



SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

The Dissatisfied Right:

A Micro-Level Analysis of Political Dissatisfaction in Supporters of
the Populist Radical Right in Rural East Germany

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Abstract

Contemporary election results of the populist radical right (PRR) reveal significant spatial variation of PRR support within countries. To a large extent, this variation is believed to be based on local and regional differences within the PRR's electorate, which calls for the inclusion of micro-level analyses in our study of the PRR. One acclaimed explanation approach that lacks a micro-level perspective is the concept of political dissatisfaction. Individuals, who are dissatisfied with politicians and politics in general, are found more likely to vote for parties of the populist radical right; however, there is little explanation of what constitutes political dissatisfaction. This thesis adds to an in-depth understanding of political dissatisfaction by capturing and analysing PRR supporters' personal accounts of political dissatisfaction in the exemplary case of Mansfeld-Südharz, a rural region in east Germany that formed part of the former GDR. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews, five elements of political dissatisfaction could be identified: a sense of longing for past normality, discontent over allocation of public funds, anti-immigratory attitudes, a biased media at the hands of the elite, and hypocritical, ineffective politics at the verge of a loss of democracy. Further, political dissatisfaction was found to culminate in a wider fear for the state of democracy, of which the AfD is perceived as a potential corrective. The results show the relevance of the local context in the emergence of political dissatisfaction while simultaneously offering a new perspective in the analysis of the PRR's electorate.

Keywords: *political dissatisfaction, populism, PRR, electorate, AfD, east Germany*

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List of Acronyms

AfD	–	<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i> , engl.: Alternative for Germany
ALLBUS	–	<i>Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften</i> , engl.: GGSS
CDU	–	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i> , engl.: Christian Democratic Union Germany
FDP	–	<i>Freie Demokratische Partei</i> , engl.: Free Democratic Party
GDR	–	German Democratic Republic
GGSS	–	German General Social Survey (engl. for ALLBUS)
GLES	–	German Longitudinal Election Study
NPD	–	<i>Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , engl.: National Democratic Party of Germany
PRR	–	Populist Radical Right

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Figure 1: A map of Germany, indicating the location of Saxony-Anhalt (own illustration)

Figure 2: A map of Saxony-Anhalt, indicating the location of Mansfeld-Südharz

(source: Hagar66, 2009. Lage von Landkreis Mansfeld-Südharz in Sachsen-Anhalt, Deutschland. *Wikipedia*. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Saxony-Anhalt_MSH.svg)

Figure 3: Illustration of the concept of political dissatisfaction after Farah et al (1979)

Introduction

Across Europe and across the world, the upsurge of right-wing populism has taken centre stage in the present-day discursive landscape. Driven by a deep-seated concern about the implications their successes might have for established democratic systems, academia, media, and a general public are looking to explain right-wing populists' appeal to a growing share of society. Thereby, populism is mostly understood as a thin-centred ideology that considers society as divided into two homogenous, antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. 'The people' is conceived as one morally superior unit that has a general will, a *volonté générale*. Politics should be an expression of this general will (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). The populist radical right (PRR) then unites populism with nativism¹ and authoritarianism² (Mudde, 2007, 22-3), thereby placing it at odds with mainstream liberal and democratic values.

Hence perceived as a challenge to established democratic values, the growing support for the PRR attracts a large chunk of scholarly attention. While most studies focus on the national level, a deeper look at past election results reveals significant sub-national variation in levels of PRR support. For instance, in the first round of the French presidential elections in 2017, in the department Aisne 35.67% voted for the populist right-wing candidate Marine Le Pen compared to 4.99% in the department Paris. At the last federal elections in Germany in 2017, results for the PRR party AfD between electoral districts ranged from 4.9% in Münster to 35.5% in Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge. Similar examples can be found across European countries, demonstrating that support for PRR parties differs significantly within countries. This highly localised variation raises questions about the comprehensiveness of current explanation attempts, and about the usefulness of theories that merely focus on the

¹ Nativism, a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, strives for states to be composed only by members of the native group. Non-native elements, who are identified based on cultural traits such as race, ethnicity, or religion, (Golder, 2016, p. 480) are considered fundamentally threatening to the monocultural nation-state (Mudde, 2007, p. 19).

² Mudde (2007, p. 23) defines authoritarianism as "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely."

national level (Golder, 2016, p. 491). Aiming for a thorough exploration of PRR support, it hence seems indispensable to take a closer look also at regional and sub-regional occurrences. In other words, spatial dimensions of PRR support should be of increased interest. Presumably, the local disparities are influenced by differences in subnational political opportunity structure, candidate quality, party organisational strength, and other supply-side factors. These factors do not account for the whole picture though. Instead, much of the spatial differences is believed to be based in differences in demand, meaning in variations within the electorate and its preferences (Golder, 2016, p. 491-3). It is those differences within the electorate that initially motivated this study.

Considering this call to analyse the PRR's electorate from a local point of view, one intuitive example of local distinctiveness can be found in the case of Germany. Having been divided not only into two countries but into two adversarial political ideologies for about forty years is an incision so deep, it almost seems negligent not to bring the separate regions into focus. Recently, east Germany and its so-called new states (ger.: *Neue Bundesländer*)³ have shifted into the centre of public attention in the context of the PRR party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). Following the large influx of refugees to Germany and Europe in 2015, the AfD transformed from a softly Eurosceptic, non-radical party to a stereotypical PRR party, resulting in massive increase of support (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019, p. 8). In all five new states, the AfD has gained vote shares between 20 and 25% – about twice as much as in country's west. The discrepancy is striking. Finding explanations for it is the interest of much contemporary discourse around the AfD's success, both in media and academia. Much scholarly effort goes into capturing a comprehensive image of AfD supporters through large-scale panel

³ East Germany refers to the five federal states at the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, ger.: *DDR*). After the German re-unification in 1990, the fourteen districts that composed the GDR acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany, ger.: *BRD*) in form of five federal states: Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, and Thuringia. Berlin, although situated in the east, is not regarded as one of the five new states. The federal republic of Germany considered Berlin as one of their federal states already during the separation. In the process of reunification, East-Berlin was incorporated into the already existing federal state Berlin.

surveys such as ALLBUS⁴ or GLES⁵. These panel surveys give a great overview over sociodemographic characteristics of AfD supporters. Screening through them, one striking aspect is the difference between east and west in levels of satisfaction with the state of politics and of democracy. Ever since the country's reunification, people in east Germany consistently reported lower satisfaction with the state of democracy than people in west Germany, despite a similarly high acceptance of democracy as the best form of government. Although the difference in satisfaction with democracy between east and west has decreased from around 20% in 1991 to around 15% in 2018 (Pickel & Pickel, 2020, p. 484), it remains striking and therefore constitutes an interesting starting point for further analysis.

