leads to growing support, currently this expectation is contested by the rise of Euroscepticism:

“Rising levels of Euroscepticism, as manifested in the electoral success of populist right-wing parties, and mounting public criticism uttered by a growing set of actors indicate that politicisation is driven primarily by those critical of the integration process rather than by those who are supportive” (De Wilde — Leupold 2016: 6).

Hence, salience is not only an insightful indicator of the extent of politicisation, but can potentially also reflect the extent of critique and scepticism towards the EU.

To assess RQ1, issue salience has to be highlighted in the context of partisan competition. Here, issue salience is closely linked to the concept of parties' effort of issue-emphasis, ergo "[...] the relative frequency with which European integration is dealt with compared to other issues" (Hoeglinger 2016: 48). To win an election, parties are expected to place issues on the agenda which they believe to benefit from, and to de-emphasise matters which could hamper success. With regard to European integration, a party will therefore increase the salience of an issue if they think they will benefit from the politicisation of the topic (ibid.: 49). In the case of the AfD as a Eurosceptic party, this work supposes that EU issue salience is higher when strong opposition to the EU is expected to have electoral benefits for the party. This should be most important and pronounced in European Parliament elections, where negative opinions towards the European project are Eurosceptics' main opportunity to catch voters' attention and support. Moreover, considering the identity approach by Hooghe and Marks (2009), national identity is expected to be challenged most in the transnational setting of elections on the EU level, where "the others" manifest a visible and tangible target contested by Eurosceptics. EU issue salience should then be decreasingly prominent where national identity is contested to a lower extent, and in settings in which EU-opposition and European matters are less important to attract voters' attention. The first hypothesis is therefore built as:

H1: EU issue salience is expected to be highest in AfD election campaigns for the EP elections, where opposition to the European project is scarce and national identity is significantly challenged, and is expected to decrease with larger distance to the EU on national and regional level.

3.3 Dimensional mobilisation of European integration

In a second step of analysis, RQ2 is answered to not only determine the extent of EU issue salience in AfD election campaigns, but to detect its scope. This work aims to understand *which type* of issue is raised when a party opens up the discourse on the Union. Two mobilisation dimensions are characterised by Mair (2007) regarding this aspect of EU politicisation — a functional dimension on the one, and an Europeanisation dimension on the other hand. The functional dimension is assigned to areas in which the EU holds competences, meaning policy issues. In this case, “the dispute concerns the approach and priorities” (Adam et al. 2009: 82), thus discussing how to functionally assess an issue. By contrast, the Europeanisation dimension addresses questions of the shape and reach of the EU, referring to polity issues. Polity issues target more fundamental questions of European integration, as these matters question the EU as a whole rather than going into detailed policy formulations. Theoretically, it is expected that functional (policy) issues dominate EP elections, while Europeanisation (polity) issues are stressed in domestic elections. The logic behind this argumentation is that in elections on the European level, national parliaments and the EP are “equal partners” as long as the co-decision procedure is applied — therefore the issues raised should be more functional. On the other hand, national politicians and actors are expected to most outspokenly negotiate the sheer shape and reach of the EU, thus the Europeanisation dimension. Correspondingly, polity issues are expected to be more prominently articulated in national parliaments than in the EP (Adam et al. 2009: 82).

However, Mair (2007) observes the opposite of this theoretical assumption when empirically testing this dimensional aspect of politicisation. The author states that generally speaking, political parties tend to focus on the Europeanisation dimension when discussing EU issues in election campaigns. Moreover, Eurosceptic parties in particular seem to place strong emphasis on issues concerning the shape and reach of the EU, as those concern fundamental positions and opinions towards the Union (Adam et al. 2009: 82).

It therefore is anticipated that in AfD election campaigns, the amount of raised polity issues — fundamental questions of EU integration — is overall higher than the discussion of policy aspects of EU integration, especially due to the Eurosceptic and EU-oppositional character of the party. However, based on the theoretical assumption by Mair (2007) regarding the functional dimension of EU politicisation, it is expected that policy issues are gradually decreasing from the EU over the national to the regional level of politics. Hence, functional issues should be discussed more extensively on the EU level where the AfD has increased room for manoeuvre, and less with greater distance to the EU, where the EU's direct influence to the political system seems weaker to politicians and especially voters. Summarised, this implies that:

H2: Due to the Eurosceptic nature of the AfD, the Europeanisation dimension (polity issues) is expected to be stronger mobilised than the functional dimension (policy issues) in election campaigns on all respective levels of politics. However, on the functional dimension it is assumed that policy issue-emphasis is strongest in EP election campaigns, and gradually decreases with greater distance to the EU on the national and the regional level.

3.4 Immigration salience

As already outlined, recent research on Euroscepticism has focused increasingly on the link between EU issue salience and the salience of immigration as a topic raised in election campaigns. This work bases its assumptions of a connection between the two “twin issues” — European integration and immigration — on the identity approach of EU politicisation, and focus in particular on the theoretical concept of a “new globalisation cleavage” by Hanspeter Kriesi (2007).

De Wilde and Leupold (2016) underline the importance of further research on this key intermediary factor in reference to the findings of Hoeglinger (2016), meaning “the extent and nature of issue linkages with European affairs, in particular with immigration” (De Wilde — Leupold 2016: 15). According to the authors, the politicisation of European governance will exist for as long as immigration is debated

within European societies (ibid.: 16). Hooghe and Marks (2009) precisely outlined the link between anti-immigration and EU-opposing attitudes as a perceived threat of “undermining the national community” among right-wing populist TAN parties. This is again based on the idea that exclusive national identities increase the probability of “othering”, and negative, hostile, or even xenophobic attitudes towards foreigners and immigrants (Börzel — Risse 2018: 97).

However, to fully assess this question, it is adopted the hypothesis of a “new globalisation cleavage” (Kriesi 2007), which deepens the identity approach by Hooghe and Marks (2009) to include this issue-linkage. Here, the potential of mobilisation for European integration and immigration is similar, as both issues divide “winners” and “losers” of an increasing economic, political and cultural de-nationalisation (Hoeglinger 2016: 56). The “new globalisation cleavage” sees structural changes in the following: 1) Processes of political competition “(the construction of new supranational centres of authority)”, (Kriesi 2007: 85); 2) Economic competition “(liberalisation and market integration, immigration, delocalisation)”, (ibid: 85); and lastly 3) cultural competition “(immigration and its multicultural consequences)” (ibid: 85). The “winners” of this new structural conflict are likely to be high-skilled workers and employees as well as cosmopolitan citizens across Europe. On the other hand, the so-called “losers” of this process tend to “[...] comprise citizens with a strong attachment to their respective national communities and traditionally protected economic sectors that find themselves increasingly exposed to foreign competition, as well as those who lack the professional and/or cultural skills to function successfully in a globalizing world.” (ibid.: 85). So how do these categories of “winners” and “losers” affect attitudes towards European integration?

While the “winners” are expected to support European integration, including the free movement of people and the opening of the EU’s internal and external borders, “losers” on the other side are likely to oppose European integration, cultural liberalism, and not least, immigration. While “winners” promote European integration, “losers” support the protection of national traditions, privileges, and sovereignty. The result of the “new globalisation cleavage” is an emerging conflict between “[...] ‘integration’ (into

the European or global community) and ‘demarcation’ (of the national community)” (ibid.: 85).

Empirically, this leads to the assumption that this new mobilisation will find articulation especially by parties who address the concerns and fears of the “losers” in this cleavage — in particular by Eurosceptic parties. In line with Kriesi’s (2007) discussion, Euroscepticism is not just a facet of oppositional politics, but part of a new cleavage which is transforming Western Europe and its party systems: support or rejection of European integration poses a new structural conflict which transforms Western Europe and its party systems (ibid.: 85).

When formulating a hypothesis for this study on this issue, the small amount of comparable data makes this a challenging task. As it is known now, the emphasis on immigration is expected to be closely linked to EU issue salience as a “twin issue”. It is generally prominent among parties who successfully mobilise European integration in election campaigns. As Hoeglinger (2016) finds, parties on the right TAN pole emphasise immigration-related issues more strongly than European integration. This is expected to be a “winning formula” for right-wing populists to catch voters’ support (Hoeglinger 2016: 57). Although in this multi-level analysis of Euroscepticism, it has to be considered the salience of the issue of immigration in the election campaigns of a populist, Eurosceptic TAN party on the EU, the national, and the regional level, and how it relates to EU issue salience. The categorisation of the AfD as a right-wing TAN party leads to the assumption that generally speaking, the salience of immigration will be high. It is expected, in line with Hoeglinger’s (2016) findings, that the topic of immigration will be more strongly articulated than that of European integration in election campaigns. When comparing it to the extent of EU issue salience, it should be kept in mind that H1 expects EU issue salience to be strongest on the EU level and decreasing on the national and the regional level. If it is assumed that immigration is a “twin issue” to European integration which mobilises the so-called “losers” of a new structural change, it could be imagined that it functions in a complementary way. This means that when EU issue salience is low, immigration as a topic could strategically “fill the gap”, catching those voters’ attention who feel left behind in a new globalised order

and who identify with a nationalist mindset. Moreover, this work assumes that on the regional level, the effects of globalisation are more likely to create substantial changes in local structures, such as traditions and culture. Therefore, immigration should be most salient in election campaigns on this political level. The third hypothesis for this research will be:

H3: The salience of immigration as a topic raised in AfD election campaigns is overall expected to be higher than EU issue salience. However, it is expected that immigration salience is highest on the regional level, and decreasing on the national and the EU level.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research design

As a starting point for the methodological path of this study, the underlying ontology and epistemology will be reflected upon. The ontology considers: what is the nature of this world and how is it shaped? The epistemology on the other hand is concerned with: how do we produce knowledge in this world? The post-functionalist theory of European integration (Hooghe — Marks 2009) draws, unlike the other grand theories of European integration, hence liberal intergovernmentalism or neofunctionalism, on a social constructivist ontology, as the main focus of this approach lies on social identities which shape the EU. It is anti-foundationalist, built on the belief that this world is socially constructed and shaped by not one external, but multiple (individual) realities. Further, epistemologically, it is aimed to gain an interpretive understanding of a constructed reality that the author of this work is part of (Risse 2019: 130, Marsh — Furlong 2002).

