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Master Thesis

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The AfD's Policy Positioning within  
the German Multi-Level Governance System

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By

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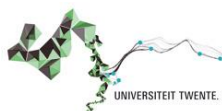
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## 1. Introduction

The German federalism and its political parties are named to be one of the most stable and established in terms of political parties throughout Europe (Reiser, 2018). In 2015, with the refugee crisis and ongoing debates about the financial support expended within the European financial crisis, also the German political landscape lost his longstanding resilience (Reiser, 2018).

When analysing the current political landscape of the EU and especially Germany, the rise of populist right-wing parties in a high number of nations is undeniable (Michelsen, 2015). A lot of research was already given into the composition of their voter base, their way of communication and the circumstances that may have influenced this change within the European party landscape (see Decker, 2017, 2018; Gómez-Reino, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). But, as recent elections have shown, the rise of these parties is not over yet, and it is expectable that more future governments like the Austrian coalition will include parties fighting for populist right-wing positions (Decker, 2018). Especially at the federal or local level, in 2019 future coalitions of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) with the CDU are highly debated (i.e. in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt). Additionally, populist right-wing beliefs are highly integrated into the political centre, meaning that also other parties are influenced by the political discourse evolving from populist right-wing parties (Schröter, 2019). These discourses recently showed their potential of dividing parties, especially the CDU, alongside the possible coalition talks at local levels.

Needless to say, also literature already focussed on this rise of shared anti-democratic beliefs, presenting detailed theories for reasons why populist right-wing parties are that present in the current political landscape, deviating from the situation ten years ago (i.e. the topics of migration, the feeling of being left behind and a growing distance between politicians and their voters) (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Moreover, this work not only tries to contribute to the current debate about the voting outcome of populist right-wing parties, but it also aims to analyse a specific pattern of behaviour of these parties when formulating policy positions. With analysing populist right-wing policy formulation in the framework of multi-level governance, new findings will be gathered in order to get an understanding of the effects the system they act in has on their behaviour. In addition to recent findings, this work highlights

the structural reasons relevant to the AfD's policy positioning, revealing their behaviour within the characteristics of the German federalism. As one possible approach for doing so, this work will analyse the rising German populist right-wing party's policy formulations at the federal level while examining congruence or incongruence with the national level.

Research on multi-level governance has also ready shown that state governments tend to align their policy positioning on economic issues by party opinions stated by the national government (Däubler & Debus, 2009). The opposite is said about the social policy dimension, where state governments move away from the partisan national governments positioning (Däubler & Debus, 2009). This interaction between policy positioning within parties operating at different levels of governance is particularly relevant for the German case where state and national level are highly connected i.e. in terms of legislation or fiscal distribution (Marks, Hooghe & Schakel, 2008) and therefore expected to influence party behaviour. Even though these connections are elaborated already, it is still unknown to what extent these relations differ when analysing the behaviour of different party families, in this case speaking of populist right-wing parties. This vertical integration of parties presents a particular challenge when formulating policy positions and pursuing office at multiple levels of governments (Thorlakson, 2011). Here, the multi-dimensionality of variables complicates the analysis of party behaviour in a multi-level setting, which is why further research is inevitable (Thorlakson, 2011). This paper tries to tackle this gap in research, pinpointing the policy positions of the German populist right-wing party AfD within the German multi-level governance system. In order to gain an understanding of populist right-wings party behaviour on a national and federal level, this paper formulates the following research question:

*“To what extent do the regional branches of the populist radical right AfD advocate policy positions that deviate from the program of the federal party and how can the deviations be explained?”*

When considering such an analysis, the selection of the country used as a sample is highly relevant. As stated in the research question, this paper will focus on the main populist right-wing party in Germany, the AfD. In terms of multilevel governance analysis, the German setting is highly interesting because of the Bundesrat which is involved in many legislation processes on the state-level and consists, as a second chamber, of parties elected on the federal level (Däubler & Debus, 2009). This cooperative federal system leads to involvement

of federal-level factors in the formation of state-government and vice versa, including an interrelation of party politics at the state level with party competition at the federal level (Däubler & Debus, 2009). Additionally, Germany is considered to be a country with a high level of regional autonomy as well as a regional high level of influence on national politics (Marks et al., 2008). Even though the German federal states do have little fiscal autonomy, their approval concerning federal taxes and distribution is required (Bäck, Debus, Müller & Bäck, 2013). This bottom-up system of regional government is unique within the European countries (Marks et al., 2008) and, therefore increases the relevance of Germany as an example for analysing congruence of policy positions in this multi-level system. Furthermore, the scholarly understanding of the German multi-level governance system is still moving, finding its current debate with a focus on regions as important locations for political life (Jeffery & Middleton, 2013). But, as the literature indicates, a comprehensive picture about party behaviour between these levels of governance is still missing (Jeffery & Middleton, 2013), which is why this paper aims to tackle one part of the existing research gap.

The success of populist right-wing parties in recent elections is undeniable, leading to strong competition with more traditional party families. This ongoing discussion promoted an increasing integration of populist right-wing beliefs into the political centre of Germany, notably the increasing votes received by the AfD, which show that populist right-wing beliefs are not a peripheral phenomenon anymore (Küpper, Berghan & Rees, 2019). Analysing especially populist right-wing parties within this framework of analysis is reasonable in different terms. First of all, the core of populism lies in its rejection of pluralism (Müller, 2016) and is described as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Moreover, this form of populism considers multi-level governance as a threat, striving for older forms of order and more settled communities (Stoker, 2017). They have not evolved fundamentally from a specific ideology but from frustration about the post-war restoration of security and social welfare towards the elite (Betz & Immerfall, 1998) and, in case of the AfD, from Euroscepticism (Detterbeck, 2012). As research on the homogeneity of populist right-wing parties behaviour concerning economic issues on the EU-level and social policy agendas on the national level has already indicated, a lack of common interest within this party family can be found (Cavallaro, Flacher & Zanetti, 2018; Fenger, 2018). This difficult relationship with the form of multilevel governance makes further analysis of these parties on a lower level of governance

crucial in order to identify patterns of behaviour that go beyond the national level and disclose possible anomalies when governing in such a pluralistic system.

Additionally, the case of populist right-wing parties is highly relevant in terms of a multi-level governance analysis because of their fragmentation in terms of location and population structure (Stoker, 2017). As the voting behaviour within recent elections has shown, the results of populist right-wing parties are divided alongside so-called cosmopolitan areas and conservative, marginalised people (Stoker, 2017). Considering this fragmentation to influence the party's policy positioning, a multi-level governance analysis may offer new insights into differences that occur when observing populist party behaviour on different levels. As the variation of socioeconomic issues and confessional structure in Germany is particularly high between the federal states and rising after the unification, state-specific patterns of party competition can be expected (Flick & Vatter, 2007; Jeffery & Hough, 2003). Combining the fragmentation of a populist right-wing party's success concerning the location and the diversity of the German federal states leads to a comprehensive picture of party behaviour alongside the multi-level governance structure.

Within this framework of analysis, the aspect of policy position congruence serves as a useful factor to operationalize internal party behaviour. As research about voter congruence in national and regional elections already indicated the importance of territorial cleavages (Schakel, 2012), the congruence of policy positioning of current party families on different levels of governance is not yet explored sufficiently. These multi-level systems create the need of distinctive strategies; policy positioning, campaign strategies and participation in elections can vary depending on the present political conditions (Deschouwer, 2006) and the policy dimension that is debated. In order to draw a comprehensive picture of this policy positioning, the policy dimensions developed by Benoit and Laver (2009), naming economic policy, social policy, the decentralization of decision making, environmental policy, and immigration, will be analysed to uncover the specifics of multi-level policy congruence within the different policy dimensions.

Using congruence of policy positioning as an indicator for party behaviour is based on the assumption that parties seek to implement their policy formulation alongside their election manifestos (Thomassen, 1994). Doing so in an environment of federalism evolves from the assumption that multi-layered systems create more complex possibilities for parties to behave

in such a system (Deschouwer, 2003). Furthermore, party congruence is described as a positive factor for the delivery of efficient government, which is also said to have an influence on the voting results (Boucek, 2002). With keeping that in mind, it is expected that party positioning explicitly in the federal system of Germany is highly complex concerning the interrelation of intergovernmental politics and party politics (Deschouwer, 2006). Therefore, the analysis of congruence of policy positions gives insights into the effects the specific German federal system has on populist right-wings party behaviour and points out differences between local branches regarding their behaviour in this political context.

In order to answer the research question sufficiently, the next chapter will mainly focus on the relevant theoretical framework, including literature on party behaviour, multi-level governance as well as specifics of the German case and populism. Based on the theoretical work, assumptions about the congruence of policy positions of the AfD in specific settings can be made. Following that, the methodology of the analysis will be described, explaining the measurement and approaches used. Reflecting the core of this work, all 17 election manifestos will be analysed and evaluated following the hypotheses stated based on the ground of the theoretical elaborations made. These will be described and explained with regard to policy formulations made within relevant manifestos. As the last step, an answer to the research question will be given, findings will be summarized, and an evaluation of the work will be made.



## 2. Theory

The following chapter aims to present an overview of the current state of research in the field of party behaviour and multi-level governance. These insights should strengthen the theoretical background for answering the stated research question and integrate empirical findings of populist right-wing parties.

### 2.1. Multi-level Governance

As already indicated, party behaviour is highly dependent on the structural and institutional setting they operate in (Deschouwer, 2003). Therefore, this chapter aims to include specifics of the different level of governance when analysing party behaviour, following the premise that dissimilarities between state-wide and sub-state elections have grown over the last few decades (Detterbeck, 2012).

#### 2.1.1. Theoretical Background

As Hooghe and Marks (2001) developed two different types of governance, it is inevitable to define which form of governance will be analysed in the following. They distinguish between governance based on general-purpose, non-intersecting jurisdictions, applicable to federalism and governance with task-specific organisation applicable to extrinsic communities (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). In the following, the first type of governance and community will be analysed in order to explicitly deliver political differences of populist parties and their relationship between the national governmental level and federal governments (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). As these jurisdictions are considered to be durable and sticky, they suit well as the basis for analysis as changes within institutions are unlikely to happen during the process of investigation (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Following their research design, the total number of subnational levels in the EU is limited to four or five tiers (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). National states and their governments are, in the end, still the most important institutions when it comes to the execution of authority, even though they have shed some authority to governments on more regional and supranational levels (Schakel, Hooghe & Marks, 2015).

Speaking of the development of policy dimensions at the different governmental levels, research has also shown that the position of governing parties on federal levels influences the party position of national governments. When considering most political parties (especially the more traditional parties) to be ideology-driven, this effect of sticking to ideology is

observed to appear in a limited range when seeing the parties' position on a general left-right scale, underlining the possible influence of the federal governance system. (Däubler & Debus, 2009).

#### 2.1.2. Multi-Level Party Competition

This section aims to present specifics of multi-level party competition. This introduction is helpful in order to understand party positions relative to their competitors and under the control of actors along with multiple levels of governance (Detterbeck, 2012).

The concept of multi-level governance has increased the proliferation of new party alternatives, leading to an increased asymmetry of the electoral strength and the competition between parties among political levels or regions (Detterbeck, 2012). As a result, parties do not only have to face new rising groups that have to be acknowledged when positioning the party politically but also face high variance regarding competition and coalition talks at different levels. When acting in such a multi-level system, parties have to stand up for specific wishes in sub-state elections in order to become a central actor in federal party competition (Hepburn, 2010). In this case, the multi-level structure has led to increased party competition over regional advocacy among all involved parties in sub-state arenas (Hepburn, 2010). As Thorlakson puts it, there is "persuasive evidence that the institutional division of power between the federal and state levels is a key variable for explaining cross-national variations in party system congruence" (Thorlakson, 2007).