Multiple authors have pointed to the impact of political dissatisfaction as one of the key factors for peoples' susceptibility for right-wing populist parties and movements (Hansen & Olsen 2019; Kleinert & Schlueter 2020). In-depth explorations of relevant factors that lead to political dissatisfaction are however scarce. Political dissatisfaction is mostly used in surveys as an a-priori concept; its effects are well-studied, its individual manifestations less so. For example, the ALLBUS 2018 assesses participants (dis)satisfaction by asking: "Generally speaking how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with democracy as practiced in Germany?" and "How satisfied are you – on the whole – with the current performance of the GERMAN GOVERNMENT?"⁶ As can be seen and as will be further shown in the literature review, this phrasing does not unpack the notion of political dissatisfaction. Against this backdrop, an in-depth analysis of micro-level understanding of political dissatisfaction appears interesting. What do people mean when they state they are dissatisfied in a survey? What are the reasons for their dissatisfaction? Combined with the aforementioned call to approach the analysis of PRR support from on a local level and the differences in levels of political dissatisfaction in

⁴ <https://www.gesis.org/en/allbus/allbus-home>

⁵ <https://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/gles>

⁶ Questions 23 and 24 of the 2018 version of the questionnaire, <https://www.gesis.org/en/allbus/contents-search/study-profiles-1980-to-2018/2018>

east and west Germany, an in-depth analysis of political dissatisfaction among PRR supporters in east Germany seems a promising route. Studying east German AfD supporter's personal understandings of political dissatisfaction increases our understanding of political dissatisfaction and thus contributes to a more targeted use of the concept. By analysing one local case and pointing to its specificities, this thesis further advocates for taking a theory from the national to the local level and thereby contribute to a more nuanced understanding, here of the concept of political dissatisfaction.

Aim and Research Questions

This thesis aims for an increased understanding of the concept of political dissatisfaction as a driver of populist radical right voting through a qualitative in-depth analysis of micro-level manifestations of political dissatisfaction. Taking AfD supporters in the administrative district Mansfeld-Südharz, Saxony-Anhalt, in east Germany as a case that focuses on a rural area, it is interested in PRR supporters' personal accounts of dissatisfaction with politics and the reasons they give for being dissatisfied.

In order to achieve this aim, this thesis sets out to answer the following research questions: *I. Which issues within the wider political sphere do voters of the AfD in rural areas of east Germany identify that account for their personal dissatisfaction with politics? II. In what ways do these voters consider the AfD as a potential corrective to these perceived defects of politics?*

Delimitations of the Study

The above definition of research aim and questions brings about certain delimitations. First, given the limited timeframe of this thesis, the study is not designed in a comparative way, thus no claims will be made about differences in east/ west Germany, rural/ urban areas, gender, or different age groups. As will be explained at a later point, assessing potential impacts of the transformation period post-1989 on participants is one of this thesis' focus points. The age group has thus been limited to people born before 1981, which in consequence impedes

statements about younger generations. Further, the study is focused on Mansfeld-Südharz as an example for a rural area in east Germany. In urban areas, PRR supporters accounts of political dissatisfaction may well be different. As it is the point of this thesis not to generalise across different socio-spatial contexts, this limitation leaves room for further analyses focusing on other local contexts. Second, the study assumes political dissatisfaction as a driver of PRR support based on existing research. Considering the convincing scholarly arguments, this thesis does not probe this assumption and direction of causality.

Contribution to the Field of Global Studies

The AfD's success is a local example of a global trend in which the PRR has established itself as a new party family (Mudde, 1996). This party family is widely perceived as problematic as they promote political ideas addressed as illiberal democracy and as they tend to disrupt the political process (Arzheimer, 2018, p. 1). Thus, driven by a core dedication to democratic values, scholars aim to understand the factors favouring the election of PRR parties. This thesis contributes to this understanding by suggesting a change of perspective to the local level. It explores individuals' political dissatisfaction as a core motivation to vote for the PRR. This dissatisfaction arises within a specific context; understanding this context can help to broaden our understanding of people's criticism and thereby ultimately offers a chance to address them. Through a candid interest in people's concerns, we gain the chance of a more comprehensive picture of this trend. An encompassing understanding is a necessary first step in the attempt to uphold liberal values. As the analysis will show, individuals' political dissatisfaction is highly influenced by local happenings while simultaneously based on larger trends on national or regional level. Potential intervention attempts, ranging from low-threshold initiatives such as offers of open conversations to further research, should take this local context-dependency into account. This means, while being a global trend, the increasing support for the PRR must be studied also in a local context.

This thesis exemplarily points out the relevance of political geography of PRR support. It provides an insight into micro-level accounts of political dissatisfaction, thereby contributing to the literature on the subject. It further resonates with a general concern with local manifestations of global phenomena within the field of Global Studies. Echoing Saskia Sassen's (2018) understanding of the global as structured inside the national, this thesis calls for the inclusion of micro-level analyses that assess individuals' accounts and local contexts in the study of PRR support.

Background

The fall of the Berlin wall on 9th November 1989 and the official reunification of Germany one year later on 3rd October 1990 precluded a period of fundamental transformations in the just acceded 'new federal states'. Individual experiences are manifold, every former GDR citizen has their own story to tell. Although much time has passed, the repercussions of those events are tangible to the present day. East and west differ in their socio-demographics, economic strength, and regarding election results. While many will argue that the country's division is a thing of the past, others will give account of clichés, prejudice, and discrimination. Recently, discussions about Germany's two parts have re-emerged in public discourse, often with a focus on the AfD's stronger results in the country's east. Making no claim to be exhaustive, this chapter points out key happenings of the transformation period to enable a comprehensive understanding and categorisation of the successive discussion.

The GDR was a socialist state characterised by lack of freedom for its citizens and a deteriorated rule of law. Its end was then publicly perceived as a turn to democracy by its citizens. Economically, the transformations were expected to result in an upswing of the east's economy – 'flourishing landscapes' (ger.: *blühende Landschaften*) in then-chancellor Helmut Kohl's (in)famous words. The reality, however, were fundamental transformations that hit peoples' ways of lives to the bone. Within an extremely short time frame, almost all major companies were shut down, alongside affiliated social institutions. Unemployment and

precarious working conditions became widespread. Settlements were disconnected from transport services (Engler, 2019, p. 3). Within a few years, social and economic structures across the entire country collapsed. Central element of these transformations was the transition of the GDR's economy from a socialist planned economy to a social market economy. Central managing instrument for this reform was the so-called *Treuhandanstalt* (short: *Treuhand*). From early 1990 until the end of 1994, the *Treuhand* steered economic transformation through privatisation. The GDR's state-owned companies (ger.: *Volkseigene Betriebe, VEBs*) were sold to private investors in an attempt to modernise the GDR's economy and finance the country's reunification. In total, more than 12.000 companies were privatised by the end of 1994. Through these processes, two thirds of all east German employees lost their jobs in the early 1990s. 3700 companies were shut down. From 4 million workplaces under the *Treuhand's* control, only 1.5 million remained by the end of 1994. Further, against initial expectations the *Treuhand* did not make a profit but instead ended their work with a significant deficit of 330 billion D-Mark (Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung, 2021). To many, the *Treuhand* serves as a scapegoat for the east's economic hardships. An historically adequate evaluation of its works is difficult, the sheer mass of information, complexity and emotional public discourse complicate the process further. In any case, the *Treuhand* remains the most disputed governmental institution up until today (Kowalczyk, 2020, p. 123).