This work intends to investigate patterns of EU-politicisation in election campaigns of the AfD by means of a cross-sectional case study, analysing the three latest elections on the European, the national, and the regional (state) level, namely the

European Parliament elections in 2019, the German federal elections in 2017, and the state elections in Saxony in 2019.

Case studies constitute a suitable research design when the posed research questions aim to uncover societal processes and explanatory issues on the micro-level which might stay hidden when applying for instance cross-tabulations. Hence, “[...] if we want more information about what (groups of) people perceive and decide, in relation to their interaction during a certain period, a case study seems to be the optimal strategy.” (Swanborn 2010: 27). The choice of research design is motivated by the fruitful results that case studies can offer when analysing societal processes and interaction on the micro-level, as this very work aims to do so.

Regarding the time period, the focus of this work lies not on a longitudinal, but a cross-sectional design. Indeed, longitudinal studies provide the opportunity to evaluate broad research questions and long-term changes over time, but have some shortcomings in terms of precision and particularity. However, this work aims to prioritise depth over breadth — a cross-sectional design of research allows this study to give a detailed understanding of processes and phenomena at a specific point of time (Vasilopoulou 2017: 31). Moreover, the AfD has only been represented on all levels of politics — European, national, and regional — since 2017. As it is aimed to carry out a multi-level analysis of the AfD, including these three political arenas, it therefore cannot be chosen another timeframe but the present. Overall, a cross-sectional case study constitutes a well-fitting research design for this work, providing the potential for a detailed in-depth, multi-level analysis.

The methodological approach deriving from these assumptions will be elaborated on in the following section.

4.2 Methodological approach

As already stated, this work prioritises depth over breadth. To assess the research questions, this study draws on a qualitative method, more specifically a qualitative content analysis after Philipp Mayring (2000), to provide the reader with an in-depth

analysis of a single parties' campaign communication and strategy, which should capture and explain the presented theoretical assumptions.

While quantitative research utilises numerical and statistical measures in order to develop generalising patterns and replicable designs, qualitative methods are characterised by *not* using numerical measurements to seek an explanation for a certain phenomenon (King — Keohane 1994: 3-4). This approach tends to work with a smaller amount of cases and is “[...] concerned with a rounded or comprehensive account of some event or unit” (ibid.: 4). Hence, even if qualitative methods typically focus on less cases, this approach can offer a wide range of information and in-depth analysis of a specific event, issue, or institution. Generally speaking, qualitative research analyses “The place or event [...] closely and in full detail” (ibid.: 4).

More specifically, it will be conducted a qualitative content analysis to assess the posed research questions of this study. The aim of qualitative content analyses is to systematically explain the meaning of qualitative data by reconstructing the material under observation into categories of a coding frame. This very framework is the core of the method, including all features that illustrate the description and interpretation of the material. In sum, the qualitative content analysis is characterised by three main aspects: the reduction of data, its systematology, and finally, flexibility (Schreier 2014: 170).

In particular, this work follows the methodological approach by Mayring (2000). The author defines the qualitative content analysis as “[...] an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (Mayring 2000: 2). One unique characteristic of Mayring's approach to qualitative content analyses is the attempt to preserve quantitative elements. This includes for instance frequency distributions, which also feature strongly in this study as it aims to analyse the extent of specific issues in election campaigns, meaning *how often* a predetermined criteria occurs compared to other criteria. As Mayring states: “In case study procedures it is important to show that a certain case recurs in similar form with particular frequency. But within content-analytical category systems, registration of how often a category occurs may give added weight to its meaning and importance as

well” (Mayring 2014: 41) In more detail, Mayring (2000) describes four advantages that should be maintained in his model of a qualitative content analysis:

“Fitting the material into a model of communication: It should be determined on what part of the communication inferences shall be made, to aspects of the communicator (his experiences, opinions feelings), to the situation of text production, to the socio-cultural background, to the text itself or to the effect of the message.

Rules of analysis: The material is to be analyzed step by step, following rules of procedure, devising the material into content analytical units.

Categories in the center of analysis: The aspects of text interpretation, following the research questions, are putted into categories, which were carefully founded and revised within the process of analysis (feedback loops).

Criteria of reliability and validity: The procedure has the pretension to be inter-subjectively comprehensible, to compare the results with other studies in the sense of triangulation and to carry out checks for reliability.”

(Mayring 2000: 2-3)

Besides that, Mayring constructs a step-by-step model to successfully apply and embed the method into academic research such as this work. As a starting point, the analysis should build on a concrete research question which is of practical relevance, which potentially includes hypotheses, and which formulates assumptions and preconceptions, as this study attempted in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The research questions should further be linked to the state of the art, a theoretical approach, and preconceptions for the ensuing interpretation (Mayring 2014: 15). This study first outlined the state of the research on Euroscepticism and then linked the three posed research questions to Hooghe and Marks’ (2009) theory of EU-politicisation and to Kriesi’s (2007) “new globalisation cleavage”. This has already allowed to establish some first implications for the analysis of this study.

Subsequently, the researcher should choose the material for the study (the “corpus”) in line with the research question. This does not only entail written documents and data, but can also include visual or audio material which has been transcribed into

text form. When determining the material to observe, it is crucial to also consider its origin. “An exact description is required of where, from whom, and under what conditions the material originated” (Mayring 2014: 57). Moreover, the formal characteristics of the material should be explained. An analysis of case and data selection for this work will be undertaken in the following subchapter.

Next, the direction of the analysis has to be determined. This should happen in advance to avoid an interpretation “off the cuff”, lacking a concrete line of inquiry (Mayring 2014: 48). The direction of analysis can for instance concern the author of the text or the target group. However, in this work, the direction of analysis will constitute the text itself, as it is aimed to find out to which extent the EU is discussed, whether it concerns the functional or the Europeanisation dimension, and how strongly the topic of immigration is emphasised in AfD election campaigns. Hence, this work attempts to analyse in detail what is communicated in a specific — election-campaign related — text or material.

Next, the specific technique of the qualitative content analysis shall be defined. Three prevalent forms of qualitative content analyses exist in academic research, namely summary, explication and structuring. The summary reduces the text to an extent that only core essentials remain, resulting in an abstract, comprehensive overview of the material. Contrary to that, the explication consults additional text material in order to explain knowledge gaps. This study, however, will focus on the third technique, the structuring. It is applied to “[...] filter out particular aspects of the material, to give a cross-section through the material according to pre-determined ordering criteria, or to assess the material according to certain criteria” (Mayring 2014: 64). As this work focus on particular facets and aspects of the revised material, this technique is the most suitable for an assessment of the posed research questions. The structuring (also: “deductive category assignment”) demands the precise setup of a coding system which allows to structure the content in predetermined categories. After defining the category system in accordance with the theory, the coding guidelines should be explained, including given examples and coding rules. It will be elaborated on the operationalisation of this study, in line with Mayring’s concept, after explaining the case and data selection.

After assessing the material and applying the defined coding scheme, the analysis can be undertaken. Firstly, the distribution of categories should be identified. Secondly, the frequencies of the predetermined categories over all recoding units, but also the frequencies of various groups of units might be analysed (Mayring 2014: 98). Lastly, the results can be interpreted in relation to the main problem and issue. This means that after the findings on the extent of EU issue salience, on the distribution of functional and Europeanisation related content, and on immigration salience are presented, frequencies can be compared. These findings will then be interpreted in accordance with the theoretical assumptions.

To summarise, this work chooses a qualitative content analysis following the approach by Philipp Mayring (2014) in order to “[...] retain the strengths of quantitative content analysis and against this background to develop techniques of systematic, qualitatively oriented text analysis” (ibid.: 39), as we consider this to be a suitable methodological approach to answer the three research question of this study. The following subchapter will, in accordance with Mayring’s framework, elaborate on the case and data selection, ergo the determined material of this study.

4.3 Data and case selection

This work will analyse data from election campaigns of the German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland. As already outlined, the case selection focuses on the most recent events in this context, namely the European Parliament elections in 2019, the German federal elections in 2017 and the state elections in Saxony in 2019. For the elections on the regional level, the researcher chose the Saxonian elections due to their timeliness and the well-established party base of the AfD in this federal state. The data on each election campaign should comprise manifestos published by the AfD prior to the elections, as well as the tweets of the official Twitter account of the AfD as one direct campaigning tool for the two months leading up to the elections. The following subchapter will elaborate on the author’s motivation for the selection of cases and data.

4.3.1 The Alternative für Deutschland

While other European countries in the Eurozone, for instance Greece or Spain, suffered immensely through the European sovereign debt crisis, Germany successfully and quickly recovered from the events which disrupted numerous other European economies. To some spectators, Germany has been the clear winner of the sovereign debt crisis. Contrary to this observation, it seems that the support for European integration in the EU's most populous country changed from "permissive consensus" to "constraining dissensus". The Eurosceptic AfD has succeeded in recent years to win a substantial amount of votes in various sets of elections. For the first time, Eurosceptics find large public support in Germany (Grimm 2015: 264-265). At the current moment, the AfD is represented on all political levels, including every federal state in the Republic. In 2017, the party entered the German Bundestag with a vote share of 12,6 percent. This constitutes a gain of 7.9% compared to the results of the general elections in 2013, the year of the AfD's foundation. The party performed particularly well in the *Länder* of the former GDR. While in the 2014 EP elections, the party obtained a result of 7.1%, it successfully increased its share up to 11% in the latest EP elections from 2019 (Lees 2018: 295-296). Hence, it can be argued that the current moment represents the party's peak of popularity and success since its' foundation.

Unsurprisingly, the AfD's great success in various elections has been a disruptive shock to the political landscape and party system in Germany and the EU — particularly due to the right-wing populist orientation of the party. The two "catch all" parties in Germany, the conservative CDU/CSU as well as the Social Democrats (SPD) had to clear seats for a party whose success relies on an increasingly radicalised party programme. Tackling Germany's traditional pro-Europeanism, the AfD criticises not only the centrist leadership of current chancellor Angela Merkel, but also the country's performance within the EU, "[...] specifically the nature and composition of the Eurozone and Germany's role as its political anchor and paymaster" (Lees 2018: 299). This EU-opposition is also reflected in the AfD's first party programme from 2013 which already called for the abolition of the Euro. Over time and after some leadership

changes, the party soon started to focus on “UKIP-like” linkages of the European issue with immigration and strong xenophobic attitudes. It becomes obvious that since its foundation, the party mobilises voters with clear Eurosceptic statements (ibid.: 301).