#### 2.1.3. Multi-level Governance: The German case

In order to understand the AfD's behaviour and policy positioning, the specifics of the German federalism will now be described briefly. The structure of the German federal system basically distinguishes between the federal states of Germany and the national government, which is why it is mostly considered to be a two-tier model (Gunlicks, 2003). It reflects the concept of dual federalism (Gunlicks, 2003) which will be described more detailed below.

When focussing on the German party landscape within this federalism, it is still true to say that the Christian Democratic Party finds its strongest electoral base in Roman-Catholic parts of the society, defending conservative policy positions (Arzheimer & Schoen, 2007). Meanwhile, the social democrats, Greens, Liberals and the Left are said to represent more progressive policies (Benoit & Laver, 2009). Additionally to the assumptions that local governments with a Roman-Catholic population are more conservative than other ones, one

can expect that also characteristics of the local political patterns are taken into account when formulating policy positions (Däubler & Debus, 2009; Detterbeck, 2012).

In order to clearly name and organise the interactions between the state and the federal level, legislative competences are divided clearly. The constitutional law of Germany names i.e. foreign and defence policies and migration as competences of the national government whereas the German federal states have competences in other policy areas like education or transport (Swenden, 2006). Furthermore, some areas are defined as shared competences, which means that i.e. social policies and economic issues have to follow from a cooperation of the federal governments and the national government (Detterbeck, 2012). In the end, the legislative power of the national government became much bigger compared to the federal states, even though Article 30 and 70 of the constitutional law state otherwise (Gunlicks, 2003). Here it is described that all legislative power lies at the federal level, if not specified otherwise (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949), but many exceptions were made why a shift in competences has taken place in recent years.

The interwoven relationship evolving from the German federal structure leads also to the assumption that voters face problems distinguishing between party positions in general and the ones relevant in the next election or their specific region (Detterbeck, 2012). It is assumed that they focus more on their approval of the parties positions in general (party identification) rather than assessing the election manifesto for the relevant political level (Detterbeck, 2012).

With regard to the voting behaviour within this multi-level setting, Völkl, Schnapp, Holtmann and Gabriel (2008) were able to visualise the federal influence on regional elections in Germany divided alongside the federal states. The results were that in a high majority of the cases, the national influence is either weaker than the influence of federal level factors or only of little significance (Völkl et al., 2008). Only in the federal province of Lower Saxony, Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Westpommern the national policy influence was found to be stronger than the influence of federal factors (Völkl et al., 2008). Reasons for that are diverse, in lower Saxony, the federal politics do not offer enough content for the voter's decision-making process which is why they include national-level policies (Völkl et al., 2008). In Thuringia and Mecklenburg- Westpommern party identification was found to be that important within the decision-making process at the federal level that federal policies were not decisive (Völkl et al., 2008).

For the analysis of party behaviour from a multilevel perspective, the role of a coherent policy positioning within the parties must be elaborated. First of all, this desired coherence is considered to be a driver for efficient government and, more relevant for the case of the AfD, is assessed positively by the potential electorate (Boucek, 2002). Furthermore, inconsistency between the national and the federal level is described to cause confusion within the voter's perception of the party, decreases party identification and may lead to deviant voting patterns within the different level of governance (Blake, 1982). Especially in case of the AfD, the recent inconsistency of political communication regarding their positioning towards extreme right-wing groups has led to intraparty conflicts, unsettling potential voters and leading to the evolvment of splinter parties (i.e. "die Blaue Party" initiated by Frauke Petry). A coherent party policy positioning within all level of governance decreases the likelihood of such events and strengthens the programmatic influence of the federal party to its regional branches.

#### 2.1.4. Populism in Multi-level Governance

As Stoker (2017) states, populism itself and especially nationalist populism considers the described concept of multi-level governance as a threat, which can be also transferred to their Euroscepticism. It is argued that the populist right-wing parties are more committed to older forms of order and more settled communities, as opposed to the new complex pluralist world order (Stoker, 2017). This is also applicable to the populist's construction of an abstract elite as the enemy of the common people. The elite is described to be part of this new pluralistic world order, out of touch for the common people (Stoker, 2017). Here, it becomes especially important that populism is said to be fragmented in terms of location and divided between so-called cosmopolitan areas and conservative, marginalised people (Stoker, 2017). The governance of populist parties within a fragmentation of voters as well as the need to cooperate with institutions that display multilevel governance (i.e. the European Parliament) is expected to cause tensions between local, national and international agendas.

When considering an analysis of populist right-wing parties within this multilevel governance system, it can be acknowledged that also urban and suburban elections and the success of these parties are seen as one level where the expression of political interests may differ from the national level (van Gent, Jansen & Smits, 2013). As the rise of populist right-wing parties is a rather new phenomenon, it is crucial to identify their policy positioning beyond one level of governance. Past research on the populist Austrian FPÖ has already indicated that electoral

success of populist right-wing parties on the national level can lead to vote setbacks on local and provincial levels because of a change in policy orientation (Luther, McDonnell & Newell, 2011). It was revealed that the party faced conflicts between governing party members and more protest-orientated functionaries at regional levels (Luther et al., 2011). Whether this is also true for the case of the AfD can be elaborated as soon as the AfD holds offices at state or federal level. In general, it is argued that populist right-wing parties do face problems on state-level policies as their populist background is based on programmatic flexibility in pursuit of voter maximization (Heinisch, 2003). This flexibility leads to the absence of a unified political message on all level of governance (Heinisch, 2003) but is not applicable when being part of a national governing coalition.

Another point that increases the speciality of analysing the populist right party family on multi-levels is the attempt of established parties in blocking populist right-wing parties (Minkenberg, 2001). As their election results on the national level are often lower than in specific regions, also their influence differs as the participation in government coalitions within the EU is to date rather uncommon (Minkenberg, 2001). As a conclusion, it is expectable that the party behaviour differs depending on the level of governance, possibilities to govern and voting results.

## 2.2. Party Behaviour

As the previous part focussed explicitly on multi-level governance and the role of populism within this framework, the next paragraph aims present existing theories on party behaviour with linking these to populist right-wing parties and their expected behaviour. This section should serve as a basis for the following analysis in order to present the theoretical background on what motivates parties in their behaviour and how this might affect the policy positioning congruence of the populist right-wing party family within the framework of multi-level governance. As literature makes three different distinctions between party behaviour, each one will be analysed under the spotlight of populist right-wing parties and their specific characteristics. This classification is based on the assumption that political benefits can most efficiently be pursued through success in elections and that these future payoffs are explicitly expected by party leaders (Strøm, 1990). As the party behaviour is not transparent, the lines between the different types of behaviour and motivations can be blurred, saying that the

assumptions may overlap. It is crucial to say, that parties can be motivated by different goals at the same time.

### 2.2.1. Typology of Party Behaviour

Office-seeking parties are characterised by their aspirations for political office benefits (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Here, the assumption about the motivating factor for party behaviour lies not in the maximation of votes, but in the certainty of winning, which means controlling the executive branch (Riker, 1962). Striving for this place in government can be explained by intrinsic motivations, or, like Budge and Laver (1986) put it, by the instrumental ability to influence policy outputs throughout holding office. Additionally, research on other parties has shown that incumbents face benefits in future elections as their policy effectiveness is mostly higher than for politicians without office (Müller & Strøm, 1999). In the end, it mostly remains unclear why parties seek for office which is why research focusses on the behaviour of parties shown when striving for office (Müller & Strøm, 1999).

When speaking of policy-seeking parties, their party behaviour is said to be driven by the maximation of their impact on public policy (Müller & Strøm, 1999). In contrast to office-seeking parties, policy-seeking actors aim to change public policy towards their own positions and beliefs (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Even though also these parties do face policy compromises when engaging in coalitions, their underlying motivation is based on the ultimate outcome that evolves from such policies (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Again, also policy-seeking can be based on intrinsic motivation and the simple belief in certain policies as well as instrumental value, because of personal benefits that go along with certain policies (Müller & Strøm, 1999). In the end, policy-seeking and office-seeking often come together and cannot be divided strictly when analysing party behaviour (Budge & Laver, 1986). Being the least developed model of party behaviour, policy-seeking combines ideological considerations as well as governmental portfolios within party behaviour, which leads to unsolved trade-offs (Budge & Laver, 1986).

With this information, one can make different assumptions about the effects this behaviour has on political right-wing party policy congruence. First, a political ideology that leads to a steady set of policy a party strives for is seen as one important factor when it comes to the congruence of policy positions. As mentioned, populist right-wing parties are no demerger of another party family but evolved from society (Decker, 2018), which leads to the assumptions

that they sometimes do not share the same ideology. Of course, right-wing parties are associated with nationalism whereas their policy formulation mainly follows this course. As a result of the weak importance of ideology, populist right-wing parties are said to formulate problems and denounce them, without offering real policy positions that solve these conflicts (Decker, 2018), complicating insights into policy-seeking motivated party behaviour.

The third classification of vote-seeking party behaviour focusses on the maximation of votes, in other words, electoral support, in order to control government and increase power, prestige and income (Downs, 1957). In contrast to office- or party-seeking, vote-seeking parties do not have a certain goal like incumbency but strive for the absolute maximation of votes (Downs, 1957). Following that, vote-seeking party behaviour cannot be based on intrinsic or heuristic goals, but only on instrumental means, following further objectives (Müller & Strøm, 1999). At this point, the assumption of vote-seeking parties is criticised. The maximation of votes is seen as an instrument for office ambitions, even though in some cases it is more useful to maximise the own probabilities or the parties pluralities rather than votes in order to win a majority of seats (Hinich & Ordeshook, 1970; Robertson, 1976). In practice, also the concept of policy-seeking can be based on the goal of vote-seeking, which is why an overlap of motivations can be expected when analysing party behaviour.

Especially relevant for the theory of vote-seeking populist right-wing parties, it must be said that their election manifestos often focus on simple solutions, directly appealing to problems in the respective area (Decker, 2018). Expecting populist right-wing parties to show rather vote-seeking behaviour instead of following certain policies, as their ideology background is considered to be thin-centred (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), one might expect, that the intraparty congruence of positions is low when analysing different level of governance. Especially the German population is divided alongside cultural and economic values (Stoker, 2017), which is why it can be hypothesised that policy position congruence of vote-seeking populist right-wing parties within the different level of governance is low when they behave in a fragmented environment like the multi-level governance system of Germany (Heinisch, 2003).

#### 2.2.2. Relevance of Diverging Poll Results

When considering populist right-wing parties to be office-seeking, the institutional system of Germany must be considered. Following the institutional explanation by Detterbeck (2011),

the German federal state system promotes intrastate linkages between the parties at the federal level, apart from the national parties behaviour (Detterbeck, 2011). Here, especially the important role of the second chamber leads to independent federal branches which do not follow the coalition formation of the national government (Marks et al., 2008). This is why one can expect that especially office-seeking parties may adopt the behaviour of the closest centre-right or conservative party, in order to overcome the status of a party that is not considered as a possible coalition partner (Detterbeck, 2012). One example for this hypothesis is the populist right-wing party of Austria (FPÖ) which managed to become a governing party (so holding office) throughout forming a coalition with the conservative people's party (ÖVP) in 2017. Following this example, the highly debated possible coalition of the CDU and the AfD in Saxony is expected to lead to an approximation of the AfD in Saxony towards the more centre-conservative positions of the CDU, away from the national party opinion. As federal branches of the AfD with higher poll results are more likely to gain office in future elections, the following can be hypothesized:

*H1: Federal branches in states with higher AfD poll results are less congruent with the national AfD.*

In contrast to the following forms of party behaviour, in the case of office-seeking party behaviour congruence or incongruence can be expected to appear detached from policy areas, as the motivation is not content-related but of systematic nature. This is also expected to be true for the stated hypothesis H1.