As much as personal accounts of the transformation period vary, so do regional accounts. The area chosen as a case for this study, Mansfeld-Südharz, is located in southwestern Saxony-Anhalt (Figure 1 & 2). Former centre for copper slate mining and copper smelting, the region used to be one of the GDR's most important industrial areas. Following the fall of the wall, the area's mining industry was fully decommissioned, leading to major unemployment. Up until today, the region remains economically weak. According to the research centre Prognos' comparative analysis of economic and sociodemographic developments of different areas in Germany, the 'Zukunftsatlas 2019', the district Mansfeld-Südharz is facing severe risks

for the future, ranking at place 398 out of 401 districts.⁷ Further, approval rates for the AfD are well above average ranging around 25%, making it the second-strongest party after the Christian Democrats CDU. The region's particular context shaped by the transformation period and the strength of the AfD makes Mansfeld-Südharz an interesting case for the exploration of political dissatisfaction.



Figure 1: Map of Germany, indicating the location of Saxony-Anhalt (green) within the territory of the former GDR (yellow)



Figure 2: Map of Saxony-Anhalt, indicating the location of Mansfeld-Südharz (red)

Literature Review

Explaining electoral support for the populist radical right lies at the heart of a large and ever-growing body of academic literature. Based on Klaus von Beyme's (1988, pp. 15-6) call to include parties in right-wing extremism research, literature can be divided into two main groups: approaches focusing on the supply-side and others focusing on the demand-side of electoral support. Supply-side explanations usually refer to factors inherent to radical right parties such as manifestos, organisational structures and resources, and the presence of a 'charismatic leader'. Demand-side factors describe individual variables such as personality

⁷ <https://www.prognos.com/en/node/947>

traits, experiences, and personal attitudes, which may predispose voters to support an RRP (Arzheimer, 2018, p. 217). This research project is focusing on the demand-side.

The literature on demand-side explanations of the PRR's electoral support is vast and quickly growing. The variety of approaches is large; therefore, the following literature review is by necessity highly selective. It will focus on contributions around the concept of political dissatisfaction. Other important approaches include protest voting, deep explanations such as effects of certain personality traits or theories of group conflict and deprivation, and anti-immigratory attitudes. Starting off with some terminological clarifications, this literature review summarises different conceptualisations of political dissatisfaction and outlines its relation with the concept of protest voting. In a second step, it takes a deeper look how political dissatisfaction is used in case studies, paying special attention to quantitative election surveys.

Some Words of Clarification

While there seems to be a consensus in literature that negative attitudes towards various political institutions on the micro-level have an impact on peoples' voting behaviour, we find considerable disagreement regarding terminology making a precise distinction difficult. In anglophone literature, most often used terms are political dissatisfaction, political discontent, and political disaffection. Other common but less frequent concepts include political dissent and political alienation. Related but not synonymous are the concepts of political de- and realignment and political trust and legitimacy. Among the German-speaking scientific community (and in media discourses) the term *Politikverdrossenheit*, which roughly translates to political querulousness, has achieved broad popularity. For a comprehensive discussion of the German relative of the concept see Arzheimer's (2002) eponymous monography. Despite this terminological plurality, the above-mentioned concepts are mostly regarded as synonyms (Wright, 1981, Arzheimer, 2002, p. 181). In election surveys and quantitative research, the term political dissatisfaction is most common. For this reason, and because dissatisfaction seems to be the most relatable word for the concept when doing field work, this thesis will stick to the

term political dissatisfaction. To comprehensively summarise the concept, however, the following literature review includes work that uses different nominations. For the sake of clarity, the literature review will adopt the terms used by the authors. The latter part of the thesis regards these as synonymous names for the same concept and will subsume them under the label political dissatisfaction.

Conceptualisations of Political Dissatisfaction

Political dissatisfaction is a rather vague concept that still lacks a precise definition. Generally, it describes a sentiment of dissatisfaction caused by negative attitudes towards political decision-makers, political institutions, and/ or the overall way democracy works. Mostly, the referent object is the individuals' nation state, or sometimes a wider region such as the European Union. These negative attitudes are expected to drive individuals to vote for the PRR. In the following, most relevant conceptualisations of political dissatisfaction will be outlined, followed by a short positioning of political dissatisfaction in relation to the concept of protest voting.

Political Dissatisfaction in-depth: Attempts of Definition and Operationalisation

One of the most elaborate characterisations of political dissatisfaction was developed by Farah et al (1979). Based on David Easton's (1975) renowned work on political support, the authors argue that the degree of support of public authorities, governments, and political systems is determined by citizens' evaluations of political outcomes (p. 410). Discontent with the performance of these political institutions, viz. political dissatisfaction, thus results in a withdrawal of support. In further detail, Farah et al present political dissatisfaction as a multi-dimensional concept, based on Easton's (1975, pp. 436-7) proposition of two modes of political support (or the withdrawal of it). Either, it can be specific, i.e. related to the actions of concrete political authorities, or diffuse, which means a rather fundamental discontent with the regime per se. In this vein, Farah et al distinguish between specific and diffuse types of political evaluation and between authorities and the regime as different referent objects of political

evaluation. They then allocate indicators to each sub-aspect (Figure 3). Thereby, the authors present political dissatisfaction as a four-dimensional concept which includes the aspects of government/ opposition (specific | authority), policy dissatisfaction (specific | regime), and responsiveness (diffuse | regime). They do not name any indicators for diffuse (dis)satisfaction with authorities (upper-right quadrant), although Easton (1975, p. 455) assumes the existence of this category. Instead, Farah et al (1979, p. 410) introduce a lack of internal efficacy as the fourth dimension of political dissatisfaction.

		Types of Political Evaluations	
		Specific	Diffuse
Referents of Political Evaluations	Authority	Government/Opposition	–
	Regime	Policy Dissatisfaction	Responsiveness

Figure 3: Political Dissatisfaction after Farah et al (1979, p. 431)

In their collaborative volume on political disaffection, Torcal and Montero (2006) and their contributors take a different stance. The authors argue that “critical attitudes toward politics and representative institutions comprise all together a distinctive attitudinal dimension that should be differentiated from political support” (p. 5). This dimension is political disaffection. This stands in contrast to Farah et al who intrinsically linked political disaffection and political support. Torcal and Montero define political disaffection as “the subjective feeling of powerlessness, cynicism, and lack of confidence in the political process, politicians, and democratic institutions, but with no questioning of the political regime” (p. 6). According to the authors, political disaffection thus contains two partly independent aspects: a general distrust of politics and lack of engagement with political processes (political disengagement), and beliefs about the lack of responsiveness of political authorities and lack of confidence in political institutions (institutional disaffection). Institutional disaffection compares to Farah et al’s level of specific support; political disengagement comes close to diffuse support. The latter encompasses political efficacy in a broader way than Farah et al., including indicators such as

subjective political interest, political salience, or importance of politics in life, and internal political efficacy (p. 16).