When it is attempted to classify the AfD and its Euroscepticism, different distinctions can be applied, as presented in the literature review of this study. When employing Taggart and Szczerbiak’s (2002) categorisation, the AfD falls under “soft” Eurosceptic parties, as its focus lies not on an outright rejection of EU membership, but rather a critique of the EU’s institutional setup, a single currency, and an alleged democratic deficit. Therefore, also according to the classification by Kopecky and Mudde (2002), the AfD are not “Eurorejects” but rather “Eurosceptics” (Grimm 2015: 272). Although Lees (2018) states that profound criticism of the EU was the initial driver for the AfD’s mobilisation, the so-called “immigration crisis” in 2015 led the pathway for a deepened radicalisation of the party. This complicates the analytical distinction between Euroscepticism and populism in the case of the AfD. However, even if Lees (2018) finds that this impedes the discussion on party-based Euroscepticism, he notes that the “[...] AfD’s Euroscepticism is now nested within an ideological profile that increasingly conforms to the template of an orthodox European right-wing populist party” (Lees 2018: 295) and refers to the “[...] AfD’s potential for disruption at the EU level as the main opposition party in the largest and most powerful EU member state” (ibid.: 307).

It is therefore suggested that the AfD constitutes an interesting and relevant object of investigation for this work.

4.3.2 Party manifestos and social media accounts

The focus of this work lies on elections and campaign material as the contest for voters’ support is assumed to cause the strongest mobilisation efforts of political parties. As it analyses in particular the salience of specific issues, elections are the most relevant events, as “[...] the key to winning an election is for a party to succeed in putting its preferred issues on top of the political agenda” (Hoeglinger 2016: 49). Hence, election

campaigns should deliver fruitful material and data for this study due to an increased visibility of issue.

Many scholars have investigated questions surrounding the politicisation of European integration and Euroscepticism by means of media and news paper analyses. However, as this work does not aim to find out how the AfD is communicated about, but rather how the party itself mobilises issues, it is chosen a more direct channel of communication to investigate. More precisely, this qualitative content analysis will be applied to the AfD's party programmes for each of the three elections, as well as to all tweets of the AfD's official Twitter account in the two months prior to the elections on the EU, the national, and the state level in Saxony. The time period is justified as the two months before election day are defined as an election campaign (Hoeglinger 2016: 51).

The two different sources of material are chosen for specific reasons. Party manifestos on the one hand constitute a classic source to identify party positions, although this channel of communication only records what a party decides to openly state (Adam et al. 2009: 86). Therefore, it is reasonable to complement this material with data from another direct communication instrument, namely the AfD's social media communication. For a long time, campaign posters and televised campaign spots were considered the main tools of election campaigning. However, the current "fourth era of communication" and the rise of big data technology have created new campaigning instruments. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram have gained increased importance in parties' communication to the public. These channels do not replace, but complement "old" campaign instruments (as for instance party manifestos). They create a "hybrid communication relationship" (Esser 2019: 1127). This very connection should thus be reflected in the selection of material. Moreover, from a methodological perspective, the two different sources and data sets, ergo data triangulation, allow us to increase the validity and reliability of this study (Mayring 2000: 3).

This study will therefore analyse the AfD's party manifestos,⁵ as well as all tweets posted two months prior to each election day.⁶ As outlined by Mayring, it is crucial to reflect upon the origin of the selected material. Regarding the party manifestos, all programmes are published by the AfD itself prior to the respective elections. Therefore, it can be viewed as the self-ascribed position and political agenda of the party, meaning the way the AfD presents itself and how it wants to be perceived in order to mobilise voters. In terms of formal characteristics, all of the three manifestos are published as a PDF-document on the official webpage of the party, making the data easily accessible for all citizens. All manifestos are of similar length and comprise an average of 80 pages.

When analysing the social media content, the Twitter account of the AfD for the two months prior to each election is similarly examined. The Twitter account @AfD is the official channel of the party, meaning that posted tweets cannot be viewed as opinions or positions of an individual party member, but of the AfD itself. The account has 159.896 followers and has existed since 2012. Both the text-based tweets and the manifestos will be analysed with the software MAXQDA. Retweets, answers, and comments will not be included, as only direct tweets by the party should attract attention.

To conclude, the material for this study comprises one classic approach to investigate party positions, as well as one channel of communication that corresponds to the new "fourth era of communication". Hence, party manifestos and all tweets posted in the two months prior to each election day will be analysed. The aim is to underline the "hybrid communication relationship" between these two campaign instruments. The following subchapter will explain how it is specifically operated to analyse the presented content.

⁵ The party manifesto of the AfD for the election of the European Parliament 2019, [88 pages]; The party manifesto of the AfD for the election of the German Bundestag 2017, [76 pages]; and the party manifesto of the AfD for the state election in Saxony 2019, [76 pages].

⁶ This study only focuses on text-based tweets. Video or image based content will not be part of the analysis.

4.4 Operationalisation

This study operates according to Mayring's (2000, 2014) approach for a qualitative content analysis based on a pre-defined coding framework. The complete coding framework can be found in Appendix 1 for the reader's consideration. The coding framework is based on the posed research questions to systematically filter the criteria of observation and guarantee a structured analysis based on the presented theoretical framework. To apply this coding scheme to the selected material, the software MAXQDA, which is specifically designed to conduct qualitative research, is used. The same coding scheme is applied to the party manifestos and the Twitter account, however the counting will take place differently. While for the social media material each tweet is counted as one unit, for the party manifestos, the paragraphs will be contrasted with each other.

To assess RQ1,⁷ content which is EU-related has to be detected and separated from other-themed units in order to measure EU issue salience. To find out to which extent issues surrounding the EU are articulated in each election campaign and on the different communication channels, each unit should be analysed and coded as whether "Discussing the EU" or "Not discussing the EU".⁸ In a second step, it then can be clarified to which extent the units are emphasising the EU compared to units discussing other topics in the campaigns. After applying this scheme to the campaign material on all three levels, the findings can be compared to each other, explaining how strong EU issue salience is in the different election campaigns. Additionally, it can also be determined how the extent of EU issue salience varies between the two campaign instruments, i.e. the manifestos and the Twitter accounts.

The second research question aims to find out which type of EU issue is articulated in AfD election campaigns.⁹ To measure the mobilisation dimension, it has to

⁷ *To which extent is the European Union discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?*

⁸ For the manifestos, one paragraph counts as one unit, while for the social media content one tweet is counted as one unit.

⁹ *What type of EU issue is addressed in elections campaigns of the AfD on the European, national, and regional level?*

be determined if the content refers to policy issues or to polity issues when the EU is discussed. Hence, the coding scheme for this research question will only be applied to units that have before been categorised as “Discussing the EU”. This means that the coding rules for RQ1 and RQ2 hierarchically build on each other. The type of EU issues is divided in two categories according to the theory, namely the functional (policy) dimension and the Europeanisation (polity) dimension. Units that were coded as “Functional dimension” will comprise material that refers to the shape of classical policy fields, as for instance environment or the internal market. On the other hand, the category “Europeanisation dimension” should contain all content dealing with more fundamental question of European politics, meaning institutional and enlargement matters. This category also includes units which discuss the constitutional re-shifting of competences from the supranational to the intergovernmental sphere, as this study believes that these can be considered as fundamental changes of the EU’s setup and organisation rather than as the shaping of policy fields and EU competences.¹⁰ Sequences that refer neither to “Functional dimension” nor to “Europeanisation dimension” should be coded as “Other”. Again, in a second step the findings will then be compared to each other to determine which type of EU issue is discussed on the EU, national, and regional level, and the different campaigning tools.

Lastly, RQ3 requires the measurement of immigration salience.¹¹ To fulfil this task, it will be proceeded similarly as when measuring EU issue salience. The coding will again be applied to all units, and not only to a pre-selected set as for the mobilisation dimension. Each unit will be analysed and coded as whether “Discussing immigration” or “Not discussing immigration”, to be subsequently compared and contrasted with each other. The category of “Discussing immigration” should contain all units referring to questions of asylum, immigration and border security, as well as effects of immigration such as multiculturalism. Content that does not mention these topics will be coded as “Not discussing immigration”.

¹⁰ For detailed examples see coding scheme in Appendix 1

¹¹ *RQ3: To which extent is immigration discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?*

According to the research questions and hypotheses, this study will use the outlined coding system to provide a defined framework and yield clear and meaningful findings. For the full coding scheme including coding rules and text examples, the reader may refer to Appendix 1. Moreover, Appendix 2 provides an overview of the numeral data in form of comprehensive tables. The resulting findings will be presented and analysed, based on the theoretical assumptions and the analytical framework, in the following chapter.

5 Findings and analysis

After applying the coding scheme to the selected data as instructed in the step-by-step guide by Mayring (2010, 2014), this work finds support for H1 as well as mixed support for H3. As expected in the first hypothesis, EU issue salience is found strongest on the EU level and decreasing in AfD campaigns for national as well as for regional elections. Regarding H3, it is confirmed that the issue of immigration is most salient in campaigns on the regional level, and gradually decreasing on the national and the European political echelons. Immigration is generally more strongly pronounced than European integration, yet the hypothesis does not hold on the European level. Finally, this work does not find support for the mobilisation dimension hypothesis. Indeed, the empirics suggest the opposite findings to those assumed in H2: overall, when discussing the EU, campaigns of the AfD more often refer to policy than to polity issues, meaning to the functional dimension rather than to the Europeanisation dimension. Moreover, the focus on the functional dimension is strongest on the regional level, and gradually decreasing in campaigns for the elections of the German Bundestag and the EP elections. This chapter will present the gained data and discuss the findings with regard to the hypotheses and the underlying theoretical framework.