### 2.2.3. Relevance of Socioeconomic Characteristics

When it comes to economic policy formulation following policy-seeking behaviour, one can expect positions depending on different socioeconomic patterns of the regions (Detterbeck, 2012), following the concept of welfare chauvinism. At this point, a growing incongruence of policy positions can be expected as soon as the socioeconomic factors of an area differ significantly from the German average (Detterbeck, 2012). In the underlying research design, this leads to the assumption that the federal branches of the AfD of Bavaria, Hamburg or Baden-Württemberg with strong GDPs per capita and low unemployment rates, are expected to focus more on investments into the growing economy like lower taxes while the federal AfD in eastern Germany, where unemployment is high and the GDP per capita is low, is



expected to focus more on higher spending. In general, this can be translated into the following hypothesis:

*H2a: Federal branches of states with a socioeconomic background that deviates from the German standard are less congruent in economic policies with the national AfD.*

As this hypothesis focussed on the phenomena of welfare chauvinism, also the policy formulation within the dimension of immigration has to be considered under the light of socioeconomic backgrounds in the specific areas. Research on voting patterns of different German regions has shown that citizen with less economic power feel left behind, as the governmental support for migrants is blamed to be responsible for a lack of monetary support in these areas (Emcke, 2016). The second hypothesis H2a already indicted that especially populist right-wing parties align their policy formulation within a certain programmatic framework. Here, the argumentation made by Emcke, that the support of migrants is contrasted with social policies for German citizen follows the characteristic populist right-wing presentation of in- and out-groups and leads to policy formulations that aim to divide these groups (Emcke, 2016). It is needless to say that the AfD's general appearance is based on this form of communication, but it can be expected to be even more elaborated in federal states with low GDP and high unemployment rates. Here, the expected policy positioning would follow the described concept of policy-seeking parties. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H2b: Federal branches of states with a socioeconomic background that deviates from the German standard are less congruent in immigration policies with the national AfD.*

#### 2.2.4. Relevance of Number of Asylum Applicants

Additionally to the socioeconomic patterns of the federal states, one important aspect is the concept of issue ownership, where parties are associated with specific issues because of attention they were giving towards this issue in the past (Walgrave & Lefevere, 2013). In the case of the AfD, this ownership can be considered to be found within the topic of immigration as studies on the voting motivation of German populist right-wing voters have shown (Küpper, Berghan et al., 2019). This issue ownership leads to a generally high congruence within the respective dimension, which is why it is especially relevant to figure out under what circumstances the policy formulation of a federal branch of the AfD deviates from the national party's opinion. Research in other countries has already indicated that a greater share of refugees allocation in certain areas is likely to lead to an increase of votes for right-wing, anti-

immigration parties (Dustmann, Vasiljeva & Piil Damm, 2018). Acknowledging the issue ownership of the AfD in the field of immigration, their success in recent elections can partly be linked to the increased number of asylum seekers arriving in Europe and especially Germany (Küpper, Berghan et al., 2019). As the national AfD's policies focus on this growing number of asylum seekers (18% of the pages in the manifesto are headlined with related topics), the incongruence of policy positions can be expected in states, where the share of located asylum seekers is low. Here an incongruence, especially with states with a low share of asylum applications like Bremen or Saarland (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019), can be expected. Following the argumentation made by Dustmann et al. (2018), anti-immigration policies would be less strict compared to the national level or federal states with a high share of asylum seekers. Within this research design, this leads to the hypothesis that:

*H3: Federal branches in states with a lower number of asylum applicants are less congruent in immigration policies with the national AfD.*

#### 2.2.5. Relevance of the Former Division of Germany

Following the theory of vote-seeking, also subnational populist right-wing parties are expected to align their behaviour following the composition of the voter base. When it comes to the electorate the AfD targets, different research was already carried out alongside economic and cultural dimensions (Kriesi, 2018). What was already found when analysing the national election in 2017 indicates that their major electorate can be found within male voters and a slightly lower education status than the average (Lees, 2018). Their shared cultural beliefs are a strong feeling of being left behind in terms of globalisation, social security and political representation (Decker, 2017). It is interesting to see that especially the voters of the AfD can be divided alongside old members, that supported the AfD because of its early Euroscepticism, shifting voters (mainly from the CDU/CSU) because of the stronger nationalist positions within the AfD and previous non-voters, that use their vote for the AfD mainly for punishing incumbents (Kriesi, 2018).

Acknowledging the voter base of the AfD and the policy formulation alongside the characteristics of these voters, the German division has to be considered. Even though the unification was already in 1989, the socioeconomic cleavages are still present. This can also be found when analysing the different attitudes towards migrants. In Eastern Germany significantly more people show depreciation of Asylum seekers compared to Western

Germany (East: 63.1%, West 51.0%) and have a significantly higher share of people with clear populist right-wing tendencies (East: 30.3%, West: 19.6%) (Küpper, Schröter & Zick, 2019). As this anti-migration beliefs are one driver for the success of populist right-wing parties in recent years (Küpper, Schröter et al., 2019), it can be expected that Eastern German branches of the AfD follow even more anti-immigration beliefs as their voter base shares stronger right-wing beliefs than the national average. Additionally, the mentioned socioeconomic cleavages, a socialistic past and deviating beliefs towards authoritarian regimes may cause incongruence within the policy formulation in Eastern Germany states (Küpper, Schröter et al., 2019) when considering parties to align their positions towards the voter base, combining vote-seeking and policy-seeking party goals. Furthermore, the general socioeconomic setup of Eastern German states shows higher deficits compared to the German average, which was previously described to cause incongruence, overlapping with hypothesis H2a. The assumption is that:

*H4: The eastern German branches are less congruent with the national AfD's policy positioning.*

#### 2.2.6. Relevance of a Strong Left Party

Following the median-voter theorem, a political party will align its issue positions along the respective political landscape (Rohrschneider, 2002). This leads to the assumption, that one factor that may influence populist right-wing policy formulation is the electorate strength of the respective counterparty, the Left. Here, it is hypothesized, that the local AfD orientates its policies formulation more to the left than in the national party when the electorate success of the left party in the respective area is significantly high. This can be expected for especially the eastern federal states, i.e. Thüringen, Saxony and Brandenburg, where the German left party gained between 28% and 18% of the votes in the last state election (the average result in German state elections was 6.9 %). As a result, these states are expected to show incongruence with the national party positions as their policies follow the main direction of the voter base in these areas, where the support for the left party is stronger than in national elections (9.2% in 2017). This assumption can mainly be made for economic and social policies, as the German left is described to be focussed on the defence of the welfare state (Coffé & Plassa, 2010). In general, it can be expected that:

*H5: Federal branches with a local political landscape that is influenced by a strong left party are less congruent in economic and social policies with the national AfD.*

As these findings have shown, the field of populist right-wing parties in the German federalism and their policy positions are highly complex and dependent on various factors. The party behaviour shown by the different branches is expected to follow different motivations, mainly combining policy- and vote-seeking goals. With having this theoretical background, the next section should focus briefly on methodological considerations that help to draw a more concrete picture of the AfD's policy positioning within the German multi-level structure.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

In order to carry out the envisaged analysis, the following chapter provides an overview of the research design and the methodology used to measure the relevant variables. Additionally, possible limits of measurement will be explained, including an outlook on possible future research.

#### 3.1. Research Design

As stated in the introduction, this paper aims to investigate to what extent the populist right-wing party AfD operates as a congruent party within the multi-level governance system of Germany with regard to its policy positions. The relevance of deepening research within this field lies on one hand in the new phenomena of populist right-wing parties and, on the other hand, in the specific multi-level setting of German governance. As chapter 2.1. serves as a foundation, describing how federalism in Germany is constructed and why this is relevant in terms of populism, also general party behaviour was highlighted. Therefore, Chapter 2.2. provides different hypothesis about the development of the policy positioning congruence of populist right-wing parties, depending on the motivation they follow, naming office-seeking, policy-seeking or vote-seeking. These hypotheses can give a first impression on how parties are influenced by their environment and what behaviour can be expected when analysing the case of a populist right-wing party in a multi-level governance environment.

As general theoretical considerations about populist right-wing parties in multi-level governance are already made, the fourth chapter will elaborate precisely what policy positions the national AfD party, as well as its federal branches, hold. How this theoretical concept will be measured is described in chapter 3.2.

### 3.1.1. Research Question

The underlying research question “To what extent do the regional branches of the populist radical right AfD advocate policy positions that deviate from the program of the federal party and how can the deviations be explained?” can be divided alongside two dimensions. First, it is questioned how far the populist right-wing AfD shows congruence within its policy claims. This will be measured with the help of the policy positions formulated by the party and its subnational branches. Chapter 3.2. will provide more information about the relevance of congruence in policy positioning and possible ways of measurement. The second part of the research question includes possible explanations of this incongruence, aiming to highlight specifics of party behaviour within the German political system. Concluding, this research question combines general considerations about policy positioning congruence of populist right-wing parties with integrating theories about party behaviour. Applying these concepts into the setting of the German political landscape generates practical insights into the AfD’s party behaviour and tests theories of party behaviour against the background of multi-level governance. A future extension of this research question can be made regarding other party families as well as other systems of governance.

### 3.1.2. Units of Analysis

The units that will be analysed in order to answer the research question are the local branches of the populist right-wing party AfD operating at the federal level. Hereby, the analysis will focus on current policy positions formulated by the respective parties. In order to draw a comprehensive picture of the parties positioning, the election manifestos of the recent federal election in each state will be used. This approach follows the assumption that political party behaviour follows the statements made in the elections manifestos (Thomassen, 1994) and that election manifestos represent the opinion of the whole local group of a party rather than displaying personal opinions of single politicians.

The publishing dates of these manifestos are between 2014 and 2019, depending on the date of the most recent federal election. From a more observative point of view, the election manifestos do not share a common agenda or template, which leads to the assumption of a more decentralised election manifesto formulation and party organisation strategy (Däubler, 2012). This is supported by the strong variance in length the manifestos show (starting with less than 7.000 words from the AfD in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and ending with more

than 27.000 words of Brandenburg's election manifesto, whereas the national AfD's manifesto consists of 17.805 words). Even though literature describes the preparation of election manifestos as a summary and update of already existing material of national elections (Däubler, 2012), the analysed manifestos of the AfD deviate from this as they show a high amount of individual, partly local content and do not all share the same formal guidelines. In general, the main focus of all manifestos lies in the topic of migration, integration and inner security (13% in the national manifesto), in contrast to environmental policies, which are only part of 3% of the national manifesto.

### 3.2. Measurement of Concepts

With carrying out a qualitative analysis, a broad and profound method was chosen in order to ensure that all relevant dimensions are covered and understood properly, even though the specific formulations differ between the chosen manifestos. Therefore, different dimensions and criteria have to be defined beforehand.

#### 3.2.1. Policy Dimensions

When deciding to measure party positioning following the statements made in the election manifesto, it is inevitable to define the policy dimensions that will be analysed. As there are various attempts on how to summarize relevant policy positions and identify general trends of parties, literature has not evolved a clear set of policies yet that are significant when analysing policy positions of a party's behaviours. In order to ensure a scientific basis of the compared policy dimensions, the following work will use the categories defined by Benoit and Laver (2009) in order to create a comprehensive picture of the parties policy positioning. These categories were designed with the help of expert surveys, carried out with national academics specializing in political parties and electoral politics (Benoit & Laver, 2009). With the help of these surveys, they were able to identify a set of political dimensions which are relevant individually for each country. As the research question of this paper does focus on federal level policies, policy dimensions referring to EU-level policies are excluded, as they are not covered by the regional election manifestos. With this modification, the policy dimensions developed to be most relevant for the German case are the following (Benoit & Laver, 2009, p. 228):

- economic policy

- social policy
- environmental policy
- the decentralization of decision making
- immigration

This set of policy dimensions is without any claim of comprehensiveness but serves as a reasonable basis for analysing party behaviour based on election manifestos. Using these dimensions as categories, a systematic analysis of the manifestos will be carried out, following clear and stable sub-categories. Alongside a general left-right scale, the policy positions of each group will be aligned following the statements made with regard to each policy dimension. Additionally, emphasis will be given on the salience of each dimension, measuring to what extent which dimension is addressed. As mentioned above, it is expected that different dimensions also differ in their salience, which is why the analysis has to be extended towards this quantitative form of analysis.