Lastly, in a collaborative volume edited by Pharr and Putnam (2000, p. 23) a group of authors offers a list of possible indicators of political disaffection. They understand political confidence, which they equate with public satisfaction with representative institutions, as a result of the information to which citizens are exposed, their evaluation criteria for government and politics, and the institutions' actual performance. A decrease in political satisfaction may be the result of a change in any of these variables. Unlike the aforementioned contributions, the authors do not include diffuse discontent with politics in their outline.

While, as shown by the above, there is no clear-cut definition of political dissatisfaction, scholars agree in their understanding of it as a multi-faceted sentiment that is in part depended on individual evaluation of political performance. A level of diffuse discontent with politics in general likely also forms part of this sentiment.

Political Dissatisfaction as a Driver of Protest Voting

Protest voting for PRR parties seems to be a frequent way of expressing dissatisfaction. Pippa Norris et al (2005), Hans-Georg Betz (1994), Schumacher & Rooduijn (2013) and others have demonstrated a correlation between political dissatisfaction and protest voting for the radical right⁸. Although protest voting is not immediate focus of this study and will thus not be outlined in detail, it is worth presenting linkages between the two concepts.

Several works within the field of election research link political dissatisfaction to engagement in protest activities (see Norris, 1999; Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007). Protest activities may refer to attendance of demonstrations or abstention from voting, or it can mean the vote for a PRR party. Dissatisfied citizens are found more likely to cast their vote for the PRR. Thereby, two strands of argumentation are dominant in literature. Accounts of pure protest

⁸ Regarding the radical left, significantly less research has been done so far. For examples see Schumacher & Rooduijn (2013) and Quaranta (2015).

voting understand voting for the PRR as an act unconnected to the proximity between the party's and the voter's policy preferences. A politically dissatisfied citizens casts their vote for the PRR merely in the desire to punish incumbent parties and to show a sign of protest. Hence, their support for the PRR is driven exclusively by dissatisfaction with the establishment (Cohen, 2020, p. 664). Another perspective suggests that protest voting can instead include considerations about the party's policy. Dissatisfied voters who hold negative attitudes towards what they perceive as the establishment can be attracted by the PRR's policies and their anti-elite narratives (Cohen, 2020, p. 664). In addition to this distinction, Christensen (2016) argues that since causes and consequences of political dissatisfaction may differ, different kinds of political dissatisfaction exist. Out of these, he finds only one linked to protest. While some scholars, including Pippa Norris (1999) and Levi & Stoker (2000) see low levels of support as a potential benefit for democracy as it helps keeping decision-makers accountable, others understand citizens as alienated and confused rather than critical which points to a democratic problem (Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007). As a result, Christensen (2016, p. 784) identifies three different kinds of political dissatisfaction: unsupportive citizens (low political support | high subjective political empowerment), disempowered citizens (high political support | low subjective political empowerment), and disenchanting citizens (low political support | low subjective political empowerment). He finds that only unsupportive citizens are likely to protest given their low level of support combined with a high degree of perceived political efficacy (p. 794).

In sum, political dissatisfaction can be regarded as a driving factor for protest voting. It can be a single factor or be combined with matching policy preferences between voters and the PRR. Further, it seems that a sense of high political efficacy fosters protest behaviour.

A-Priori Use of the Concept in Research

Most analyses of political dissatisfaction and its relation to PRR support are based on data from national or regional panel surveys. Interested in the effects of political dissatisfaction

on participants' voting behaviour, these studies commonly ask participants to rank their satisfaction with political performance and/ or with democracy in general on a Likert scale. This form of query does not offer a definition of political dissatisfaction, it does not account for individual understandings nor driving forces behind it. In this way, most studies use political dissatisfaction as an a-priori concept to in a second step analyse and unveil potential impacts of political dissatisfaction on PRR support. To illustrate this a-priori use of the concept, this section is intended as a brief overview of relevant works and their operationalisation of political dissatisfaction.

Seven studies have been selected to cover a wide variance in surveys used and in countries in focus. The table below shows the survey used and how political dissatisfaction is measured. What can be seen is that, first, there is no consistency in indicators used across different surveys to account for the item political dissatisfaction. It is thus harder to compare different accounts of political dissatisfaction with each other. In addition, while the indicators used vary in their specificity, they generally remain on a comparably high level of abstraction. What exactly it means to be dissatisfied and why that is, is left up to the respondents.

Author(s)	Survey	Attitudinal indicators used to measure political dissatisfaction
Rooduijn et al, 2016, p. 36	LISS Panel	Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me Political parties are only interested in my vote and not my opinion People like me have no influence at all on government policy
Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000, p. 72	German General Social Survey (ALLBUS/ GGSS)	Does the German political system function well or not at all?

Lubbers et al, 2002, p. 358	Eurobarometer, ISSP National Identity Module	Would you say that you are satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in your country?
Norris, 2005, p. 156	European Social Survey	State of education in country nowadays State of health services in country nowadays How satisfied with the national government How satisfied with the way democracy works in country How satisfied with life as a whole
Swyngedouw, 2001, pp. 232-3	Belgian-Flemish public broadcaster's exit poll	Disappointment in political organisations and politics in general (open ended questions)
Bélanger & Aarts, 2005, pp. 7-10	Dutch Parliamentary Election Study panel	Indicators of political inefficacy and political cynicism, e.g. Members of parliament do not care about the opinions of people like me, Although they know better, politicians promise more than they deliver
Cohen, 2020, p. 668	European Election Study	Satisfaction with the way democracy works in country, in later waves replaced by whether respondents believe their voice counts in their country

This brief overview points to how the study of political dissatisfaction centres around identifying its existence and analysing its impacts on voting behaviour. It falls short on identifying the why and how, i.e. what made citizens feel dissatisfied in the first place and what dissatisfaction means to them. Neither are context-specific manifestations of political dissatisfaction captured by most analyses. This use of political dissatisfaction as an a-priori variable queried in surveys thus provides us only with a reduced understanding of the concept. As pointed out in the introduction, we can assume understandings of political dissatisfaction to differ between contexts and individuals. Rather than using political dissatisfaction as a catch-

all term for negative attitudes towards the current state of politics, we should thus unpack individuals' concrete reasons of dissatisfaction in different local contexts to help understand underlying, possibly deep-seated predicaments. Building on this gap, the following chapter develops a theoretical framework to guide an in-depth analysis of political dissatisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

In response to the a-priori use of political dissatisfaction, this thesis aims to unpack the concept focusing on the micro-level. To provide guidance in this process but simultaneously allow for the openness necessary, the thesis will draw upon a range of approaches of the field of election research to construct a theoretical framework. The following chapter illustrates this process, outlining a conceptualisation of the variety of approaches within election research developed by Matt Golder (2016). As this thesis is designed as a deductive study with strong inductive elements, Golder's conceptualisation serves as a starting point for data collection and analysis rather than as an exclusionary framework, allowing for additional themes to emerge.