5.1 EU issue salience

To assess RQ1: “To which extent is the European Union discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national and regional level?”, the party manifestos as well as all tweets posted in the two months prior to the election day on the European, the national, and the regional level were coded as whether “Discussing the EU” or “Not discussing the EU”. Firstly, it was found that for the elections of the European Parliament in 2019, EU issue salience is fairly strong: While only 155 of 505 units (30.69%) address issues and questions surrounding topics other than the European Union and European integration, 350 units (69.31%) of the observed material discuss EU issues.¹²

However, the proportion of “Discussing the EU” and “Not discussing the EU” drastically changes when evaluating the two other sets of elections. On the national level, ergo the elections of the German Bundestag in 2017, only 77 out of 843 units (9.23%) are found as surrounding questions related to the EU. A substantial amount of 757 units (90.77%) concerns other issues.¹³ This result indicates very low EU issue salience of AfD election campaigns on the national level. The findings for the elections in Saxony in 2019 delivered similar results, with a further, slight, decrease of EU issue salience: on the regional level, 47 out of 533 units (8.82%) are discussing European issues while 486 units (91.18%) are not.¹⁴ Figure 1 visualises the findings of EU issue salience, comprising party manifestos and tweets, for each election under observation.

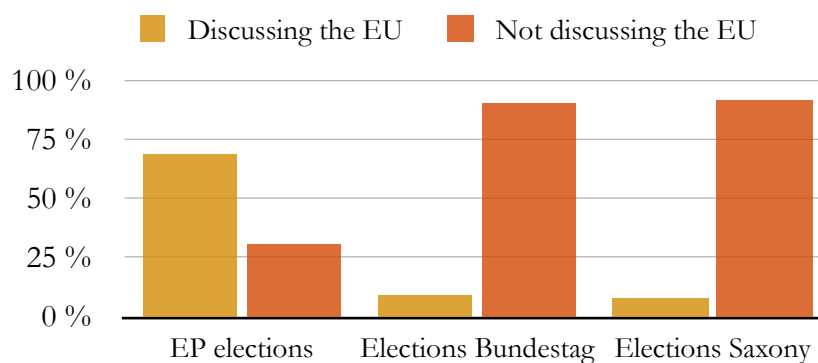


Figure 1 EU issue salience — *manifestos and tweets* (percentage)

¹² see also table 2.1 in Appendix 2

¹³ see also table 2.4 in Appendix 2

¹⁴ see also table 2.7 in Appendix 2

Hence, the findings suggest that EU issue salience is relatively strong on the EU level, but decreasing on the national and further decreasing on the regional level of politics where EU issue salience is relatively weak. This work thus finds proof for its first hypothesis: “*H1: EU issue salience is expected to be most significant in AfD election campaigns for the European Parliament elections, where opposition to the European project is scarce and national identity is significantly challenged, and decreasing with larger distance to the EU on national and regional level*”. While European integration seems to be highly politicised in AfD campaigns for the EP elections, it is only marginally mobilised as an issue on the national level, and even slightly less on the regional level.

Looking at the different sets of material in terms of data triangulation offers additional insight regarding EU issue salience within the different campaign instruments. In the election campaign for the 2019 EP elections, the party manifesto and the posted tweets display almost identical figures for the salience of EU issues. The AfDs’ party manifesto for the EP elections discusses the EU in 185 out of 266 paragraphs, and articulates other issues in the remaining 81 paragraphs. In percentage terms, this results in a distribution of 69.55% (“Discussing the EU”) to 30.45% (“Not discussing the EU”). Similarly, the Twitter account of the party posted 165 out of 239 units which are discussing the EU, while 74 tweets concern other issues. This corresponds to a relation of 69.04 to 30.96 percent.¹⁵ Thus, on the EU level, EU issue salience is similarly strongly pronounced in the party manifesto and the social media account.

However, different results are obtained when comparing EU issue salience in the various campaign tools for the election of the German Bundestag in 2017. When evaluating the party manifesto, it was found that 337 out of 399 paragraphs (84.46%) are articulating matters other than the EU, while 62 paragraphs (15.54%) are discussing the Union. Yet, among the posted tweets of the AfD, 420 out of 435 posts (96.55%) are coded as “Not discussing the EU”, and only 15 (3.45%) as “Discussing the EU”.¹⁶ This suggests that EU issue salience in AfD campaigns on the national level is almost five

¹⁵ see also table 2.2 and 2.3 in Appendix 2

¹⁶ see also table 2.5 and 2.6 in Appendix 2

times higher in the party programmes than on the Twitter account, where EU issue salience is relatively weak.

On the regional level, EU issue salience is again more similar across the two campaign instruments. While in the manifesto for the elections in Saxony, 27 out of 368 paragraphs (7.34%) are discussing the EU, 341 units (92.66%) are not. The tweets show a distribution of 145 out of 165 (87.88%) articulating EU issues, and 20 (12.12%) concerning other topics.¹⁷ Thus, EU issue salience is slightly stronger on the social media account than in the AfD's manifesto on the regional level.¹⁸

Figure 2 shows the distribution of “Discussing the EU” and “Not discussing the EU” among the three investigated party manifestos, while Figure 3 visualises the respective findings for the posted tweets.

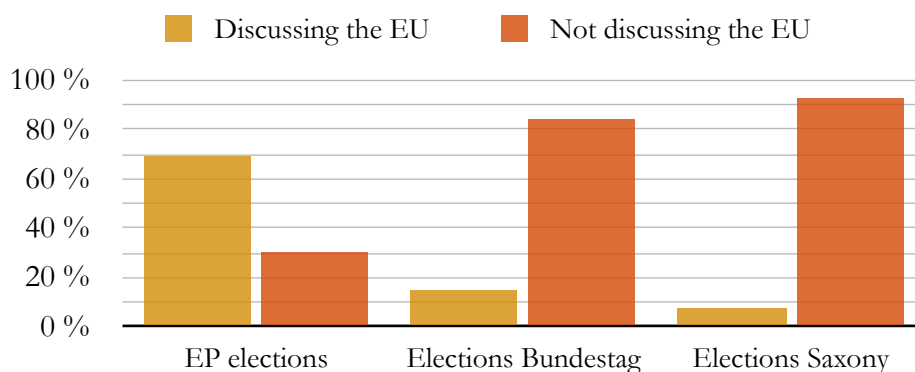


Figure 2 EU issue salience — *manifestos* (percentage)

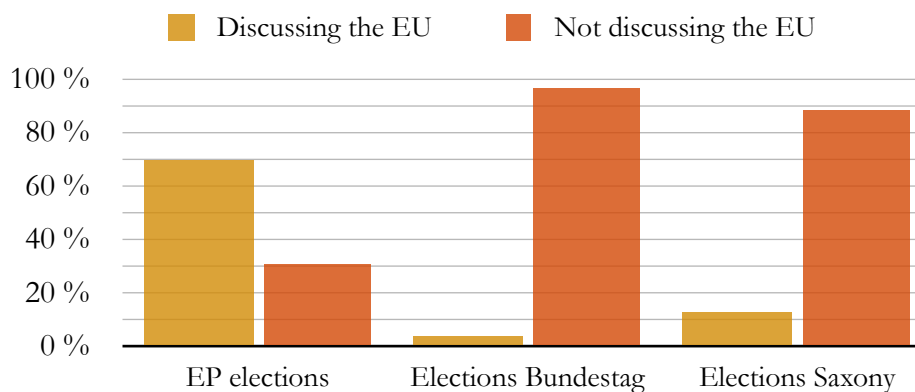


Figure 3 EU issue salience — *tweets* (percentage)

¹⁷ see also table 2.8 and 2.9 in Appendix 2

¹⁸ see also table 2.1 in Appendix 2

Having presented the numerical observations of the analysis, these findings will now be discussed. Overall, it can be stated again that this study finds support for the first hypothesis. H1 supposed that EU issue salience is pronounced strongest on the European level of politics, and decreasing in AfD election campaigns for the German Bundestag and the state elections in Saxony. Indeed, while the EU is frequently discussed in material for to the EP election campaigns, EU issue salience drastically decreases on the national and the regional level. European integration seems to be much more strongly politicised in the AfD's election campaign on the EU level than in domestic politics. The arguments that shaped H1 have been two-fold: on the one hand, it has been assumed that due to the Eurosceptic nature of the AfD, European integration will be extensively politicised in EP election campaigns, because here critique and opposition to the EU are expected to perform a crucial role in the mobilisation of voters. On the other hand, national identity and sovereignty are increasingly contested by "others" in this transnational setting, providing yet another reason why EU issue salience should be highest. This builds on the theoretical assumption by Hooghe and Marks (2009) who describe the EU as "part of a multi-level governance which is driven by identity politics as well as by functional and distributional pressures" (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 23).

Indeed, in both campaign tools under observation, EU-related issues attract a substantial amount of attention on the European level. The AfD's manifesto for the EP elections resembles a political guideline to the party's standpoint on European politics. Each chapter of the programme covers the AfD's position on various policy fields on the European level. This begins with an explanation of the AfD's fundamental opinion towards the European project in the first chapter of the programme under the title "*A Europe of the nations*".¹⁹ The following eleven chapters elaborate on the party's standpoint in different EU-related policy areas, such as European foreign and security policy, finance and economy, or social policy (AfD 2019a: 2-5). Also, the amount of tweets discussing the EU in the two months prior to election day shows that the issue is

¹⁹ All text examples in the analysis are translated into English by the author of this work.

successfully mobilised, and hence politicised, in the AfD's direct communication channel to the general public.

However, when attempting to attract voters' support for elections on the national and the regional level, Europe remains a marginally discussed topic by the "Eurosceptic" AfD. For both the general elections in Germany as well as the federal state elections in Saxony, EU issue salience is almost eight times lower than on the European level. Despite the assumption that the "sleeping giant has finally awoken" (e.g. De Vries 2007, Kriesi 2007), on the national and the regional level, European integration seems to remain in the shadow of other pressing issues. In the manifestos for the German general elections in 2017 as well as for the state elections in Saxony in 2019, opinions on the EU and European politics are not placed into the spotlight, but are interwoven in standpoints on national politics. For instance, in the AfD's programme on the national level, only one chapter directly discusses the EU and presents the party's position towards the Euro and European monetary policy (AfD 2017) — a policy field which is characterised as the main anti-EU stance of the party (Grimm 2015: 266). Additionally, EU positions mainly feature in chapters about national policy fields and are often only outlined briefly.