### 3.2.2. Coding Scheme

In order to carry out a scientific analysis alongside the named policy dimensions, a clear coding scheme has to be elaborated. Therefore, the election manifesto of the national AfD will serve as the basis for a manual content-analysis of the potential incongruence of the federal branches. This method is used as the first sight of the content has shown that the national party's opinion does reflect the average position of the party, at least content-wise. Furthermore, the national party's opinion is considered to be most visible for all voters, detached from federal states, increasing the signal effect of its policy formulations. These findings go ahead with the assumptions stated by Detterbeck, who expects federal branches to compete over influence on national party positions rather than insisting on federal autonomy (Detterbeck, 2012). Even though the federal branches hold autonomy in sub-state election campaigning, the predominance of German national politics leads to involvement of the national party leadership in the federal organization, planning and financial assistance (Detterbeck, 2012). In recent years it was found that federal branches do focus more on the specific regional contexts due to reforms of the German federal system, but this change has not yet overcome the strong influence of national parties to their federal branches (Detterbeck, 2012). With acknowledging this interwoven relationship, the programmatic influence originating from the national party is the main reason why their election programme

is used as a reference in the analysis with the federal branches. The national manifesto will be analysed alongside the stated policy dimensions and their different manifestations. With using the national manifesto as a benchmark, incongruence in policy positions can be revealed when structurally analysing the manifestos of the federal branches.

For the first policy dimension of economic policies, the subcategories defined by Benoit and Laver (2009) are the promotion of raising taxes in order to increase public services against the promotion of cutting public services in order to cut taxes. One example here would be a promoted raise of the minimum wage against cutting the wealth tax. Additionally, the subcategory of deregulation is defined as favouring high levels of state regulation and control of the market against favouring deregulation of markets at every opportunity (Benoit & Laver, 2009). The dimension of social policy is defined as either favouring or opposing liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia (Benoit & Laver, 2009). The dimension of environmental policies will be measured with exposing either policies that support the protection of the environment, even at the cost of economic growth or policies that support economic growth, even at the cost of damage to the environment (Benoit & Laver, 2009), i.e. supporting subsidies of renewable energies against the maintenance of fossil fuels. Additionally, the dimension of decentralization will be analysed along with the endpoints of policies promoting decentralisation of all administration and decision-making and policies opposing any decentralisation of administration and decision-making. (Benoit & Laver, 2009). The last dimension of immigration is interpreted as either favouring policies designed to help asylum seekers and immigrants integrate into [their] society or favouring policies designed to help asylum seekers and immigrants return to their country of origin (Benoit & Laver, 2009). Here, statements within the manifesto made regarding the task of integration against the priority of deportation will be analysed and opposed. Even though it is expectable that all branches share a similar general opinion on immigration and integration, differences in the harshness of the content of the manifesto can be expected.

Alongside these clearly defined continuums stated for each dimension, the election manifestos will be scanned, highlighted and relevant phrases summarized in order to place the policy formulation of each federal branch and the national branch within these dimensions. Every manifesto is carefully read and analysed following the dimensions, in order to provide a sufficient basis for the gathering of the information in chapter four. Here, all found



data will be applied to the formulated hypotheses, leading to confirmation or rejection of the statements.

Additionally, a comparison of salience will take place, roughly following the approach of the Manifesto Project (Alonso, Gómez & Cabeza, 2013). Therefore, the number of words that each party manifesto dedicates to each policy dimension is transferred into a percentage over the total number of words within the respective manifesto (Alonso et al., 2013). This saliency score should serve as an indicator of how much emphasis was given on each policy dimension, pinpointing its relevance in the given party manifesto without including the concrete policy position (Alonso et al., 2013). A detailed table displaying the exact salience of each dimension found within each election manifesto can be found in the Annex.

### 3.2.3. Limits of Measurement

As every scientific work, also this paper faces certain limits of measurement, which will be described briefly. First, the selection of cases, reduced to one country and one populist right-wing party, is induced by the scope of this thesis. The same goes for the number of political dimensions that are included in the analysis. As this work focusses on current policy positions, it can also be used in order to display the development of this congruence throughout repeating this approach in future research. As comprehensive research about the congruence of intra-party positions was not sufficiently carried out yet, this work aims to provide a starting point for further research on party behaviour in multi-level governance, accepting the limited scope.

Speaking of technical limits, the used approaches face, language disparities must be named. As the elaborated policy dimensions presented in chapter 3.2.1. were developed in English, a translation made by the author is necessary in order to carry out the analysis within the German election manifestos. As the author is able to provide sufficient knowledge of German as well as the English language, no loss of information or uncertainty is expected because of this circumstance. Because of topicality, this work does not claim to present a finite point of knowledge but is a snapshot of current populist right-wing party behaviour, future changes do not attack the relevance of the findings made at the time writing. Moreover, possible future changes in policy position congruence of the respective parties can be a confirmation on why the understanding of their structure and motivations is that relevant.

## 4. Analysis

As described previously, this chapter will deal with differences in policy positioning of the national AfD and its federal branches. Underlying for this analysis is a prepared overview, displaying all positions within the respective dimensions. In order to overcome this descriptive presentation of the prepared content, an analysis alongside the state hypotheses will be carried out. The single results, relevant for each branch of the AfD at the national and federal level and each policy dimension are presented in the annex. A summary of these results will be given shortly in order to underpin the following analysis.

The analysis of the policy positions within the economic dimension has shown a high variety of positions. Especially within the topic of the minimum wage, the federal branches go from opposing this form of security (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Berlin, 2016) towards claims of a higher minimum wage (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Brandenburg, 2019). Most federal branches go with the federal parties opinion of keeping the current form of the minimum wage (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017). Additionally, the claim for lower taxes is very common within the different branches and is only unsupported by the AfD's position in Thuringia and Saarland (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Saarland, 2017; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Thüringen, 2014).

With regard to the dimension of decentralization of decision making, all branches do promote lower barriers for referendums and direct democracy. The only difference here can be found in the emphasis given on the topic. But, as the AfD started as a party with the main goal for more direct democracy, this consensus is not surprising but follows the (short) history of the party. A similar picture can be drawn when analysing the branches position on liberal policies such as abortion or gay rights. Here, a clearly conservative standing can be found without any exception. But, again, the salience of the topic differs between the states, varying from 4.3% of the whole manifesto of the national party to 0.5% of Bremen's election manifesto. Additionally, some federal branches do not mention every relevant aspect, i.e. the AfD in North-Rhine Westphalia which does not mention its position towards abortion.

Within the dimension of environmental policies, a clear trend against subsidies on renewable energy and a denial of climate change can be found within all analysed manifestos. But,

whereas the federal party is in support of the use of nuclear, gas and coal for energy production, the federal branches mostly do favour forms of energy production that is relevant for their own economy. While the Bavarian AfD claims the importance of subsidies for their existing gas power plants, the branches in Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt do favour the use of lignite-fired power-stations as this benefits their economy (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Bayern, 2018; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Brandenburg, 2019; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016). These findings do follow the theory of policy-seeking party behaviour, motivated by the forms of electricity relevant to the different federal branches.

The dimension of immigration policies shows a comparable picture. The general opinion of all branches is in favour of fast returns and immigration policies that are limited to qualified personnel only. Differences within the manifestos can be found with regard to the language used, especially its harshness, and the salience of the topic of migration. The emphasis given on the topic of immigration varies from 1.8% of election manifesto by the AfD in Thuringia to 14.4% of the manifesto in Saxony-Anhalt (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Thüringen, 2014). How these described differences can be explained and where possible reasons for this incongruence can be found, will be elaborated within the next chapters.

#### 4.1. Incongruence of Positions related to diverging Poll Results

As the first stated hypothesis H1 follows the office-seeking approach, it was claimed that AfD branches with higher poll results than the national party do show incongruence in their policy positions as they are expected to adjust their positions towards opponents in order to become a possible partner within a coalition. The most recent results of election polls at the national level show 12,9% of possible voters for the AfD if an election would be pending (results from 1.07.2019, combined numbers by the institutes Civey, Forsa, FG Wahlen, Infratest dimap, INSA and YouGov) (DAWUM, 2019a). Following the hypothesis, the relevant federal branches of the AfD would be Saxony with 24,2% (15.06.2019), Saxony Anhalt with 21.0% (28.08.2018), Thuringia with 20.9% (27.06.2019), Brandenburg with 20,2% (13.06.2019) and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with 18,0% (17.01.2019) (DAWUM, 2019a).

In terms of economic policies, the national manifesto mentions both reducing the general sales tax (p.75) as well as financing higher rents (p.76) (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017). This goes ahead with the policy positioning of the AfD in Saxony (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen, 2019). The programme of Saxony Anhalt deviates from the previous position about reducing taxes and moreover follows the approach that is also highlighted by the CDU in Saxony Anhalt (as a possible coalition partner) with not reducing taxes, but investing into infrastructure and agricultural industry (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016; CDU Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016). Similar positions can be found within the manifesto of the AfD in Thuringia and the respective of the CDU (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Thüringen, 2014; CDU Landesverband Thüringen, 2014) as well as with regard to the AfD in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which positioning regarding the reduction of taxes is closer to the strong competitors of the CDU and DIE LINKE (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016; CDU Landesverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016; DIE LINKE. Landesverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016). With regards to content, a different picture can be drawn when looking into the policy positions stated by the federal branch of Brandenburg. Here, a higher minimum wage is claimed, which is not in line with the national AfD, but with the strongest competitor, the social democratic party (poll results of 19,7% at the 13.06.2019).

When reviewing the H1 under the light of the dimension of decentralisation of decision-making, no significant differences in policy positions between the different federal branches compared to the national party can be found. All groups state their desire to simplify referendums, promote direct democracy and reduce the influence of political parties as hitherto. The same can be said with regard to the positioning within liberal social policies such as abortion or rights of homosexuals. Here, all six branches oppose lower barriers for abortion and reject legal equalisation of same-sex marriages. Also, the dimension of environmental policies draws a clear picture, whereas all analysed branches do favour solutions that support economic growth rather than prioritizing the protection of the environment.

In terms of the dimension immigration, the findings made within the dimension of economic policies cannot be strengthened as no relevant differences in policy positions between the five federal branches and the national branch can be found. The state of Brandenburg is no exception, even though the left party is a big competitor at the state level, propagating an

opposite policy positioning in terms of immigration. One explanation here might be the mentioned concept of issue ownership that leads to high congruence within the policy dimension that is as salient as immigration is in case of the AfD (Küpper, Berghan et al., 2019).

Referring back to the concept of office-seeking party behaviour, which is said to go beyond policy dimensions, the first hypothesis cannot be confirmed fully as the federal branches with higher poll results than the national party do not fully orientate their policy positions alongside possible government coalition partners. But, in terms of economic policies, four out of five branches showed congruence with the respective possible coalition partner rather than with the national branch. A possible explanation might be the development of the AfD detached from a certain ideology, which now combines aspects of direct democracy, Euro-scepticism and Anti-immigration beliefs (Detterbeck, 2011). Even though all branches proclaim social market economy, the lack of a clear common idea about the economy is said to be missing (Cavallaro et al., 2018), which is why this dimension is more likely to be aligned towards the positions of possible future coalition partners than other. Summarizing, the hypothesis H1 can partly be confirmed, naming that federal branches in states with higher AfD poll results are less congruent with the national AfD in terms of economic policy positions, gearing policy positions towards possible coalition partners.

#### 4.2. Incongruence of Positions related to diverging Socioeconomic Characteristics

When considering political parties to be motivated by policy-seeking, one might expect diverging positions on economic policies when the socioeconomic background of the party is diverging (Detterbeck, 2012). Hereby, two different factors will be included in the analysis: the respective unemployment rate of each state and the GDP per capita.