Drawing on Election Research for Interpretative Categories

The body of literature aimed at explaining the PRR's electoral appeal covers multiple perspectives and focus points. As the preceding chapter indicated, the field is complex, and its concepts and approaches are highly interlinked. It is therefore difficult to separate political dissatisfaction from other concepts. Instead of treating political dissatisfaction separately as an isolated concept, this thesis therefore capitalises on the plurality of perspectives by using the different approaches as joint sources for the exploration of political dissatisfaction. By no means, this section intends to weigh approaches against each other or claim a specific position of political dissatisfaction within this array of concepts. Rather, the range of the field can serve as a source of knowledge to unpack political dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, in a balancing act between the field's plurality and complexity, we do rely on scholarly synopses and

classifications to retrieve the approaches' analytical value. Among them, Matt Golder's (2016) categorisation of approaches is particularly beneficial for the aim of this thesis.⁹

Golder classifies demand-side explanations of far right¹⁰ support into three groups: modernisation grievances, economic grievances, and cultural grievances. Thereby, he summarises and classifies the multitude of election research approaches into manageable categories, and further adds an element of contextuality by connecting the approaches to broader theories. Understanding electoral behaviour in the context of major grievances can help to consider wider aspects in peoples' lives, which may directly or indirectly impact their vote. The three grievances are of heuristic value for the exploration of political dissatisfaction. Rather than constituting explanatory variables by themselves, they serve as guidance for the exploration of political dissatisfaction and will be used as interpretative categories. The following subchapters introduce Golder's three grievances, followed by an explanation of how they fuse into the theoretical framework for this thesis.

Modernisation Grievances

Golder's first strand of explanation for far right support are modernisation grievances. Modernisation grievances encompass works focusing on different aspects of modernisation processes and their consequences. A common denominator among them is the premise that a small amount of latent support for far right values can be found in all industrial societies. Under normal conditions, this support remains latent, however, in moments of crisis it can be politicised and thereby mobilised (p. 482-3). An individual's ability to cope with rapid and fundamental societal changes thus defines their susceptibility for the PRR. In other words, it is the modernisation losers that turn to the far right.

⁹ For another categorisation, see e.g. Kai Arzheimer's contribution in Rydgren's Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right (2018).

¹⁰ Golder's conceptualisation includes both, radical right and extreme right parties, which together are referred to as the far right. The inclusion of extreme right support does not play a significant role in the construction of this thesis' theoretical framework and is therefore not further discussed.

Under this theme, one important work is Hans-Georg Betz' (1994) early analysis of the emergence of the PRR in Western Europe. In his monograph, he discusses the appeal of the far right in the light of the transformations of the post-war period. One aspect he discusses is the impact of the shift to a globalised, post-industrial economy on workers. Betz (1994, p. 27-9) argues that the global breakthrough of capitalism along with the advent of a global economy severely impacted the composition of workforce in most countries, reducing the number of low-skill jobs in favour of technical, managerial, and professional workers. In effect, flexible, mid-aged employees with a formal professional education enjoyed secure and increasingly generous employment opportunities. In contrast to this group stands what Betz calls the "marginalized periphery" (p. 28), whose skills are abundantly available on the market and who thus work in insecure and poorly rewarded jobs under close control of their supervisors. Alongside this economic transformation, also social and cultural ties eroded. Formal education is increasingly relevant for upward social mobility, and individual effort becomes increasingly relevant. "As a result of these developments, established subcultures, milieus, and institutions, which traditionally provided and sustained collective identities, are getting eroded and/or are being destroyed." (p. 29) Moreover, this increased individualisation constitutes a challenge to adapt to rapidly changing environments – leaving those with lower cultural capital, flexibility, and individual entrepreneurship behind. In sum, through the transition to post-industrial capitalism, segments of society that are incapable or unwilling to adapt find themselves in increasingly precarious situations. Thus left anxious, bewildered, and insecure, workers developed a sense of resentment. Paired with frustration towards the perceived incapability of mainstream parties to effectively address their situation, disadvantaged workers may be attracted by simplistic solutions offered by the far right (p. 59).

This decline in employment opportunities for some segments of society should however not be interpreted as process of social pauperisation. Rather, the term modernisation losers describes a subjective category which encompasses individuals who struggle in the process of

a diversification of life chances. If this sense of unease is paired with rigid thinking, authoritarian attitudes and traditional values, it can predispose PRR support (Minkenberg, 2000, p. 182-3). It is thus more a sense of anxiety or anger rather than an objective threat that makes individuals modernisation losers. In contrast to previous research, Minkenberg (2000, p. 187) defines the group of modernisation losers as “the second-to-last fifth of post-modern society, a stratum which is rather secure but objectively can still lose something.” Along these lines, Salzborn (2017, p. 140) describes the phenomenon of relative deprivation, in which he finds AfD supporters as not actually socially deprived but afraid of a possible, not factual, loss of status.

In the wider context of Eastern Europe, most scholars understand this sense of insecurity as an effect of the relative recency of democracy in these countries. The modernisation process includes the emergence of democracy, the transition from a socialist to a capitalist system, and the introduction of postmaterialist Western values (Golder, 2016, p. 483). The fundamentally different history necessitates a differentiated look at Eastern Europe. The analytical categories used in Western contexts cannot be adopted without question to the PRR in Eastern Europe (Minkenberg, 2002, p. 361). Considering the GDR’s historical ties to the Soviet Union and the above-described fundamental transition from a socialist to a capitalist state, applying this lens to the analysis of east German states promises to be fruitful.

In sum, modernisation grievances describe defects and discomforts resulting from past changes in people’s economic, social, and political attachments, which develop for some segments of society, the modernisation losers. Thus resulting feelings of anxiety, anger, or isolation are met by far right parties with offers of a simpler, better society (Golder, 2016, p. 483).

Economic Grievances

The second strand of research Golder defines are economic grievances. Approaches in this group stand in context with Campbell’s (1965) realistic group conflict theory. The theory

explains hostility towards outgroup members with competition over scarce resources. Far right parties tend to strive on this grievance by establishing a link between minorities, often immigrants, and economic scarcity. Immigrants as the outgroup become scapegoats for the ingroup's economic struggles.