When placing the findings in line with the scholarly debate on Euroscepticism and the politicisation of European integration, it seems reasonable to suggest that EP elections cannot be described as sole "second-order contests" of national politics, but that right-wing populist TAN parties successfully mobilised the EU issue on grounds of disputes over national identity and sovereignty (Adam — Maier 2011: 431-432). However, in the case of the AfD, this mobilisation seems to mainly focus on one situational moment, namely the EP elections, where a "Europeanisation" of the parties' manifesto (Adam — Meier 2011: 441) and its social media presence is observed. Yet surprisingly, the AfD, borne out of the critique on European politics and especially a single currency after the Euro-crisis, remains relatively silent about the Union offside the European stage. Hence, greater distance to the EU seems to crucially affect the politicisation efforts of the party.

5.2 Mobilisation dimension

The aim of the second research question was to detect the dimensional scope of discussed EU issues, meaning: “RQ2: *What type of EU issue is addressed in elections campaigns of the AfD on the European, national, and regional level?*”. After assessing this task by examining all units coded as “Discussing the EU”, this work can present the following findings: on the European level, an overall share of 130 out of 350 units (37.14%) refers to issues which discuss a functional dimension of politics, i.e. policy issues. On the other hand, 93 units (26.57%) could be assigned to the Europeanisation dimension, ergo the debate on more fundamental polity issues.²⁰ The AfD campaigns for the election of the German Bundestag in 2017 show an increase in discussed policy issues when compared to the EP elections. Here, 33 out of 77 units (42.86%) concerning the EU are located on the functional dimension, while again, the Europeanisation dimension finds less attention with only 29 units (37.66%).²¹ The extent of discussed policy issues within the three sets of elections under observation is highest on the regional level: 23 out of 47 units (48.94%) refer to the functional dimension, discussing the shape of policy areas in which the EU yet hold competences. Apart from this, a share of 13 units (27.66%) opens up the debate on fundamental questions of European integration in AfD campaigns for the state elections in Saxony.²² Figure 4 depicts these very findings:

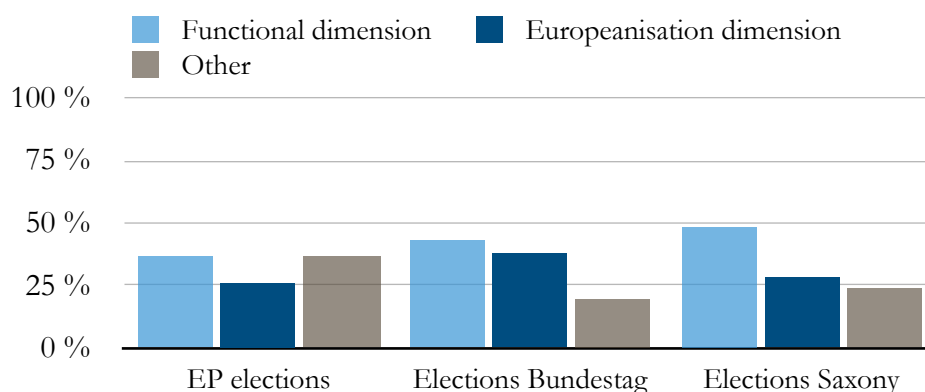


Figure 4 Mobilisation dimension — *manifestos and tweets* (percentage)

²⁰ 127 units (36,29%) of the content have been coded as “other”. For a detailed explanation see the coding scheme in Appendix 1.

²¹ see also table 2.4 in Appendix 2

²² see also table 2.7 in Appendix 2

Reflecting on the foregoing, it is noted that this study cannot find support for the second hypothesis *“H2: Due to the eurosceptic nature of the AfD, the Europeanisation dimension (polity issues) is expected to be stronger emphasised than the functional dimension (policy issues) in AfD election campaigns on all respective levels of politics. However, when focusing on the functional dimension, it is assumed despite an overall lower articulation, that policy issue-emphasis is strongest in EP election campaigns, and gradually decreasing with greater distance to the EU on the national and regional level.”* Indeed, the opposite of this assumption can be empirically observed in this case study. Overall, the functional dimension is more strongly articulated on all three levels of politics in the AfDs’ election campaigns. Generally speaking, fundamental questions on European integration, hence questions referring to the Europeanisation dimension, are less pronounced than policy issues. Moreover, against all expectations, the emphasis of policy issues is not decreasing, but rather rising with greater distance to the EU: units discussing the EU and referring to the functional dimension are lowest at the European level and increase at the national and again the regional level of politics.

When looking at the division between party manifesto and tweets, interesting findings can be presented regarding the type of EU issues. On the EU level, the extent of discussed policy issues is higher in the party programme than on the social media account of the AfD. While in the manifesto, 52% of EU-related content refers to the functional dimension, only 19.39% of the tweets discuss these so-called policy issues. Also, “polity issues” form a total share of 38.92% in the manifesto and are thus more strongly articulated than on Twitter, where only 12.73% of the tweets discuss fundamental questions of European integration. However, the tweets in the two months prior to the European elections show a substantial amount of material that concerns “other” issues: 122 tweets, equal to 67.88% of the content, neither refer to policy nor to polity issues.²³

On the national level, this analysis obtains the only findings which indicate a stronger emphasis of the Europeanisation over the functional dimension. While in the manifesto for the elections of the German Bundestag, 43.55% of the paragraphs refer

²³ see also table 2.2 and 2.3 in Appendix 2

to policy issues and 35.48% to polity issues, 46.67% of the posted tweets on the AfD's account mention polity-related questions, ergo the Europeanisation dimension. Hence, the social media account of the party shows a lower amount of policy issues (40%) on the national level.²⁴ In regard to the state elections in Saxony in 2019, the manifesto shows a distribution of 55.65% of the paragraphs coded as “functional dimension” and 25.93% referring to the Europeanisation dimension. Compared to that, less tweets (40%) that concern the Union mention policy issues. Again, polity issues (30%) are mentioned to an even lesser extent.²⁵ Figures 5 and 6 present the findings regarding the mobilisation dimension for each of the two sources of data.

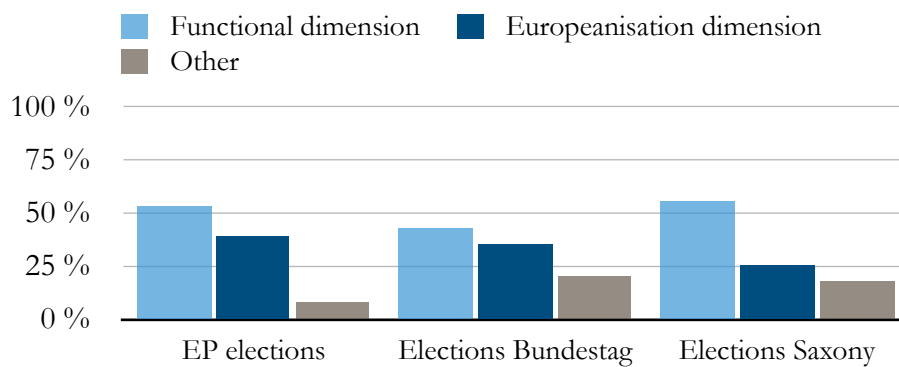


Figure 5 Mobilisation dimension — *manifestos* (percentage)

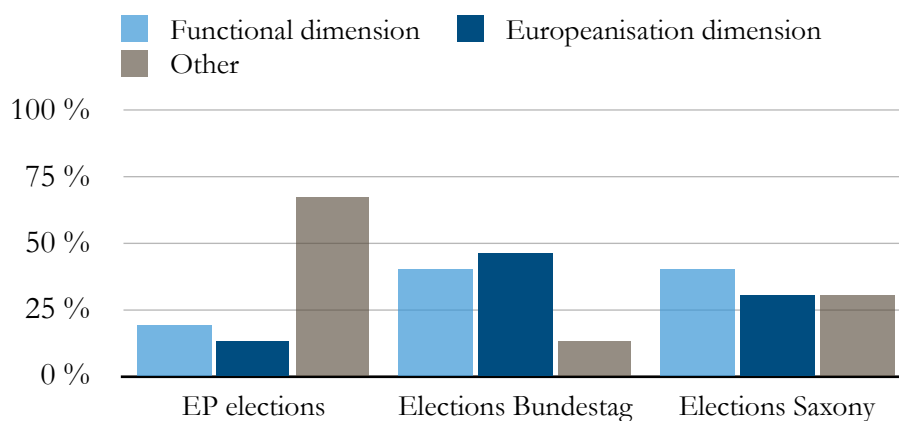


Figure 6 Mobilisation dimension — *tweets* (percentage)

²⁴ see also table 2.5 and 2.6 in Appendix 2

²⁵ see also table 2.8 and 2.9 in Appendix 2

As for EU issue salience, the numerical results shall now be complemented by a thorough discussion. It should be remembered that in a first step of analysis, RQ1 and correspondingly H1 inquired after the degree of debate on the European Union, ergo EU issue salience. However, it should be noted that the pure extent of discussion on European integration, thus EU issue salience, cannot provide a direct indication for Euroscepticism. Even if the topic seems to be less politicised in domestic politics, the AfD remains sceptical towards European integration. To detect the *type* of critique towards the EU, it has been differentiated between issues located on the Europeanisation (polity issue) and a functional (policy issue) dimension. H2 expected a majority of fundamental questions on European integration. Overall, policy issues attract more attention in campaign material of the AfD on all political levels, which means that this work cannot find support for the second hypothesis. Also, against all expectations, it did not find that polity issues are increasingly discussed with greater distance to the EU— indeed, the opposite was true in this study.

When reconsidering the theoretical groundwork for H2, different explanations for this deviation should be taken into account. Even if Mair (2007) found in his empirical work that in EP elections, the main focus lies on the shape and reach of the EU, ergo polity issues, his original theory suspects — in line with the findings of this very work — policy issues to be the main topic on the European level (Mair 2007). This would be reasoned for with the equal stance that national parliaments and their European equivalent obtain through the co-decision procedure, opening up the debate on functional issues. Accordingly, the domestic arena should be intensively concerned with the shape and reach of the EU, as national politicians and actors still mainly dominate the decision-making process on questions of Europeanisation (Adam et al. 2009: 82). Again, this is in line with the findings, since the national level shows the highest amount of discussed polity issues compared to the other sets of elections, even exceeding the functional dimension on the AfDs' Twitter account. However, this approach fails to provide a convincing explanation for the findings on the regional level, where fundamental critique on the EU was expected to be scarce.