##### 4.2.1. Incongruence within Economic Policies

When ranking the federal states alongside these attributes, the state of Bavaria shows the lowest unemployment rate (2.6% in June 2019) (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019), while Hamburg owns the title of the state with the highest GDP per capita (65.603€ in 2018) (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2019). For both states, it is true to say, that their economic policies focus more on liberal approaches like the reduction of taxes and support of companies rather than higher public spending. In comparison to the national

manifesto a lack of support for the minimum wage can be found, naming a clear claim of the AfD Hamburg to link social benefits with citizen's work (p.24) in order to use high tax incomes more efficient for investments into infrastructure (p.13) (Alternative für Deutschland Fraktion Hamburg, 2015). Also, the AfD in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg follows this trend with promoting less monetary support for unemployed in order to increase their motivation (p.27) and aims to lower existing land transfer taxes giving further incentives for companies (p.40+41) (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Baden-Württemberg, 2016).

In contrast to this, the federal states of Bremen with the highest unemployment rate (10% in June 2019, as a comparison Germany with 4.9%) (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019), and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with the lowest GDP per capita (27.905€ in 2018, as a comparison Germany with 40.851€) (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2019), do show support for higher public spending such as a minimum wage and higher rents, which is in line with the positions stated by the national parties program (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Bremen, 2019; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016). But, especially within the positions of Bremen, the socioeconomic background of a high unemployment rate can be read. No general lowering of taxes, not even trade tax or wealth tax is supported, which are mentioned in nearly all manifestos with the claim of being lowered or abolished. Moreover, the federal branch supports the idea of giving benefits for low incomes and pensioners in the form of tax exemption (p.23). Support for the economy can mainly be found in the form of reduction of bureaucracy (p.18), no emphasis on targeted investments is given (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Bremen, 2019). This is supported by the policy program of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt (as the state with the second-lowest GDP per capita), which also does not support the idea of a general reduction of taxes and rather focusses on financial support for families and free day-care (p.6) (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016). This is in line with the policy positioning made by the federal branch of Brandenburg, whose GDP is comparable to the score of Saxony-Anhalt (29.411€ in 2018). Here, the federal party promotes an increase of the minimum wage, deviating from the national party opinion as well as from states with higher GDP per capita (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Brandenburg, 2019). Hence, a clear trend towards policies relevant to the respective state can be found, naming economic policies that follows the socioeconomic structure of the states and aligns its policies alongside their needs. Throughout

that, incongruence evolves as the national party, including economically strong states, rather focus on streamlining of the state's involvement.

When comparing the national AfD's party positioning in the dimension of economic policies with a state they share a similar social background with, a strong congruence with the manifesto of lower Saxony can be found. The federal branch of the AfD with the same unemployment rate like Germany (4.9%) also promotes the maintenance of the minimum wage, sufficiently financed rents and the removal of the land transfer tax, which is totally in line with the national party (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Niedersachsen, 2017).

As a conclusion, deviating policy positioning of parties with diverging socioeconomic characteristics can be found. As expected in hypothesis H2a, the federal branch with the highest GDP per capita Hamburg shows more economic driven policies than the national party as well as the state of Bremen with the highest unemployment rate presents more positions towards higher public spending than found within the positions of the national party. In the case of Bavaria (lowest unemployment rate) and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (lowest GDP per capita), no substantial difference in economic policies compared to the national party positioning can be found. Therefore, the hypothesis can only be partly be confirmed and cannot be supported for all analysed cases, without finding evidence opposing the hypothesis.

#### 4.2.2. Incongruence within Immigration Policies

As indicated previously, the narrative of populist right-wing parties focuses on immigration policies, blaming these for lack of financial support for German families and an overcharge of the tax system (Emcke, 2016). This assumption based on previous literature is also supported by the national party manifesto of the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017). Even though also the national AfD acknowledges demographic problems caused by low birth rates and ageing population, immigration is not seen as a desirable solution. With this described linkage between lower living standards for the German society and immigration policies, hypothesis H2b concludes that federal branches of states with a socioeconomic background that deviate from the German standard are less congruent in immigration policies with the national AfD. As indicated above, the relevant federal states with socioeconomic characteristics deviating most from the national median are Bavaria, Hamburg, Bremen and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. Following their statements regarding immigration policies, unsurprisingly, a

general negative connotation towards immigration can be found. As a possible explanation, this argumentation is the main factor named by AfD voters (Franzmann, 2018), which is why incongruence with the national branch might not be as extensive as found within other dimensions.

But, apart from context-related congruence, also the quantitative salience of the topic of immigration has to be included. Even if the same positions are shared, especially the federal branch of Bremen with the highest unemployment rate shows a high salience of the topic of migration. 13.7% of the manifesto deals with their positioning in the field of migration, while the national parties percentage is by 10.9% (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Bremen, 2019). Bremen's score is the second-highest within the dimension of immigration, only the manifesto of Saxony-Anhalt, the state with the second-lowest GDP per capita, contains more statements regarding immigration policies (14.4%) (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016). Bavaria as the state with the lowest unemployment rate in Germany shows a very low emphasis on immigration policies, naming 4.3% of the latest election manifesto (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Bayern, 2018). Following this logic, also the salience score of the dimension of immigration within the manifesto of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania as the state with the lowest GDP per capita in Germany should be high. Against this assumption, only 6.7% of their manifesto deals with immigration policies, which is below the factor of the national party. As a conclusion, no clear confirmation can be given regarding the assumption that federal branches of states with a socioeconomic background that deviates from the German standard are less congruent in immigration policies with the national AfD. As a support for this refusal, the policies formulated by the state Berlin with the second-highest unemployment rate in Germany, focus less on the topic of immigration (6.7%) than Hamburg as the state with the highest GDP per capita (7,8%), both lower than the score of the national party.

When concluding these findings, it can be said that a deviating socioeconomic background of the federal states only partly leads to higher incongruence with the national party's policy positioning. In the dimension of immigration policies, the two parties with topic salience that deviates upwards from the national party, do show socioeconomic incongruence as either their unemployment rate is especially high or their GDP per capita comparatively low. Within economic dimensions, incongruence can be found as parties with a more difficult



socioeconomic background tend to show more welfare chauvinistic policies compared to the national party's policies.

#### 4.3. Incongruence of Positions related to diverging Numbers of Asylum Applicants

As the distribution of asylum seekers is within the competence of the national government, a nationwide system, including the so-called Königsteiner formula, regulates the localisation of incoming refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019). This formula which is also used for the distribution of research funds is to two-thirds composed of the tax revenue and to one-third of the population size of the respective federal state. In case of the formula relevant for the distribution of asylum seekers in 2018, the financial year of 2017 is used, applicable for all asylum seekers obligated to live in a governmental reception centre (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019). Following these key figures, the states of North Rhine-Westphalia (39579 asylum seekers in 2018) and Bavaria (21911 asylum seekers in 2018) are the states with the highest number of asylum seekers (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019). The federal states of Bremen (1880 asylum seekers in 2018), the Saarland (2685 asylum seekers in 2019) and Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania (2828 asylum seekers in 2018) show the lowest total number of asylum seekers, including the lowest quotas following the Königsteiner formula (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019). Here, hypothesis H3 would expect incongruence with the national party positioning on immigration policies as the number of asylum seekers influences the harshness of the policy positioning of parties (see Dustmann et al., 2018).

As indicated in chapter 4.2 within the analysis of hypothesis H2b, the congruence of the immigration policies between the federal branches of the AfD and the national party is comparatively high, which is why possible factors of incongruence are more difficult to detect. But especially when analysing the federal states with lower shares of asylum seekers, one can identify incongruence regarding the rhetoric used to emphasize the policy positions. The parties in Bremen and Saarland do show strong negative connotation when analysing past immigration policies and do link these migrants with rising criminality, naming the number of delinquent foreigners and the violent night of New year's eve in Cologne (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Bremen, 2019; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Saarland, 2017). Against the assumption made by Dustmann et al. (2018), particularly the

states with a low quota of asylum seekers show more strict, negative connotations regarding the integration of immigrants. These findings are also supported by a recent study of the Bertelsmann Foundation, claiming that less social contact with immigrants leads to higher anti-immigration attitudes within the German electorate (Pickel, 2019). This is also supported by the AfD's election manifesto of North Rhine-Westphalia. The federal state with the biggest number of asylum seekers in 2018 does not, in contrast to Dustmann's assumptions, show stronger anti-immigration policies compared to the national level. Moreover, their policy formulations about immigration are less strict and do only cover 5.7% of their manifesto (compared to 10.9% of the national manifesto).

A possible reason for that can be found within the specifics of the German federalism apart from economic differences, naming culturally and historically grown differences. As an example, the extensive manufacturing sector of North Rhine-Westphalia was one reason why intensive guest-worker immigration took place until 1974. This led to a high share of people with a migration background as well as the inclusion of foreigners into society. It is needless to say that also this state faces problems with the integration of migrants but is considered to be a pioneer in integration policies, detached from party opinions at the national level. From a vote-seeking point of view, a high number of migrants may also lead to a transformation towards migrants as possible voters, taking the loss of congruence with the national party. As a comparison, the Bavarian policy positioning found within the AfD's manifestos is as negative as the ones previously mentioned (Bremen & Saarland) which could be explained by the missing history of guest-worker immigration, that influences the connotation of migration within society towards an economic benefit rather than a burden for the social systems. (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014)

Referring back to the formulated hypothesis H3, no growing incongruence can be found within states with extraordinary high or low quotas of asylum seekers. But, without any doubt, the policy formulations of the federal branches do differ when it comes to salience and language. As an example, the federal branch with the highest salience of immigration policies and very harsh formulation of the claims, Saxony-Anhalt, has comparatively low quota of asylum seekers (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016), while the AfD of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the country with the lowest share of asylum seekers shows very low emphasis on the topic of migration within their election manifesto (Alternative für

Deutschland Landesverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016). From their content alignment, the parties do not show relevant incongruence when it comes to immigration policies, all favouring fast returns instead of integration policies. As mentioned beforehand the concept of issue ownership is applicable here, with additionally highlighting the importance of state-specific characteristics that shape vote-seeking party behaviour. Under the light of the presented examples, including results from further, unmentioned election manifestos, the stated hypothesis H3 can be rejected, including the note that the findings by Dustmann et al. (2018) in Denmark are not applicable to the AfD's policy positioning within the multi-level governance of Germany.

#### 4.4. Incongruence of Positions related to the former Division of Germany

Additionally to the specifics of policy positioning within the federal structure of the German states, also its history is expected to influence policy positioning to date. As populist right-wing parties are said to focus on social cleavages dividing the electorate, the historically grown differences may also lead to different vote-seeking party behaviour, aligning alongside the characteristics of the Eastern German population rather than following the national parties positioning.

When analysing the economic policies formulated by the Eastern German branches of the AfD, one can find a general trend towards higher public spending compared to the national AfD's manifesto, naming more financial support for unemployed (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen, 2019), higher minimum wages (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Brandenburg, 2019), and the rejection of general reduction of taxes (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2016; Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Thüringen, 2014). Even though all parties stick to their commitment towards the social market economy, their interpretation differs. As a comparison, most western branches of the AfD show less incongruence with the national policies than the East German branches. It is especially interesting, that the only two branches who either favour a higher minimum wage or stronger controlling mechanisms, are East German branches, while only one branch of the AfD in East Germany (Berlin) opposes the minimum wage as such, also deviating from the national agenda (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Berlin, 2016). Within the dimension of economic policies, a tendency of

Eastern German branches of the AfD can be drawn showing incongruence with to national AfD's policy positioning.