At the individual level, this model finds much support as the typical far right voter is likely to find themselves in competition with immigrants in the economic sphere. Scheve and Slaughter (2001) have found that individuals at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, who are more likely to compete with immigrants for low-skill jobs, tend to hold stronger anti-immigratory attitudes. Starting off with Billiet's and Witte's (1995) study of the Vlaams Blok, the prevalence of anti-immigratory attitudes has time and again been demonstrated as the most important driver for radical right voting (Brug, Fennema, Tillie, 2000, Norris, 2005). Despite these and other supporting studies, the general impact of people's socioeconomic context on far right success remains under-theorised (Golder, 2016, p. 484). Current research suggests a context dependency of economic hardships. According to Dancygier (2010), for example, the interrelation of economic scarcity and immigrant competition is dependent on whether immigrants hold electoral power. If they do, ruling parties are more likely to provide material benefits for them, which can result in a sentiment of competition and resentment of natives against immigrants. If immigrants do not hold electoral power, incumbents are not incentivised to provide benefits to them thus not creating competition with natives. Although there is no conclusive consensus of the workways of economic grievances on electoral support for the PRR, the existence of a general effect of economic grievances on far right voting is likely.

Cultural Grievances

The final strand of explanation for far right success according to Golder are cultural grievances. Approaches that address cultural grievances can be seen in context with Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory. Social identity theory suggests an inherent tendency in individuals to associate with similar individuals. Due to an immanent desire for self-esteem, the

ingroup is perceived as superior to outgroups. Put differently, “the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory response on part of the in-group” (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 56). Far right parties instrumentalise these natural tendencies by highlighting an alleged incompatibility of migrants’ cultural values and those of the native population (Golder, 2016, p. 486).

Scholarly accounts have found much support for this argument at individual level. Anti-immigratory attitudes have repeatedly been related to far right support. Starting off with Billiet’s and Witte’s (1995) study of the Vlaams Blok, the prevalence of anti-immigratory attitudes have time and again been demonstrated as the most important driver for radical right voting (Brug, Fennema, Tillie, 2000, Norris, 2005). However, the casual direction is not clear. Anti-immigratory attitudes can be the result of both, cultural as well as economic grievances (Sniderman et al, 2004, Mayda, 2006). Another relevant point of discussion is that anti-immigratory attitudes do not automatically translate into respective behaviour. According to Blinder et al (2013), the existence of norms against prejudice and discrimination effects individuals’ voting behaviour – the more prevalent norms are, the less likely far right voting becomes. This normative context is likely to vary between and within countries. Further, there are some attempts linking far right support with the cultural context in which individuals form their preferences, specifically with the size of local immigrant communities. The results so far are mixed.

Another important element of cultural grievances which Golder does not touch upon are issues of (under-)representation in politics and other important offices. For the example of Germany, Weisskirchner (2020, p. 620) argues that the considerable deficit of east Germans in the public sphere as well as in leading positions in the private sector is connected to a dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy among east Germans. In addition, Weisskirchner sees this underrepresentation of east Germans also as a cause for anti-

establishment attitudes. The AfD manages to capitalise on this underrepresentation.¹¹ While these issues do not fall into social identity theory, they do describe a tension between two groups, east and west Germans, with supposedly divergent interests. Therefore, this thesis subsumes the issue of underrepresentation in important offices in public and private sphere under cultural grievances.

Definition of the Grievances as Key Concepts for Political Dissatisfaction

Golder's conceptualisation of demand-side approaches into modernisation, economic, and cultural grievances is not always clear-cut. Both modernisation and economic grievances broach the issue of (perceived) scarcity of employment opportunities and thus resulting financial distress for individuals. The marker of distinction thereby is the temporal element. Modernisation grievances refer to job loss (among other things) as a result of historical transformation processes, while economic grievances refer to present-day employment and financial hardships. Similarly, economic and cultural grievances both contain an element of anti-immigration attitudes. Hereby the difference lays in the kind of competition. Economic grievances refer to financial competition over jobs or public support, while cultural grievances allege a fundamental incompatibility of both groups' basic values such as religion and cultural specificities.

For the subsequent analysis, the three grievances will be defined as follows. Modernisation grievances refer to individual hardships resulting from profound, far-reaching societal transformations that happened in the past. This can refer to tangible needs arising from for example job loss as well as to psychological distress. Economic grievances describe

¹¹ For the German context, Bluhm and Jacobs (2016, pp. 29-30) have laid out that east Germans are significantly underrepresented in elite functions in regional parliaments, public media houses, leading positions in major companies, university presidents, court judges, and army generals. Germany-wide, less than two percent of elite positions are taken by east Germans while their population share is at seventeen percent. Also, if only eastern German states are considered, east Germans are still underrepresented. Interestingly, according to the authors the federal government is the only institution that reflects the east-west share with 19% east Germans (at 17% of the population).

perceived or actual scarcity of resources at the present time such as jobs or unequal distribution of salaries, often related to (perceived) competition with an out-group. Cultural grievances account for hostility towards minorities, generally immigrants or other groups perceived as non-native, based on the belief in a fundamental incompatibility of both groups' basic values. They also account for issues of underrepresentation in high-ranking positions in public and private sphere.

As set out in the beginning of this chapter, these three grievances serve as a theoretical framework which guides and informs data collection and analysis. Based on the above, these three grievances are expected to emerge as cornerstones in people's accounts of their personal political dissatisfaction. They thus constitute the backbone of the interview guide. The three grievances are enquired in qualitative interviews with AfD supporters to identify their relevance in peoples' personal accounts of political dissatisfaction, while simultaneously allowing room for other themes to emerge. The following chapter explains the methodology in further detail.

Methodology

To achieve this study's aim of an in-depth analysis of individuals' understandings of political dissatisfaction, it is designed as a single-case study that uses semi-structured interviews with supporters of the AfD who are actively engaged in the party on a local level. The case that was chosen for this study is members of regional AfD groups in the administrative district Mansfeld-Südharz, which is located in southwestern Saxony-Anhalt in the east of Germany (see Figure 1 & 2). The administrative district's socioeconomic characteristics make this an extreme case study, which will be discussed below. The following sections further explain research design and choice of method, data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations and positionality.

Research Design

The present study follows a qualitative research strategy and is designed as a single case study. As previously argued, theories and approaches on the PRR's electorate, although mostly

targeted at the national level, should be complemented by analyses on regional and local level to achieve a comprehensive image. Specific historical experiences and (partially resulting) local particularities should not be overlooked but instead captured to enable a profound exploration of the PRR's electorate and, in the case of this study, the electorate's accounts of political dissatisfaction. Therefore, this thesis is designed as a single case study. To allow for a profound analysis that fully captures regional particularities within the limitations of this thesis, it focuses on one local area rather than on east Germany as a region. The unit of analysis that was chosen are AfD supporters active in the party's local branch in Mansfeld-Südharz. The case was sampled purposefully as an extreme case for the outstandingly high approval rates for the AfD and for major socio-economic transformations the region underwent post-1989. These events are outlined in more detail in the background chapter.