Giving the empirics a closer look, it is important to clarify a crucial aspect in this discussion: it was assumed the AfD's election campaigns to strongly emphasise the Europeanisation dimension, as this is expected to be an indicator of Euroscepticism and strong critique on the European project. Yet, even if overall the extent of functional issues seem to attract increasing attention on election campaigns on all levels, it would be a fallacy to conclude that the AfD is not sceptical towards European integration. The programme of the party comprises for instance the reintroduction of the German Mark, the abolition of the European Parliament, and the reassignment of various policy fields from the supranational to the national level (AfD 2017, AfD 2019a, AfD 2019b). As a matter of fact, in the manifesto for the election of the German Bundestag 2017, the AfD suggests that the "The German People should follow the British example and decide in a referendum on the remaining of Germany in the Eurozone, and if necessary, the EU!"²⁶ (AfD 2017). This study observes that issues referring to the Europeanisation dimension include deeply rooted questions of subsidiarity, actually touching upon the possibility of a withdrawal from the European Union.

However, the majority of paragraphs in the AfD's manifestos and posted tweets consider functional aspects of policy-shaping, as for instance when the party states: "Bologna failed - Reintroduce Diploma and Magister again"²⁷ (AfD 2019b: 35), or "The AfD consequently rejects an EU-wide liberalisation and commercialisation of the water market" (AfD 2017: 72). Indeed, the party is, across all levels of politics, articulating standpoints with a reorganisational perspective on European politics and policies, rather than the pure denial of the institution's legitimacy or existence is emphasised. Considering the foregoing, it can be believed that cautious evaluation should be applied to the claim that the AfD is "Pro-European but anti-Euro" (Grimm 2015: 265). The analysis of the data suggests that fundamental questions of European integration on the Europeanisation dimension, as discussed by the AfD, go beyond opposition towards

²⁶ It should be noted that the German text uses the ideologically charged term „Das Deutsche Volk“. This phrase assumes the existence of a sovereign German nation state with an exclusive identity and is strongly associated with the rhetoric of the National Socialist period from 1933-1945.

²⁷ Diploma and Magister were the pre-Bologna degrees of higher education in Germany.

European monetary policy and a common European currency. The findings on the mobilisation dimension could be further refined by a more differentiated research design, to deliver more detailed and insightful results on the different positions and levels of opposition towards the EU on all three levels. For instance, the coding scheme could include a variable to detect the tonality of the AfD's discourse on the Union. This could clarify the extent of general scepticism towards the EU, which was expected to be higher on the regional level but could find no evidence for. Moreover, since the findings show that policy issues find increased attention with greater distance to the EU, a division of these issues into distinct political areas would have been an insightful addition to the analysis. This would allow a further investigation of the political emphasis in AfD campaigns and shed light on potential variations between the respective levels.

5.3 Immigration salience

The third research question of the study has been formulated as: *“RQ3: To which extent is immigration discussed in AfD election campaigns on the European, national, and regional level?”* Similar to the measurement of EU issue salience, all content (meaning manifestos *and* tweets) with regard to immigration salience has been coded as whether “Discussing immigration” or “Not discussing immigration”. Overall, the assessment of immigration salience delivered very similar results for all three levels of politics under observation. The evaluation of campaigning material relating to the European Parliament elections in 2019 show that 89 out of 505 units (17.62%) discuss immigration while 416 units (82.38%) open up the debate on other issues or policy fields.²⁸ However, immigration salience only slightly increases on the national level. For the elections of the German Bundestag in 2017, 162 out of 834 units (19.42%) were coded as “Discussing immigration” and correspondingly, 672 units (80.58%) as “Not discussing immigration”.²⁹ On the regional level, the data of the AfD's election campaign in

²⁸ see also table 2.1 in Appendix 2

²⁹ see also table 2.4 in Appendix 2

Saxony in 2019 indicates again a — minimal — increase. Here, 105 out of 533 units (19.70%) articulate immigration-related topics, while 428 units (80.30%) discuss other policy areas.³⁰ Figure 7 visualises the overall findings referring to the issue salience of immigration, capturing the gained data of both campaign instruments for each election under observation.

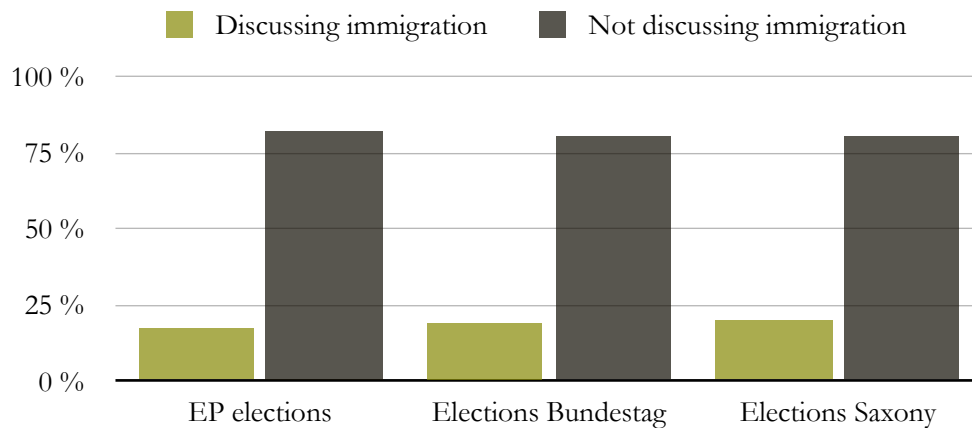


Figure 7 Immigration salience — *manifestos and tweets* (percentage)

The findings suggest partial support for the immigration salience hypothesis “*H3: The salience of immigration as a topic raised in election campaigns of the AfD is overall expected to be higher than EU issue salience. However, it is assumed that immigration-salience is highest on the regional level, and decreasing on the national and EU level.*” Indeed, on the national as well as the regional level, the salience of immigration is more strongly pronounced than EU issue salience.³¹ Analysing the EP elections offers contrasting results: here, the salience of European integration (69.31%) is substantially higher than immigration salience (17.62%). Yet, the data shows that immigration salience is highest on the regional level (19.70%) and decreasing with the national (19.42%) and the EU level (17.62%). Only slight decreases can be noted, as the extent of immigration salience in the three different election campaigns can be described as overall similar and therefore almost constant. On

³⁰ see also table 2.7 in Appendix 2

³¹ For the elections of the German Bundestag 2017, 9,23% of the content was coded as “Discussing the EU”, and 19,42% as “Discussing immigration”. On the regional level, the results show a distribution of 8,82% of units “Discussing the EU”, and 19,70% “Discussing immigration”.

average, almost a fifth of the campaign material on the EU, the national, and the regional level discusses immigration-related matters.

When comparing the extent of immigration salience between the different campaigning tools of the AfD on the respective levels, the analysis delivered some additional, interesting insight: on the European as well as the national level, immigration salience is generally more strongly pronounced in the party manifestos than on the Twitter account of the AfD. For the EP elections in 2019, it has been found that in the party programme, 53 paragraphs (19.92%) discussed immigration, while only 36 tweets (15.06%) mention the topic.³² Similar numbers are noted on the national level of politics. Here, the manifesto for the elections of the Bundestag refers to immigration in 95 paragraphs (23.81%). However, the extent of immigration salience decreases when investigating the findings for the social media presence, where 67 tweets (15.40%) are emphasising immigration-related matters.³³ Only the regional level shows higher immigration salience for the Twitter account than for the manifesto of the state elections in Saxony. However, the difference is minimal: while the AfD dedicates 72 paragraphs (19.57%) of its manifesto to the policy area of immigration, 33 tweets (20%) are concerned with it.³⁴ While Figure 8 focuses on the extent of immigration salience across the different party manifestos of the AfD, Figure 9 visualises the findings in regard to the Twitter account of the party.

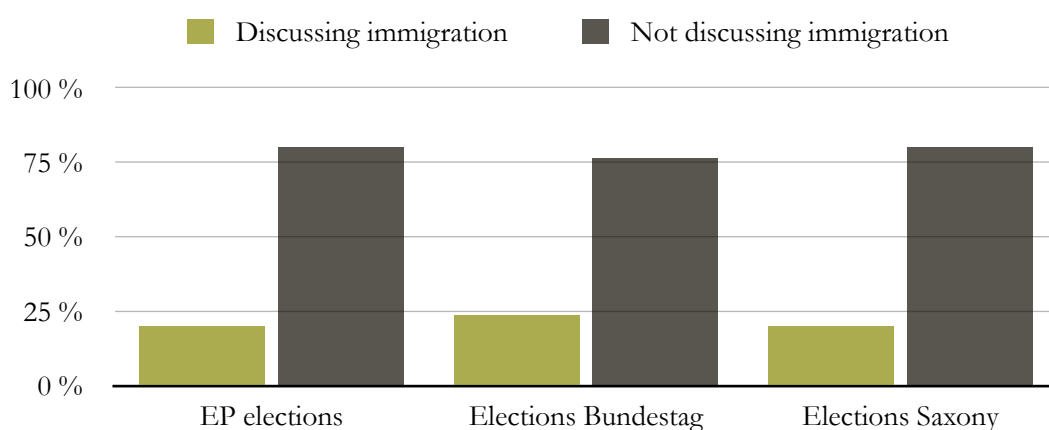


Figure 8 Immigration salience — *manifestos* (percentage)

³² see also table 2.2 and 2.3 in Appendix 2

³³ see also table 2.5 and 2.6 in Appendix 2

³⁴ see also table 2.8 and 2.9 in Appendix 2

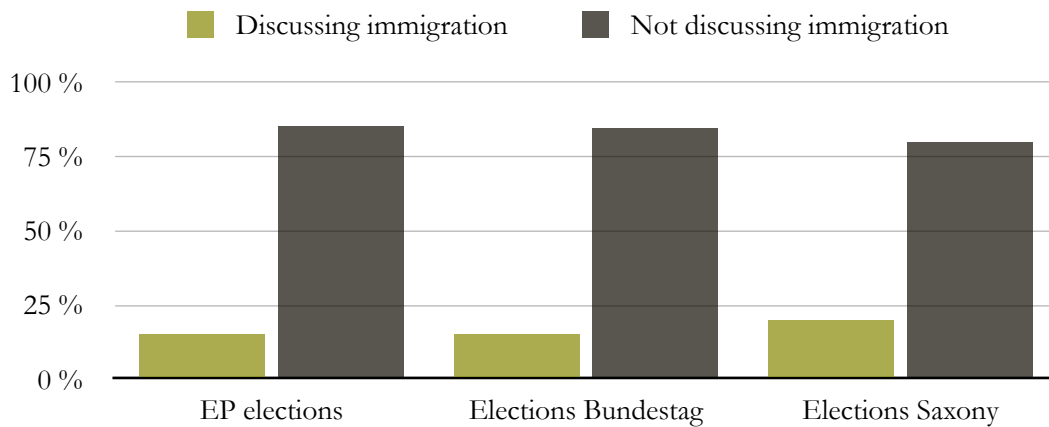


Figure 9 Immigration salience — *tweets* (percentage)

The numerical data offers some interesting results for our hypotheses. Now, these findings should be analysed in a brief discussion.