Overall, an analysis of the liberal and social policy positioning of the AfD in East German states shows that no significant incongruence can be found. All manifestos follow the statements made by the national party, opposing alternative family models, gender research, lower barriers for abortion and equality in rights of homosexual marriages. But the same congruence can be found when including the policy positioning made by the AfD in the other federal states, who also share these beliefs. It can be acknowledged that these social policies agendas are not influenced by the composition of the electorate in each state as argued by the vote-seeking theory (Downs, 1957), yet gear their formulation towards the national election manifesto. Even though the program of the AfD is considered to lack a common ideology, growing conservative values, evolved within the change from a mainly Eurosceptic towards a mainly anti-immigration party (Lees, 2018), have led to common ground when it comes to social policies such as the right to abortion or liberal gay rights. Differences can only be found in the extension of the statements.

Within the dimension of environmental policies, as expected all federal branches of the AfD and the national party do favour economic growth in contrast to rising prices caused by environmental protection. Within the election manifestos of East German branches of the AfD a comparatively high emphasis is given on the topic of environmental policies, naming six out of seven branches that give more space for environmental policies than the national manifesto. Especially Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg are highly depended on lignite mining, providing more than two thirds of their annual power plant output in 2016 (Umweltbundesamt, 2017), which might be one explanation why the salience of the topic is comparatively high. Only the federal branch of Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania does not mention environmental policies as an own topic, additionally giving no clear statement regarding the necessity of coal-fired power plants (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016). When analysing their annual power plant output, it is easy to see three-quarter of the output is generated by either wind power or photovoltaic plants (Umweltbundesamt, 2017). Here, vote-seeking party behaviour may lead to small incongruences with the national party as especially in Eastern German states employment is still highly depended on the trade-off between economic and environmental policies,

increasing the fear of social relegation caused by unemployment. Again, an interrelation of different dimension can be found, causing fragmented reasons for incongruence.

Even though recent studies have indicated stronger shares of right-wing beliefs within East Germany (Küpper, Schröter et al., 2019), which would lead to the assumption that the respective branches of the AfD do formulate their anti-immigration policies more strict, no clear pattern supporting this idea can be found. As mentioned, the dimension of immigration is as salient within the AfD self-presentation and furthermore covers most of the media statements published about the AfD, that strong incongruences within this dimension could possibly cause problems within the party. As an example, between 2015 and 2017 two prominent leaders of the AfD left or were forced to leave the national AfD (Pfahl-Traughber, 2019). These incidents were linked to a clear swing of the right within the party as both Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry supported the moderate wing, disagreeing with certain anti-immigration beliefs and policies (Pfahl-Traughber, 2019). Most recently, formations within the AfD organising alongside right and far-right beliefs have evolved, indicating the potential of party splitting due to the formulation of immigration policies (Becker & Schuller, 2019). These debates have indicated that the AfD's positioning on immigration policies are not aligned alongside socioeconomic factors, cultural beliefs or the personnel of each federal branch, but do follow the national policy positioning.

A similar picture can be drawn when analysing the dimension of decentralization of decision making. Here, the national AfD promotes decentralisation of administration and decision-making, naming more power to the federal and local level, simplifying direct democracy and shifting power from political parties towards the society (p.11+12) (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017). These claims are supported by all federal states, differences can again be found within the emphasis that is given on the topic of direct democracy and decentralisation. While the AfD in Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania shows the highest salience score of this topic (5.9% compared to 5.5% of the national AfD), also the branch with the lowest emphasis given on the dimension of decentralisation can be found in East Germany (0.6%). Even though the East German population is said to have a higher distrust in democracy and feel politically powerless (Küpper, Schröter et al., 2019), which may lead to the assumption that policies of decentralization are more prominent here, hypothesis H4 cannot be confirmed at this point. One reason for that might be, similar to immigration policies, the history of the party that

started with the fight for more direct democracy and Euroscepticism, symbolising a permanent part within the otherwise thin-centred ideology of the AfD (Korsch, 2016).

Concluding, hypothesis H4, claiming that the AfD's federal branches of East German states show incongruence with the national policy positioning cannot be confirmed fully. With regard to the dimensions of economic and environmental policies, the hypothesis can be confirmed, acknowledging different socioeconomic side-effects that may have led to this incongruence. The dimensions of immigration and social policies, as well as the topic of decentralization, do not show significant incongruence that would support the hypothesis of a substantial incongruence between East German federal branches of the AfD and the national party.

#### 4.5. Incongruence of Positions related to a strong Left Party

As hypothesis H5 deals with the political landscape influencing vote-seeking parties in their policy formulation, incongruence is expected when the respective states show strong support for the Left party, representing the ideological counterpart of the AfD concerning relevant parties in the German party landscape.

As one relevant example of the latest federal election, the vote outcome in Thuringia 2014 can be named, where the Left party gained 28.2% as the second strongest party while the AfD's gained 10.6% of the votes (Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik, 2014). Even with acknowledging the comparatively long time passed since the last election, the success of the Left party is undeniable, especially in comparison to the party's success at the national level (9.2% in 2017). Current polls indicate, a significant change within the next election in October 2019 is expected, showing stronger results for the AfD (20.9%), partly based on the loss of votes by the left party (22.8%) (DAWUM, 2019b), indicating the Left party losing its position as a party of protest (Olsen, 2018). Even though this analysis is based on recent election results in 2014 and the respective election manifestos, the gain of knowledge remains, as the AfD's party behaviour in 2014 within the respective political landscape is as meaningful as future analysis based on upcoming elections. As it was already indicated in the previous subchapter that the AfD Thuringia's economic policies do show incongruence with the national level, advocating stronger control of the minimum wage and do not mention a general reduction of taxes like wealth or trade taxes (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Thüringen, 2014). Additionally, they formulate the idea of financial support for qualified personnel in order to

remain an attractive state for highly needed specialists. Also incongruent with the national level and most other states, they do not explicitly state the rights of homosexuals or their position on legal barriers for abortion (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Thüringen, 2014). It can be discussed whether the absence of a topic can be seen as incongruence, but, apart from that, the AfD in Thuringia does show more political proximity with the economic and social policy positions of the left party than the national AfD (DIE LINKE. Thüringen, 2014).

When expecting strong results of the left party being responsible for incongruence of the federal AfD with the national party positions, the counterargument would say that a weak left party is in support by the policy positions stated by the national AfD. Without a political landscape at the federal level that deviates from the national structure, congruence with the national party can be expected as the respective branch does not face a counterparty it has to follow in policy positioning in order to gain votes. As one example of this setting, the AfD's federal branch of Rhineland-Palatinate can be used. Here, the state election in 2016 revealed low support for the left party (2.8%) while the AfD gained 12.6% of all votes (Landeswahlleiter Rheinland-Pfalz, 2016). The economic policies stated by this branch do show a high level of congruence with the national branch, supporting a lower land transfer tax (p.21) and raising investments into research and development (p.23) while questioning general subsidies (p.23) and highlighting the importance of social market mechanisms (p.22) (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Rheinland-Pfalz, 2016). As an example, both branches do favour personal initiative in form of qualification or company formation rather than stronger financial support provided by the state in form of social policies (p.20) (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Rheinland-Pfalz, 2016). In terms of social policy formulation such as gay rights, or traditional family models, a similar picture can be drawn. The AfD in Rhineland-Palatinate states its support for the traditional family model consisting of a mother, father and child, and opposes gender studies as well as the legal equality of homosexual registered partnerships including adoption (p.9) (Alternative für Deutschland Landesverband Rheinland-Pfalz, 2016). In this case, strong congruence with the national AfD's policy positioning within the dimension of social and economic policies can be found, highly deviating from the policy positions stated by the left party in Rhineland-Palatine (DIE LINKE. Rheinland-Pfalz, 2016).

The presented examples indicate incongruence that is influenced by the respective political landscape. Especially when considering parties to show vote-seeking behaviour, aligning their

policy formulations towards positions deviating from the national party is a useful tool in order to maximise the voting outcome. Even though hypothesis H5 can be confirmed following the analysed cases, it cannot clearly be identified whether the correlation of incongruence and a strong Left party is generally based on the strength of the left or whether the left parties success is only due to low socioeconomic factors, as elaborated in hypothesis H2a.

#### 4.6. Aggregated Discussion of Factors influencing Incongruence of Policy Positions within the AfD

As this chapter has shown, a variety of factors can be named to influence incongruence within the policy positions of federal branches of the AfD. An overview about the results will now be given and presented graphically at the end of the chapter.

As hypothesis H1 indicated, the AfD's branches do follow office-seeking behaviour within their election manifestos as soon as they receive high poll results, increasing the chance for holding office. Even though literature expects incongruence with the national party to be counterproductive for future elections (Boucek, 2002), aligning positions with future coalition partners is applicable to office-seeking motivations. In terms of H1, reflecting mainly office-seeking motivations, no overall confirmation of the assumptions can be found. It was shown that within most dimensions no higher incongruence can be found as soon as poll results are high. This opposes the theory of office-seeking motivated party behaviour and indicates that also federal branches with high results follow policy- or vote-seeking motivations when formulating their policies.

The second hypothesis H2, dealing with socioeconomic factors influencing the congruence of policy positions, shows differences throughout the different policy dimensions. In the case of economic policies, the incongruence of positions can partly be found within the AfD's positioning in states strongly deviating from the national average either in their unemployment rate or their GDP per capita. As this incongruence is not consistent among all branches with highly deviating socioeconomic factors, a general incongruence with the national AfD evolving from deviating socioeconomic factors cannot be confirmed. But it can be noticed that branches with similar socioeconomic factors compared to the national level do show generally higher congruence in economic policies than states with deviating socioeconomic characteristics. In the case of immigration policies, no substantial difference



with the policy positioning of the national AfD can be found. But, in case of salience, especially the states with the lowest marks used to analyse their socioeconomic standing, do show the highest salience of immigration policies within the local AfD's election manifestos. One explanation for that, also relevant for upcoming findings, might be the fear of people with lower socioeconomic standards of migrants receiving preferential treatment, meaning less financial state support for the own group (Decker, 2018). It can be concluded that the expected influence of the socioeconomic context of the branches can lead to higher incongruence with the federal party, especially when it comes to policy- and vote-seeking behaviour within the economic dimension.

Hypothesis H3 followed the findings made by Dustmann et al. (2018), claiming that higher shares of asylum seekers lead to higher anti-immigration beliefs within a region. When considering the AfD to be a vote-seeking party, it was hypothesized that higher shares of asylum seekers within states lead to the incongruence of federal branches of the respective branches with the national AfD's policy positioning in immigration policies. As the analysis of the election manifestos has shown, this hypothesis is rejected, induced by a generally high congruence within the topic of migration and, apart from that, no clear patterns of incongruence regarding salience or language. As the AfD's anti-immigration policies are their main claim in recent debates, a strong incongruence within federal branches deviating from the national party opinion is highly unlikely and may lead, as examples of the national level have shown, to indirect exclusion from the party (Pfahl-Traughber, 2019). As a summary, within the dimension of immigration, the salience of the topic leads to a general congruence within the party, including all level of governance.

The fourth hypothesis H4 dealing with incongruence traced back to the former division of Germany can only partly be confirmed. As the analysis has shown, a higher incongruence of East German states within the dimensions of economic and environmental policies was found, but no clear hint for the underlying reasons for that incongruence can be given. Further research is needed in order to elaborate a clear line between the factors influencing this incongruence. In terms of immigration policies, the analysis has shown that stronger right-wing beliefs found within the East German society (Küpper, Schröter et al., 2019) do not lead to incongruence between the policy positioning of the national AfD and East German branches. Here, a high correlation of different factors influencing policies in East German

states can be found, indicating that this set of attributes leads to shared policy positions within East German states. This assumption would support the idea of policy- and vote-seeking party behaviour influences by the relevant socio-economic context.

Regarding hypothesis H5, the AfD's federal election manifestos have shown that the presence of a strong left party at the federal level increases incongruence with the national AfD's policy positions and thus hypothesis H5 can be confirmed. These findings follow the theory of vote-seeking which expects political parties to align their policy formulations alongside the respective party landscape in order to increase their voting outcome. But, as mentioned beforehand, a clear distinction between the factors influencing each federal branch of the AfD in each dimension cannot be made, which is why the confirmation of hypothesis H5 must be seen under the light of possible further influencing factors.