Data Collection

As this thesis is driven by an interest in individuals' understandings of and their personal reflections on the sentiment of political dissatisfaction, qualitative interviews are the most suitable method. In contrast to structured quantitative interviews, qualitative semi-structured interviews are less tied to an interview guide that has been pre-formulated by the researcher and would thus reflect their ideas on the topic. Instead, the interview is flexible, it follows the interviewees' stories allowing for themes to emerge that the researcher may not have thought of before (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). While this is an explorative study, this study relies on semi-structured interviews over unstructured interviews in order to include the grievances identified as a theoretical framework. Openness for those themes is particularly crucial as this thesis is set out as a work combining deductive with strong inductive elements. Structured interviews alongside other methods such as surveys are more rigid and thus unsuitable for this study's aim. Another method that allows for an open search for new patterns and explanations is a discourse analysis. Despite occasionally reoccurring discussions in media and politics about citizens'

alleged disinterest or ‘disenchantment’ with politics, political dissatisfaction does not qualify as a discourse, thus ruling out discourse analysis as a method for this study.

Sampling

To ensure that the research questions can be answered through the interviews conducted, interviewees were sampled purposefully. In total, six interviews were conducted with a duration of about one hour each, some interviews lasting longer. All initial contacts but one were made through information publicly available on the party’s or their members’ online presences; one participant was contacted through a referral from another interviewee. Participants needed to be member of the local AfD branch since membership is used as a proxy for AfD support, which is explained further in the sub-chapter on ethical considerations. Participants further needed to live in the region Mansfeld-Südharz and consider it their home. To assess a potential impact of the transformation period, they had to be above 40 years, so at least of school age in 1989, to ensure a certain degree of awareness during the transformation period. Given privacy concerns resulting from the relatively low number of interviewees, their gender, age, hometown, or position within the party will not be disclosed in detail. The sample included men and women aged between 43 and 70 years. Members of all but one sub-regional groups within AfD Mansfeld-Südharz were included as well as members on high as well as lower party positions. All participants work/ have worked in blue-collar jobs or have established their own small businesses.

Given different constraints due to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as temporal limitations, the sampling of participants proved challenging. Possibly, without the pandemic, face to face contact would have been a more fruitful approach. Another complicating factor was a general sense of distrust regarding my motifs at initial contact. While I am aware of the comparably low number of participants, the sample constitutes a solid representation of the local case as it reflects different genders, ages, locations, and party positions. Further, after the fourth interview, no new themes emerged, indicating possible saturation. Considering the small

size of the case to begin with and the overall aim explore local manifestations of political dissatisfaction rather than a generalising claim for east Germany as a region, the study provides meaningful results nevertheless.

Conduct of Interviews

To minimise health risks and to increase convenience for participants, all interviews were conducted via phone call. Phone calls were chosen over videocalls to decrease potential participation barriers, as familiarity with video call software cannot be assumed. This also avoided potential reservations concerning data security. Language of the interviews was German, which is all participants' and my own mother tongue. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, in addition to notes that were taken during the interviews.

As semi-structured interviews, conversations were based on an interview guide (see appendix) derived from the theoretical framework. In their stories, participants expressed strong discontent with the political performance of all parties but the AfD, which confirmed the presence of political dissatisfaction in interviewees. In most cases, the introductory question led participants to narrate core issues, often directly relating to one of the three grievances. This is valued as a confirmation of the suitability of the theoretical framework. To comprehensively assess the potential impact of the three grievances previously identified as key concepts, the interview guide was used as a prompter in case interviewees did not mention the grievances by themselves. Given the explorative nature of the research questions and paying credit to the study's inductive elements, the interviews were kept rather unstructured focusing mainly on participants' stories. This allowed for increased flexibility and openness for themes not covered by the theoretical framework.

Data Analysis

To allow for a better understanding of the data and for potential adjustments of the interview guide, the process of data collection was accompanied by ongoing data analysis. By simultaneously conducting data collection and analysis, a close connection between data and

concepts could be maintained and the early codes could influence data collection. This feedback loop pays credit to the explorative nature of the analysis.

The general strategy of data analysis employed was thematic analysis. Despite being one of the most common approaches in qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis has not yet been outlined as one defined approach with a stringent set of techniques (Bryman, 2012, p. 578). Generally, it is an approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns – themes – across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Following Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 83), who have first outlined thematic analysis as a systematic approach in psychology, themes can be identified in both, a deductive top-down way and an inductive bottom-up way. This flexibility is one of thematic analysis' main strengths (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 249) and makes it the ideal method for this study. As described above, this thesis is designed as a study which combines deductive elements (three grievances) with strong inductive elements (openness for new themes). For this, flexibility in data analysis is crucial, making thematic analysis the ideal method.

In connection to research aim and questions, the analysis of interviews aimed to extract reoccurring themes in participants' accounts and explanations of their own political dissatisfaction. The recordings were transcribed and coded in two rounds; the codes produced were then re-examined for themes and sub-themes. This was done using NVivo. Through the deductive element of thematic analysis, attention was paid to whether any of the three grievances emerged as a theme. In different degrees, references to all three were found. Analysing the data also through an inductive lens allowed for two previously unconsidered themes to emerge: mistrust in media and mistrust in politics. These two themes were not identified in the initial theoretical framework and thus constitute an enrichment in the exploration of political dissatisfaction. To avoid distortion of the interviewees' statements through translation, coding was done in German. The finalised codes were then translated into English; the English translation is what is used for the remainder of this thesis. Also, quotes

from interviews were translated into English to the best of my abilities trying to stay as close to the original sentence structure as possible.

Ethical Considerations

This study's focus on voters of the AfD raises potential ethical issues with particular regard to secrecy of the ballot and PRR voters being a (in some regards) stigmatised group. Following Diener and Crandall (1978), four main ethical principles are to be considered in social research: harm to participants, informed consent, privacy, and deception. For this study, individuals' vote choice constitutes a pivotal criterion for selection of participants. In order to derive valid conclusions from the data gathered, interviewees must identify with the AfD and have the declared intention to vote for this party at the upcoming (local and federal) elections. However, under German constitutional law, elections are to be carried out in secrecy¹². Asking interviewees for their electoral preferences can therefore be a potential invasion of this right and thus a violation of the ethical principle of privacy. Therefore, participants were selected exclusively by membership and engagement in the AfD. Based on their active engagement for the party, individuals' vote choice for this party is assumed. Participants were at no point asked to indicate their election intentions. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, all contact was made exclusively via telephone and email, ensuring that interviewees did not expose themselves to additional health risks. Contact details and recordings were stored separately from each other, and all recordings were anonymised immediately. In the written thesis, participants are at no point identified by name, gender, or party position; instead, they have been allocated a single-digit number. To further reduce potential harm, all interviews were scheduled according to participants' wishes and phone calls were made by me so no telephone charges for participants applied. To assure informed consent and prevent deception, participants were informed verbally and via email about the general aim of the study (understanding the concept of political

¹² Principles of electoral law according to Art. 38 (1) GG

dissatisfaction from an individual's point of view) and how their statements will be used (exclusively for my Master's thesis, analysed only by myself) when initial contact was made. Right before the interview, they were advised that the conversation will be recorded, their statements will be treated anonymously, and that they had the choice not to answer a question or end the interview at any point. Participants were further given the option to ask questions before and after the interview. All questions were answered comprehensively, and additional requests were accommodated.