One issue that finds constant attention in the AfD’s campaign communication indeed is immigration and asylum. Against the expectation of H3 which suspected immigration to be permanently more salient than the topic of European integration, on the European level, this hypothesis did not hold. In the AfD’s campaign material for the European Parliament elections in 2019, the EU is more strongly articulated than immigration and hence, increasingly politicised. This applies not only to the party manifesto which, in any case, frequently discusses the Union, but also to the AfD’s Twitter activity in the two months prior to election day. For the political momentum of the EP elections in which the EU is significantly more salient, the “twin issue” of immigration seems to make room on the AfD’s political agenda.

However, for the election campaigns on the national as well as the regional level, immigration and asylum are across both campaign instruments constantly more strongly politicised than European integration. Therefore, apart from the European level of politics it proves true that: “[...] Europe remains in the shadow of immigration” (Hoeglinger 2016: 59). In line with Kriesi’s (2007) theory, the empirics lend weight to the argument that European integration and immigration both stem from a newly emerging globalisation cleavage. The topic of immigration appears to usually be the priority of culturally conservative TAN parties when mobilising their voters. This is explained by some scholars with the argument that immigration is “[...] simpler and

clearly defined, and therefore the issue is easier to handle in political competition” (ibid.: 59). Unless the EU is, as in the EP elections, not a top priority on the parties’ agenda, the AfD appears to rely on the politicisation of a matter which is similarly grounded on concerns of national identity and sovereignty, but easier to mobilise.

Indeed, immigration was discussed to almost the same extent in all campaigns of the Eurosceptic AfD - around 19 percent. The politicisation of immigration does not show substantial differences between the three levels of politics. In the respective party manifestos, it is not only listed as a single chapter of the programme in which the policy field finds a general discussion, but it also appears to be the topic of various other sections of the text. Even when the party presents standpoints on policy areas other than immigration and asylum, as for instance when opening up the debate on social policy and benefits or border security, but also agriculture or health policy, the AfD often mentions the EU’s “twin issue” immigration. Although most of the units discussing immigration refer to immigration of third country nationals, the party also criticises some aspects of the free movement of people within the EU. For instance, the AfD finds that: “In some cases, EU citizens living in Germany enjoy even more rights as Germans. This so-called ‘national discrimination’ must be immediately ended” (AfD 2019a: 41).

Additionally, the data also showed that a substantial amount of content in the manifestos directly refers to Muslim immigrants and citizens. On the one hand, various religious and cultural traditions of Islam are discussed and criticised in chapters on animal protection or education policy, as for instance the process of slaughtering animals according to Muslim rites and the wearing of a headscarf on the basis of religious beliefs. Yet additionally, all manifestos include specific chapters directly referring to Islam. In the AfD’s programme for the EP elections, the fifth subchapter of Justice and Home Affairs is titled as: “Islam - A threat for Europe” (AfD 2019a: 4). For the elections of the German Bundestag, a whole chapter is dedicated to the topic: “Islam in conflict with a free and democratic order” (AfD 2017: 4). On the regional level, the Muslim religion is again discussed in a subchapter, to complement the AfD’s standpoint on education policy with the section: “No Islam lessons at Saxon schools, no special

rights for Muslims” (AfD 2019b: 34). With an outspokenly hostile and anti-Islamic position, the AfD propagates that Islam is not part of German nor European society. With the belief of the existence and primacy of a so-called German “Leitkultur”,³⁵ the strongly xenophobic attitude of the party characterises its right-wing populist ideology (Lees 2018: 306-307).

On the Twitter account, where the Tweets posted allow for a less official, but more populist language and writing style, the strategic use of xenophobia and hostile views towards immigrants is increasingly apparent. Here, the formulation of political demands at times seems to change into an agitational campaign against people with other religious belief, citizenship and culture. For example, prior to the general elections in Germany, the AfD posted: “Merkel is responsible for terrorist attacks, increasing sexual assault, higher crime rate and billions of expenditure. Take your country back. Vote for #AfD” (@AfD: 22-09-2017). When directly communicating to the constituency, the discussion on immigration increasingly builds on a reinforcement of stigmas and fears, for example by linking the issue to statistics on criminality and the direct defamation of criminal individuals of non-German origin.

To refer back to the theory of a “new globalisation cleavage”, it can be concluded that the opposition of immigration builds on the same argumentation and ideology as the opposition of European integration, but finds a more constant mobilisation in the AfDs’ campaign communication, with almost no changes of salience between the three levels. The populist TAN party calls for closed borders and less immigration just as it calls for less EU and more nation state. A sovereign nation state with an exclusive national identity is promoted by the politicisation of two issues which both have the potential to address the concerns of the so-called “losers” of globalisation. In his article, Lees (2018) stresses the difficulty of distinguishing between Euroscepticism and right-wing populism in German politics. Over time, the position of the AfD has evolved from anti-Euro to increasingly linking the opposition of European integration with a more general xenophobia (Lees 2018: 307). Based on the above findings, however, it appears

³⁵ translated as “leading culture”

that the politicisation of the EU and that of immigration are not two distinct matters, but that they appear as “part and parcel of broader processes” (see Kriesi 2007: 85).

6 Conclusion and outlook

How salient is the issue of European integration in election campaigns of the German Eurosceptic party AfD? Is the EU politicised differently on the EU, the national, and the regional level? Also, what *type* of issue does the AfD emphasise when articulating EU matters? And lastly, how is the issue of immigration mobilised in campaigns of the populist TAN party?

These overarching questions have been approached by this work in order to investigate the politicisation of European integration in campaign communication of the German Eurosceptic party AfD. This study did not solely focus on the supranational, European sphere or exclusively on domestic politics — it rather analysed and compared AfD campaign material on the EU, the national, and the regional level of politics to depict not only the complexity of Euroscepticism, but also that of the EU’s multi-level governance nature.

After reviewing the existing scholarly debate in Chapter 2 of this work, it has been shown that there are different strains of research which approach the phenomenon of Euroscepticism. While some works rely on economic, utilitarian explanations for EU-opposition, a second strand assumes the aspect of *identity* as fundamentally shaping public positions towards the EU (e.g. Hooghe — Marks 2009, Kriesi 2007, Hoeglinger 2016). In line with this identity approach, Chapter 3 presented the “Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration” by Hooghe and Marks (2009) as well as Kriesi’s (2007) idea of a “newly emerging cleavage of globalisation”. Deriving from these theories, an analytical framework was designed to assess the three posed research questions of this work. To capture the extent of politicisation of European integration, this study aimed to measure the *salience* of EU issues, as it is argued that especially TAN parties on the culturally conservative axis actively provide cues, hence directly address European integration in order to gain electoral support (Hooghe — Marks 2003). To further

analyse the extent of critique towards the EU, a subsequent focus lay on investigating the *type* of EU issue that was communicated. To do so, this work divided, as previous research has done, into policy issues (functional dimension) and polity issues (Europeanisation dimension). While the functional dimension refers to classical policy fields the EU yet holds competences, the latter deals with fundamental concerns of shape and reach of European integration (Adam et al. 2009). Lastly, this study aimed to identify the salience of immigration, as this issue is often considered a “twin issue” of European immigration (Kriesi 2007). Based on this theoretical concept, three hypotheses have finally been formulated to deliver a clear and structured assessment of the leading research questions.

Chapter 4 elaborated on the methodological framework of this work. This cross-sectional case study investigated the three latest elections on each level under observation — the 2019 EP elections, the elections of the German Bundestag in 2017, as well as the federal state elections in Saxony 2019. The AfD was chosen as a representative example of a Eurosceptic party, yet it should be noted that the findings obtained in this study are still the evaluation of a specific case. Even if a similar research design could be used to assess other Eurosceptic election campaigns, the results of this very study should not misleadingly be generalised to explain other events or cases.

This work has opted for a qualitative content analysis to deliver an in-depth analysis of politicisation processes of the AfD’s campaign communication. A detailed coding scheme was conceptualised to deliver a transparent and reliable collection of data.³⁶

The results supported the EU issue salience hypothesis (H1) and partially supported the immigration salience hypothesis (H3). The second hypothesis referring to the mobilisation dimension (H2) did, against all expectations, not hold. Chapter 5 thus presented and discussed the gained findings: firstly, in line with this work’s assumptions, it has been found that while on the European level EU issue salience is comparatively high, little attention is being paid to the Union in domestic election campaigns of the AfD. For the political momentum of the EP elections, European integration seems to be

³⁶ see Appendix 1

strongly politicised by the AfD in order to mobilise their constituency. However, the findings suggest that on the national and regional level, where EU issue salience is comparatively low, the “sleeping giant” (van der Eijk — Franklin 2004: 2) has not yet completely awoken.

Contrary to the assumptions, it has been further found that the AfD pays more attention to functional policy issues than to fundamental questions of European integration when discussing the EU. Indeed, with the national and the regional level, where stronger debate on the shape and reach of the Union was expected, the amount of functional issues gradually increases. Yet this work suggests to not take the majority of discussed policy issues as an indicator of EU support. When articulating questions referring to the Europeanisation dimension, the AfDs’ concerns include deep-rooted questions of subsidiarity, actually touching upon the possibility of a withdrawal of Germany from the European Union. To deliver a more fruitful analysis of the degree of EU-opposition, this study therefore suggests to apply a more refined research design and coding system particular to this topic.