It was found that factors influencing the congruence of policy positioning within the AfD are highly overlapping, naming the high poll results of the AfD in East Germany, combined with their rather weak economic status added to comparatively high results of the left party. This result can be transmitted to the motivation driven the relevant party behaviour. It can be assumed that especially the concepts of policy- and vote-seeking party motivation can practically hardly be separated. In the end, the examples have shown that the theory about party behaviour based on either office-, policy or vote-seeking motivations cannot be fully confirmed as other aspects such as policy salience do influence also federal party politics within their policy formulation.

## 5. Conclusion

Under the light of rising populist right-wing parties and a lack of comprehensive picture about their policy positions at the federal level, this paper examined possible factors influencing incongruence within the policy positions of the national AfD and its federal branches. Especially in terms of economic policies, the analysis has shown that the German multi-level federalism leads to growing incongruence between these two levels as the federal branches are influenced by various factors within their policy positioning, deviating from the national party opinion. As presented in the previous chapter, especially socioeconomic factors of the federal branches do lead to incongruence with the national AfD, indicating the importance of the federal states in Germany compared to the national level. Additionally, the AfD as a populist right-wing party does show incongruence when it comes to clear concepts within the named economic dimension, indicating the lack of a comprehensive shared ideology that includes the organisation of the welfare state. It was underlined, that the AfD can be considered to be less stable than older parties due to its incongruence with the national party, showing high variations, especially alongside the dimension of economic policies, in both directions, naming spending for social policies. Additionally, hypothesis H1 and H5 have indicated that the shape of the federal party landscape does influence the policy positioning of the respective federal branches of the AfD, deviating from the national party. Furthermore, it was shown that the parties policy positioning is influenced by issue salience, including the prominence of its position in immigration policies.

These results are based on theoretical considerations about party behaviour, naming office-seeking, policy-seeking and vote-seeking, based on the theory developed by Müller and Strøm (1999). Following their assumptions about the motivations of parties when formulating their policies, different hypotheses were made regarding the incongruence that might be caused by party behaviour based on the different concepts. Here, a combination of the theoretical considerations about policy formulation and research about populist right-wing party behaviour was gathered, presenting factors that are expected to influence the congruence of policy positions within the AfD in the German federalism. In order to carry out the analysis alongside these hypotheses, the most recent election manifestos of the federal branches of the AfD, including the national AfD, were analysed following the political dimensions, elaborated for Germany within the Election Manifesto Project (Alonso et al., 2013). These

dimensions were coded and afterwards applied to all 17 manifestos. Additionally, the quantitative salience of each dimension for each manifesto was highlighted and can be found in the Annex.

As the main point of work, the policy positions found in each manifesto were set in relation following the assumptions made in the hypotheses, analysing possible connections between the congruence or incongruence of the manifestos with the national AfD and characteristics of the respective federal state. As mentioned beforehand, even though this analysis has taken place following a clear plan, the final policy positioning within each manifesto can be compared to a Blackbox. But, with testing various hypotheses as happened, the factors influencing the incongruence of the federal AfD within its election manifestos can be localized and limited. Here, a combination of future studies applied to the findings of this work may help to indicate and specify which factors do influence populist right-wing parties policy positions and which are only side-effects, not directly relevant for the policy formulation. It is inevitable to extend the existing approach of research in order to strengthen the existing results i.e. regarding the influence of socioeconomic factors on the policy formulation of populist right-wing parties. Here, policy- or vote-seeking party behaviour within the policy formulation was particularly visible in the economic dimension, representing a political dimension where the division between the different German states is highly visible and policy positions easy adjusted. Additionally, in terms of Eastern Germany factors of anti-immigration beliefs, economic difficulties and a deviating cultural history are overlapping factors, where separation, in order to highlight the clear motivation when formulating party positions, is difficult to examine.

Summarising, this presentation of the AfD's policy positions within the German multi-level governance system indicates a high level of incongruence within this populist right-wing parties. These findings go along with wider literature that expected the AfD to show such behaviour due to its lack of common ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Furthermore, it was shown, that policy positioning at the federal level does not necessarily follow the direction of the national party but moreover identifies the socioeconomic and political environment of the federal level and aligns the policy statements towards the respective state. These findings go ahead with the theory of office-, vote- and policy-seeking parties, that were mentioned beforehand. It was shown, that the behaviour motivated by these attributes varies, depending

on the dimension used and the prominence of the topic within the overall discourse of the party. A lower influence of the federal circumstances and lower motivating of party behaviour by the three stated forms of party behaviour can especially be found within dimensions with high issue salience, naming immigration policies but also liberal policies, representing the conservative values of the party. These party values show influence beyond the presented theories on party behaviour, indicating further aspects relevant when analysing the policy positioning of political parties.

Even though Völkl et al. (2008) have highlighted the importance of national-level politics in some federal state elections, naming the federal province of Lower Saxony, Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Westpommern, the analysis of the positions stated by the AfD indicates that these results are not applicable for the populist right-wing party and its policy formulations. Furthermore, the definition of right-wing populism given by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), highlighting the lack of a shared ideology and a strong focus on the topic of immigration and Euroscepticism, is supported with the findings made within the analysis. With regard to anti-immigration literature, it was not supported that higher shares of asylum seekers lead to stronger anti-immigration beliefs (Dustmann et al., 2018), contrary it was found that the AfD in federal states with low shares of asylum seekers is less congruent with the national party, supporting stronger anti-immigration beliefs. It was indicated that future research on shared anti-immigration beliefs is necessary in order to gain a comprehensive picture about recent developments occurred with the refugee crisis, influencing motivations for anti-immigration beliefs within the electorate of populist right-wing parties. Without any doubt it was found that policy positioning within one party is dependent on the level of governance, reflecting the importance of attributes relevant at the respective level, without eroding the influence of national party politics.

With knowing about incongruences of policy positions of the AfD at the federal level compared to the national level, future research on the congruence of other European populist right-wing parties is inevitable. The existing explanation for party behaviour as presented above are insufficient when it comes to the congruence or incongruence of policy positions within a multi-level governance system. As indicated in the beginning, current research in the field of right-wing populism focusses on their electorate and the framing they use in order to strengthen their positions within the European political landscape. Up to now, a structural

analysis of the rising populist right-wing parties is missing, leaving a gap of knowledge compared to traditional parties like socialists, liberals or conservatives. Furthermore, such an analysis would give implications about a change in behaviour of populist right-wing parties when acting in another system of governance. From another point of view, future research could also focus on the policy formulations of populist right-wing parties at the communal level, acknowledging that the German AfD gains its highest voting results at more local levels, i.e. a very close loss of the AfD candidate for holding office as a mayor in Görlitz in June 2019 (AfD: 44.8%, CDU: 55.2%) (Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen, 2019). Including this lower level into research about the congruence of the different level of governance, could give insights into the long-term stability of the party which is expected to suffer from strong incongruences in policy positions at the different levels (Boucek, 2002).

In the end, this work has contributed to the systematic understanding of the AfD's policy positioning at the federal level, leaving room for further research, increasing the understanding of this party group. Future elections have to reveal whether this incongruence at the federal level is a current trend of a party that lacks widely shared economic policies or whether the AfD's strategy to focus on this level of governance in order to maximise their vote outcome, will remain and be adopted also by more ideologically sounded parties. This understanding is not only relevant in terms of scientific knowledge but also gives implications for other party families on how to respond to this rising political group.

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## Annex

### I. Policy Positions of the different Branches

#### a. Policy Positions within the Dimension of Economic Policies

	<b>Economic Policies</b>
<b>National</b>	Generally lower taxes, limiting rising taxes, general sales tax reduced to 7%, reducing subsidies (p. 67) <--> pro minimum wage, securing rents and financing them also from other taxes, higher unemployment benefits for people with long-term professional experience (p.77-78)
<b>Hamburg</b>	Generally lower taxes, no wealth tax (p.30), no inheritance and gift tax (p.67), recovery of the national budget (p.32), qualification rather than payment support und unemployed (p.35) <--> higher rents after 40 years of working experience (p.35)
<b>Thuringia</b>	Reducing debts (p.20), support of medium-sized enterprises (p.21) <--> keeping minimum wage and stronger control (p.22), financial support of qualified personnel (p.13), no claim about reducing taxes apart from families (p.6)
<b>Saarland</b>	A stronger focus on the industry (p.13), lowering or no land transfer tax and general no higher taxes (p.13), no land transfer tax, no wealth tax, no inheritance tax (p.35) <--> keeping minimum wage, higher rents (p.34)
<b>Lower Saxony</b>	No land transfer tax (p.37) <--> minimum wage should remain (p.32), rents should be financed sufficiently (p.33)
<b>Hessen</b>	No land transfer tax (p.43), incentives for unemployed rather than welfare policies (p.45)
<b>Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	Focus on debt repayment also with help of tax income (p.26), less monetary support for unemployed (p.27), lowering land transfer tax (p.40), incentives for companies (p.41) <--> monetary support for families (p.29)
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	Efficient financing of the economy (p.33) <--> free child day-care starting from age 4 (p.6), subsidising agricultural industry (p.47), no reduction of taxes mentioned
<b>Bavaria</b>	No inheritance tax (p.39), lowering general sales tax (p.78) <--> financial support of families pausing their jobs after new parenthood (p.43), financial support for tech-start-ups from Bavaria (p.72), supporting families buying property with 15.000€ per child (p.95), special (higher) minimum rent for people living in Bavaria (p.98)
<b>Bremen</b>	No taxes on lower-income <--> pro minimum wage, higher rent for long-life working, trade tax should be stable, wealth tax not mentioned, supporting employees (p.16-18)
<b>Brandenburg</b>	Lower taxes (p.67) <--> higher minimum wage (p.18)
<b>NRW</b>	Lower taxes, no wealth tax (p.30), no inheritance and gift tax (p.67), recovery of the national budget (p.32), qualification rather than payment support und unemployed (p.35) <--> higher rents after 40 years of working (p.35)



<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	Lowering land transfer tax (p.21), more investments in research and development (p.23), no higher public spending
<b>Mecklenburg Western-P.</b>	Against solidary support (p.19) <--> financial support for families, free kindergarten (p.3-4), lowering debts in a controlled way, still making investments (p.19)
<b>Berlin</b>	Self-help rather than financial state support (p.28), lowering land transfer tax (p.26), reducing debts (p.26), no minimum wage in private sector but also no immoral wages (p.28), fewer taxes but more self-responsibility (p.24) <--> procurement law should be more social (p.29)
<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	Market mechanisms and competition are highlighted (p.32), against solidary payment (p.35), no higher taxes (p.35), no land transfer tax (p.36) no inheritance tax (p.43) <--> financial support for families (p.18)
<b>Saxony</b>	No land transfer tax, no wealth tax (p.12), less regulation (p.14) <--> financial support for families (p.26), higher spending for unemployed and sticking to the minimum wage (p.42), higher rents (p.43)

b. Policy Positions within the Dimension of Decentralisation of Decision Making

	<b>Decentralisation of Decision Making</b>
<b>National</b>	Promoting decentralisation in all levels, more direct democracy, less power of parties (p.11+12)
<b>Hamburg</b>	Only mentioned with regard to the acceptance of DDTIB and desired referendum about it (p.17)
<b>Thuringia</b>	Referendums in questions of migration (p.8), in general, easier referendums and more direct participation (p.19)
<b>Saarland</b>	Direct democracy at all levels of democracy (p.20)
<b>Lower Saxony</b>	More direct democracy, strengthening communal decision making, lowering power of political parties (p.14)
<b>Hessen</b>	Easier referendums at communal levels (p.9)
<b>Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	More referendums at the federal and communal level (direct democracy) (p.15)
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	More communal power (p.35), direct democracy at all levels of governance (p.60), the principle of subsidiarity (p.63)
<b>Bavaria</b>	direct democracy following the swiss model (p.9), intervening into legislative processes with direct democracy (p.10), Bavarian needs before EU legislation (p.56)
<b>Bremen</b>	Incentives for less bureaucracy are mentioned (p.18), but no emphasis on the topic
<b>Brandenburg</b>	More direct democracy (p.8), reducing the number of members of parliament (p.8)
<b>NRW</b>	More direct democracy (p.26), more power to the federal level and more subsidies of communal level (p.77)
<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	Direct democracy in all levels of governance and less power to political parties (p.7)
<b>Mecklenburg Western-P.</b>	Lower barriers for referendums, supporting direct democracy and opposing power of parties (p.20)
<b>Berlin</b>	Lower barriers for referendums (p.27)
<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	Direct democracy following the swiss example (p.7)
<b>Saxony</b>	More power to the communal level (p.50), easier referendums, especially in case of building mosques (p.22)

c. Policy Positions within the Dimension of Social Policies

	<b>Social Policies</b>
<b>National</b>	In support of home care of small children and traditional family constellations, no right for abortion, no promotion of alternative relationships apart from “father, mother, child” (p.50-53)
<b>Hamburg</b>	In support of a traditional family model, against gender mainstream (p.25)
<b>Thuringia</b>	In support of a traditional family model, against gender mainstreaming (p.6)
<b>Saarland</b>	In support of a traditional family model, no legal equality of homosexual registered partnership and no right of adoption (p.32)
<b>Lower Saxony</b>	Against gender mainstreaming (p.42), in support of the traditional family model (p.35)
<b>Hessen</b>	In support of the traditional family model (p.19), favouring higher barriers for abortions (p.20), against gender mainstreaming (p.25)
<b>Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	No right of adoption and legal equality of homosexual registered partnerships, in support of the traditional family model, no gender-ideology (p.28)
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	Against gender-ideology (p.9), no right of adoption and legal equality of homosexual registered partnerships (p.9), in support of the traditional family model (p.5)
<b>Bavaria</b>	Abortion is a fundamental injustice, campaigning towards anti-abortion beliefs and traditional family model in school (p. 42), stopping gender-mainstreaming and early sex-education in school (12 years old) (p. 50)
<b>Bremen</b>	Against gender studies (p.9), but no family model is mentioned neither homosexuality nor abortion
<b>Brandenburg</b>	Promoting the traditional family model and oppose abortion (p.10)
<b>NRW</b>	In favour of registered partnerships for homosexuals but opposing marriage, in favour of the traditional family model (p.22), the topic of abortion is not mentioned
<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	No right of adoption and legal equality of homosexual registered partnerships, in support of the traditional family model, no support of gender-ideology (p.9)
<b>Mecklenburg Western-P.</b>	Traditional family model, no legal equality of homosexual registered partnerships (p. 4)
<b>Berlin</b>	Against gender mainstreaming (p.8), no legal equality of homosexual registered partnerships (p.9), against lower barriers for abortion (p.9)
<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	In support of a traditional family model, against gender-mainstreaming (p.17)
<b>Saxony</b>	Traditional family model (p.25), higher barriers for abortion (p.26)

d. Policy Positions within the Dimension of Environmental Policies

	<b>Environmental Policies</b>
<b>National</b>	Rising prices for energy have to be stopped with using nuclear power and modern gas and coal-fired power stations, no subsidies of E-Mobility or renewables (p.88), no clear scientific results about human-made climate change
<b>Hamburg</b>	Against the subventions of renewables and higher costs for electricity (p.11), highlighting the importance of interests of society and economy (p.26)
<b>Thuringia</b>	Ending disadvantages for the economy because of higher costs following subsidies for renewables, against EEG (p.27)
<b>Saarland</b>	Against the support of renewables and in favour of cheaper solution (p.25)
<b>Lower Saxony</b>	Nuclear power and fossil fuels in order to lower costs for electricity (p.26)
<b>Hessen</b>	Energy policies should follow market movements (p.62), in support of conventional power stations, against renewables (p.64), questioning the urgency of climate change (p.61)
<b>Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	Using nuclear power competences of BaWü (p.48), adjusting energy policies towards economic factors and needs (p.49) including the use of coal-fired stations (p.47)
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	Energy transition shouldn't block economic development of Germany (p.37), improving existing lignite-fired power stations instead of subsidising renewables (p.38)
<b>Bavaria</b>	In support of biological diversity (p.57), fewer subsidies, more market economy (p.69), against EEG-subsidies that support old coal-fired power stations and disadvantage Bavarian gas power plants (p.69)
<b>Bremen</b>	Very little information on environmental policies but clearly stating that the competitiveness of Germanies industries is more important than environmental policies (p.27)
<b>Brandenburg</b>	Questioning climate change and acting against subsidies for renewables (p.72), sticking to gas and coal for energy production (p.74)
<b>NRW</b>	dependency on employment in coal mentioned, no subsidies for renewables (p.63), lower electricity tax (p.64), in support of nuclear power (p.65) but acknowledging climate change
<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	no interference into market mechanisms throughout the EEG and subsidies for renewables (p.17)
<b>Mecklenburg Western-P.</b>	Against EEG law, in support of gas power plants (p.18), but not much emphasis is given on the topic
<b>Berlin</b>	Use of coal is necessary (p.33), but three pillar-based policies are desired: safe, cheap and sustainable (p.32), against EEG (p.33)
<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	nuclear energy is still necessary (p.44), lower energy costs are necessary (p.42)
<b>Saxony</b>	Against EEG and subsidies for renewables (p.66), in support of nuclear power and coal-fired power plants (p.67-68)

e. Policy Positions within the Dimension of Immigration Policies

	<b>Immigration Policies</b>
<b>National</b>	Migration is seen as no solution for lower birth rates and integration is impossible which is why a deficit migration is required, countries of origins should be pressured to take migrants back (p.38)
<b>Hamburg</b>	Integration as a duty of immigrants (p.18), dealing with asylum applicants already in North Africa rather than in Germany in order to reduce immigration (p.19)
<b>Thuringia</b>	Immigration should follow German rules and needs, a fast procedure to deport illegal immigrants (p.8)
<b>Saarland</b>	Strong focus on financial costs of integration and way to deport immigrants but no concept of how integration could work (p.39-40)
<b>Lower Saxony</b>	Germany is not a country for immigration (p.47), the right to remain here only if integration is successful
<b>Hessen</b>	National interests should be the basis for rules of immigration (p.36), integration is an obligation of immigrant (p.39)
<b>Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	Integration of some immigrants is considered to be impossible (p.19), consequent deportation (p.21), immigration should follow economic benefits for Germany (p.22), integration must be motivated by immigrant's willingness to adopt German culture (p.24)
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	Only immigration of qualified personnel (p.23), maximum quota (p.23), less monetary support and faster deportation (p.26), integration following German values and motivated by the immigrant (p.29), no promotion of welcome culture but willingness to integrate of immigrants (p.29)
<b>Bavaria</b>	reinventing "Abstammungsprinzip" (p.18), reinventing Bavarian border control (p.23), stopping foreign influence in Germany (p.31), integration only when speaking the German language, otherwise deportation (p.46)
<b>Bremen</b>	Focus on immigrants as criminals, the distance towards Islam is emphasized, integration should not be supported but based on attempts made by asylum seekers (p.15)
<b>Brandenburg</b>	No financial support of asylum seekers, integration only after clear selection of asylum seekers (p.59)
<b>NRW</b>	Integration should follow German values, but as soon as no clear claim for asylum was confirmed, they should be sent back (p. 38-39)
<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	Integration should follow German interests, otherwise deportation (p.13)
<b>Mecklenburg Western-P.</b>	building refugee centre in home countries (p.12), immigration law should follow German interests (p.13), social payments only after 5 years of contribution (p.13)
<b>Berlin</b>	Fighting reasons for immigration rather than inviting immigrants to travel to Germany (p.18), making financially motivated immigration less attractive (p.20), self-motivation rather than state initiatives in integration policies (p.20)

<b>Schleswig-Holstein</b>	Clear requirements for successful integration (p.29), only temporary support to bypass time until immigrants can return (p.29)
<b>Saxony</b>	Emigration as fast as possible, less incentives to stay as possible (p.44 et)

## II. Salience of Dimensions <sup>1</sup>

	<b>Economic Policies</b>	<b>Decentralisation</b>	<b>Social Policies</b>	<b>Environmental Policies</b>	<b>Immigration Policies</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>National</b>	1489w = 8,7%	974w = 5,5%	764w = 4,3%	598w = 3,4%	1933w = 10,9%	17.805w
<b>Hamburg</b>	633w = 6,4%	18w = 0,2%	279w = 2,8%	221w = 2,2%	769w = 7,8%	9.867w
<b>Thuringia</b>	365w = 3,5%	59w = 0,6%	170w = 1,6%	807w = 7,7%	187w = 1,8%	10.505w
<b>Saarland</b>	353w = 3,5%	230w = 2,3%	163w = 1,6%	298w = 3,0%	327w = 3,3%	10.021w
<b>Lower Saxony</b>	730w = 3,6%	290w = 1,4%	87w = 0,4%	892w = 4,5%	1357w = 6,6%	20.517w
<b>Hessen</b>	1089w = 5,6%	565w = 3,0%	321w = 1,7%	899w = 4,8%	1097w = 6,0%	18.615w
<b>Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	897w = 4,4%	244w = 1,2%	589w = 2,9%	1420w = 7,0%	2090w = 10,3%	20.368w
<b>Saxony-Anhalt</b>	518w = 3,6%	434w = 3,0%	157w = 1,1%	507w = 3,6%	2055w = 14,4%	14.266w
<b>Bavaria</b>	682w = 3,2%	369w = 1,8%	471w = 2,2%	623w = 3,0%	901w = 4,3%	21.004w
<b>Bremen</b>	282w = 3,9%	75w = 1,0%	15w = 0,2%	73w = 1,0%	1006w = 13,7%	7.335w
<b>Brandenburg</b>	1402w = 5,1%	704w = 2,6%	228w = 0,8%	1117w = 4,1%	918w = 3,3%	27.594w
<b>NRW</b>	642w = 4,5%	312w = 2,2%	78w = 0,6%	458w = 3,21%	640w = 4,5%	14.240w
<b>Rhineland-Palatinate</b>	363w = 4,4%	479w = 5,8%	207w = 2,5%	284w = 3,4%	437w = 5,2%	8.335w
<b>Mecklenburg Western-P.</b>	309w = 4,5%	409w = 5,9%	36w = 0,5%	148w = 2,5%	463w = 6,7%	6.915w

<sup>1</sup> Following the election manifestos and the dimensions and their coding (similar to the qualitative analysis), number of words, percentage in relation to the number of words of the whole text document, rounded to one decimal place

<b>Berlin</b>	401w = 3,2%	228w = 1,8%	253w = 2,0%	496w = 4,0%	830w = 6,7%	12.408w
<b>Schleswig- Holstein</b>	749w = 4,3%	339w = 1,8%	144w = 0,8%	526w = 2,8%	609w = 3,3%	18.641w
<b>Saxony</b>	875w = 4,2%	446w = 2,1%	288w = 1,4%	1059w = 5,1%	879w = 4,2%	20.992w
<b>Average</b>	≈693w = 4,4%	≈363w = 2,3%	≈250w = 1,6%	≈610w = 3,9%	≈971w = 6,1%	≈15.718w

### III. Declaration of Academic Integrity

I hereby confirm that this thesis on *the AfD's Policy Positioning within the German Multi-Level Governance System* is solely my own work and that I have used no sources or aids other than the ones stated. All passages in my thesis for which other sources, including electronic media, have been used, be it direct quotes or content references, have been acknowledged as such and the sources cited.

Münster, 23/08/19



I agree to have my thesis checked in order to rule out potential similarities with other works and to have my thesis stored in a database for this purpose.

Münster, 23/08/19