Finally, it has been found that besides the European level, immigration is more strongly politicised than the EU in election campaigns of the right-wing populist AfD. Hence, in the domestic arena, it proves that: “[...] Europe remains in the shadow of immigration” (Hoeglinger 2016: 59). In line with the assumptions, this “twin issue” of European integration is most strongly pronounced on the regional level, and slightly decreasing with proximity to the EU. Based on the “new globalisation cleavage”, this study therefore suggests that both issues are “part and parcel” of a newly emerging structural conflict between so called “winners” and “losers” of globalisation (Kriesi 2007: 85). However, apart from in the EP elections, the AfD prioritises the issue of immigration over that of the EU to mobilise its constituency.

To conclude, this work supports the claim that TAN parties “oppose European integration for the same reasons that they oppose immigration: it undermines national community” (Hooghe — Marks 2009: 17). Indeed, the AfD builds on the idea of an exclusive, sovereign nation state and identity. However, this implicates some effects which threaten not only the development of the European peace project, but also show

increasing levels of xenophobia and hostile attitudes towards people from other origins, religions and cultures. At the present moment, it appears that Euroscepticism is irreversible (Statham — Trenz 2013: 1), yet it is not an exclusively European or national phenomenon. Interregional Eurobarometer statistics show that attitudes towards EU membership vary not only between member states, but also the 16 federal states of Germany (European Commission 2014). This work therefore calls for an increased attention to the regional level in future research on Euroscepticism, as it shows that regional economic and cultural differences have the potential to contribute to a full picture of EU opposition and scepticism.

Moreover, this work introduced the reader to the research field by pointing to the connection between crises and the rise of sceptic voices towards European integration. Likewise, the AfD has emerged from critique towards the Euro and European monetary policy after the Euro-crisis. At the moment of writing, not only the EU, but the entire international community is being hit by one of the greatest global pandemics in human history. Nonetheless, since the outbreak of COVID-19, statistics have revealed decreasing support among German citizens for the AfD (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2020). Instructive insight for the research on Euroscepticism lays in investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding political and economic crisis in relation to support or opposition towards the EU across its 27 member states.

Whatever direction future developments will take, Euroscepticism forms a threat to the European project and domestic structures of politics — the explicit case of the AfD shows that this party does not only create severe divisions in attitudes towards European integration, but similarly mobilises strong xenophobic ideas towards people from “other” national and cultural identities. Increased attention should therefore be paid to the AfD, as this party not only destabilises processes of European integration — but also tackles norms and values of the European Union at their core.

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Appendix 1 Coding scheme

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
RQ1: Discussing the EU	EU issue salience: the visibility of European integration, hence the extent of mobilisation efforts of intermediary organisations, can be defined as the importance that is attributed to the EU and European integration (De Wilde — Leupold 2016: 6).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “If such a concept with the current partners of the EU is not to be negotiated by mutual consent, Germany is forced to follow Britain's example and withdraw from the existing EU” (Afd 2017: 8). - “Merkel wants less Germany and more EU. She stands for open borders, less securities and further unreasonable burdens” (@Afd, 03-09-2017). 	Units that refer to the European Union in general, e.g. European institutions, policies or European norms and values, regardless of specific areas or aspects of European integration, are coded as “Discussing the EU”.
RQ1: Not discussing the EU		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The aim of school education is to impart a positive image of Saxony and Germany, of its history, present and future. Bright, as well as dark sides should be covered. We want to accordingly change the syllabus” (Afd 2019b: 33). - “3 most dangerous cities in Germany governed by the left. As if any evidence was needed to show what a left-wing government does to internal security. There is only real security with the AfD” (@Afd, 10-04-2019). 	Units <i>not</i> referring to the European Union but German and regional politics or any other EU-unrelated issue are coded as “Not discussing the EU”.

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
RQ2: Functional dimension	The functional dimension is defined as articulated policy issues, hence issues referring to classical policy fields and areas where the EU yet holds competences (Mair 2007).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “All ECB measures to manipulate the free capital market must be stopped” (AfD 2019b: 29). - “Dr. Alice Weidel on the demand to introduce the € in all EU countries: Juncker’s loss of reality” (@AfD 13-09-2017). 	Units discussing the EU referring to the shaping of policy fields on the European level of politics are coded additionally as “functional dimension”.
RQ2:Europeanisation dimension	The Europeanisation dimension is defined as articulated polity issues, referring to fundamental questions on the EU such as constitutional, institutional and enlargement issues (Mair 2007).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Therefore Germany must terminate the transfer union and leave the Eurozone” (AfD 2017: 14). - “Cancellation of the Turkey election: #EU accession negotiations with Turkey have to finally stop” (@AfD 05-05-2019). - “Since consumer protection policy is now largely EU-controlled, the AfD wants to bring the competence for consumer protection back to Germany” (AfD 2017: 72). 	Units discussing the EU referring to fundamental questions on European integration, such as institutional and constitutional changes, subsidiarity and enlargement, are coded as “Europeanisation dimension”. This also includes the discussions of retransfers of competences from the supranational to the domestic level of politics and policy areas in which the EU does not hold competences.

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
RQ2: Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The EU elections for the 9th European Parliament will send signals that can no longer be ignored!” (AfD 2019b: 8). - “EU elections 2019: new patriotic parliamentary group is getting bigger! Support the #AfD and thus the conservative-patriotic forces in the Brussels Parliament with your vote for the #2019 European election on May 26th! Thank you very much” (@AfD, 29-03-2019). 	Units discussing the EU referring not to the functional nor the Europeanisation dimension but other issues are coded as “other”.
RQ3: Discussing immigration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The aim of schooling children of asylum seekers who are required to attend school must be to prepare them for life after returning to their country of origin and to bridge the time until they return” (AfD 2019b: 33) - “Stranger in your own country: Germany's future is so dark. The demographic revolution is in full swing. "Ethnic Germans" are becoming a minority. Migration researcher Jens Schneider predicts this unequivocally” (@AfD, 04-07-2019). 	Units discussing immigration-related content, including immigration of EU citizens as well as third country nationals, immigration and asylum policies, internal and external border security, and effects of immigration such as multiculturalism are coded as “Discussing immigration”.

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
RQ3: Not discussing immigration		<p>- After 50 years of development policy, the result is sobering. For example, despite (or because of) all aid, Africa is now only involved in around two percent of world trade. The rapid development of the population is destroying the results of development policy.</p>	<p>Units discussing content related to other issues than immigration are accordingly coded as “Not discussing immigration”.</p>

Appendix 2 Tables

2.1 EP elections 2019 (*manifesto and tweets*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	350	69,31 %	
Not discussing the EU	155	30,69 %	
			505 units
Functional dimension	130	37,14 %	
Europeanisation dimension	93	26,57 %	
Other	127	36,29 %	
			350 units
Discussing immigration	89	17,62 %	
Not discussing immigration	416	82,38 %	
			505 units

2.2 EP elections 2019 (*manifesto*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	185	69,55 %	
Not discussing the EU	81	30,45 %	
			266 paragraphs
Functional dimension	98	52,97 %	
Europeanisation dimension	72	38,92 %	
Other	15	8,11 %	
			185 paragraphs
Discussing immigration	53	19,92 %	
Not discussing immigration	213	80,08 %	

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
			266 paragraphs

2.2 EP elections 2019 (*tweets*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	165	69,04 %	
Not discussing the EU	74	30,96 %	
			239 tweets
Functional dimension	32	19,39 %	
Europeanisation dimension	21	12,73 %	
Other	112	67,88 %	
			165 tweets
Discussing immigration	36	15,06 %	
Not discussing immigration	203	84,94 %	
			239 tweets

2.4 Elections of the German Bundestag 2017 (*manifesto and tweets*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	77	9,23 %	
Not discussing the EU	757	90,77 %	
			834 units
Functional dimension	33	42,86 %	
Europeanisation dimension	29	37,66 %	
Other	15	19,48 %	
			77 units
Discussing immigration	162	19,42 %	

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Not discussing immigration	672	80,58 %	
			834 units

2.5 Elections of the German Bundestag 2017 (*manifesto*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	62	15,54 %	
Not discussing the EU	337	84,46 %	
			399 paragraphs
Functional dimension	27	43,55 %	
Europeanisation dimension	22	35,48 %	
Other	13	20,97 %	
			62 paragraphs
Discussing immigration	95	23,81 %	
Not discussing immigration	304	76,19 %	
			399 paragraphs

2.6 Elections of the German Bundestag 2017 (*tweets*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	15	3,45 %	
Not discussing the EU	420	96,55 %	
			435 tweets
Functional dimension	6	40 %	
Europeanisation dimension	7	46,67 %	
Other	2	13,33 %	
			15 tweets

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing immigration	67	15,40 %	
Not discussing immigration	368	84,60 %	
			435 tweets

2.7 State elections in Saxony 2017 (*manifesto and tweets*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	47	8,82 %	
Not discussing the EU	486	91,18 %	
			533 units
Functional dimension	23	48,94 %	
Europeanisation dimension	13	27,66 %	
Other	11	23,40 %	
			47 units
Discussing immigration	105	19,70 %	
Not discussing immigration	428	80,30 %	
			533 units

2.8 State elections in Saxony 2017 (*manifesto*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	27	7,34 %	
Not discussing the EU	341	92,66 %	
			368 paragraphs
Functional dimension	15	55,56 %	
Europeanisation dimension	7	25,93 %	
Other	5	18,52 %	

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
			27 paragraphs
Discussing immigration	72	19,57 %	
Not discussing immigration	296	80,43 %	
			368 paragraphs

2.9 State elections in Saxony 2017 (*tweets*)

Code	Units (in numbers)	in %	Total
Discussing the EU	20	12,12 %	
Not discussing the EU	145	87,88 %	
			165 tweets
Functional dimension	8	40 %	
Europeanisation dimension	6	30 %	
Other	6	30 %	
			20 tweets
Discussing immigration	33	20 %	
Not discussing immigration	132	80 %	
			165 tweets