Positionality Considerations

For the quality of social research, reflexivity about the researcher's social, cultural, and political context is crucial, as it impacts the knowledge they generate (Brymann, 2012, p. 393-4). The following section reflects on my personal values, power relations, and personal history.

First, discussing values refers to the researcher's personal beliefs or feelings. While I attempted to remain as objective as possible during all stages of the research process, it is relevant to note that my personal values diverge significantly from those commonly associated with the AfD and its members. Conducting the interviews, several statements were made that I, under different conditions outside a research context, would firmly refute. In my role as a researcher, however, I remained neutral to the best of my abilities and simply recognised what was said. One participant persistently checked back for my opinion on a question I asked them, which I responded with a vague answer. This experience stands exemplary for the sometimes-difficult position I found myself in as an interviewer, where I neither wanted to validate ethically problematic political views nor actively respond in a way that might make the interviewee feel stigmatised or their opinion being depreciated, which could potentially endanger the continuation of the interview. In a balancing act, I minimised my responses in those situations and shifted topics, trying to pick up on a related but less delicate topic.

Second, in social research a distinction is often made between 'interviewing up/ down' or 'interviewing the elite/ vulnerable groups'. Although this dichotomy is subject to widespread

criticism (Smith, 2006, pp. 645-5) and does not easily fit the interview contexts at stake, it remains nevertheless important to reflect on the power relations at play within the interview space. Without going too much in-depth into conceptualisations of power, two issues became apparent during data collection: researcher/interviewee-relation, and age gap. When establishing contact with the interviewees, I introduced myself and my project in affiliation with the University of Gothenburg, rather than only stating I was a student working on my thesis. In this affiliation to a public institution lies a certain degree of power that may have induced participants to agree to an interview. Another point that participants themselves brought up is the age gap between me and the interviewees. All interviewees belong to the age group 40-70 years. When talking about issues related to the post-1989 transformation period, some participants asked for my age. Being born after 1989, participants may have more epistemic power in this regard, as they dispose over distinct first-hand knowledge of this time. When referring to issues related to the transformation period, some participants further asked whether I knew about the issue at stake. In some instances, when I was forced to admit I did not know, participants reacted surprised and slightly shocked. With most of my participants identifying as male, there is also a potential power discrepancy due to gender. Although I could not make out any instances of paternalising behaviour from my male interviewees in this regard, this cannot be fully ruled out.

Lastly, during the initial contact I explained my interest for the topic and their specific cases with my personal context. I come from a medium-sized town in the same federal state (Saxony-Anhalt) interviews were conducted in. While my first call was initially met by some scepticism on my motives for the research by some participants, once I told them I was from a nearby town they noticeably opened. Clearly, my geographical background was a strong trust-building factor.¹³ While this did not make me an ‘insider’ as understood by Brannick and

¹³ On interpersonal level, Germany’s separation has created a strong sentiment of condescension from west against east Germans. In some people, particularly in older generations, this sentiment echoes until today. Being east

Coghlan (2007), a complete and recognised member of an organisation or group, which is difficult alone by my age, it did impact the way I was seen by participants. They assumed I was aware of all specific ‘east German topics’ they mentioned, for example nicknames of GDR politicians (“Erich” in reference to Erich Honecker, GDR head of state) or effects of the *Treuhand* (“you know...”). Those and similar remarks show that I was perceived as an insider to a certain degree.

The above is not an exhaustive list of all reflections on my positionality in the research process, it is rather meant to point to particularly significant considerations about my own identity, position, and interest. Through this transparency the reader shall be enabled to grasp the context this thesis was written in and to form their own thoughts. In a personal reflection of the research process, I believe my identity as a person from the same region has been of great help to gain access to interviewees and to gain their trust, to a point where I am unsure how successful the study would have been if I were from a town in western Germany. This also enabled me to capture profound and supposedly honest accounts of participants’ political dissatisfaction. On the flipside, this trust and perhaps also the instance that some participants regarded me (coming from the east) as ‘one of their own’ has led to the above-described moments, in which participants expressed critical and at times openly discriminatory beliefs that are fundamentally opposed to my own and to what can be considered as mainstream liberal and democratic values. Here, a more distanced set-up could have been helpful, in which my role as a neutral researcher would be more pronounced. Nevertheless, I consider the benefits gained by being from the same region as outweighing the challenges.

Results and Analysis

The preceding chapters have mapped out the context of this study and argued for its design as a deductive single case study enriched with strong inductive elements. This section

German myself, participants were not running the risk of feeling condescended by talking to me. It is therefore not surprising that they appreciated my background.

presents and analyses the results obtained. Its first section focuses on the deductive elements, on the grievances that emerged based on the theoretical framework. The second section presents the themes identified inductively, which are two themes of mistrust. A sub-chapter will be dedicated to each theme. This chapter's final section will, in conclusion, use these results to answer the research questions.

Deductive Patterns: Grievances

Based on the theoretical framework, the material was collected and analysed in the light of three grievances that are expected to account for political dissatisfaction in AfD supporters: modernisation, economic, and cultural grievances. This section presents the results.

Modernisation Grievances

As defined earlier, this study understands modernisation grievances as individual hardships resulting from profound, far-reaching societal transformations, which in this case means the events related to the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany. Modernisation grievances can refer to tangible needs arising from e.g. job loss as well as to psychological distress. Participants confirmed the existence of both types of distress, their impact on today's political dissatisfaction however appears limited. Furthermore, a general sense of longing for a past normality not directly connected to the transformation period was identified. Although this sentiment was not directly mentioned by Golder, it strongly relates to modernisation grievances and is thus included here. The sense of longing for a past normality will firstly be outlined before turning to participants' concerns with the transformation period.

All participants depicted, in one way or another, a general sentiment of remembrance of the past as something better than today, something either lost or about to be lost. While participants did not define a specific point of the past they are longing for, the sentiment manifested in a sense of longing for normality. Normality then was associated with the past; the present was perceived as a deviation. Participant 4 shared an emotional account of the loss of normality they perceive, by referring to children being brought to school in their parents'

cars, children not knowing native plants and animals but spending time on their smartphones instead, people not singing German folklore, and the number of English-language songs on TV and radio. Referring to Mansfeld-Südharz as centre their whole life, Participant 6 expressed their aversion to change by saying: *“My homeland is beautiful, and it shall remain this way, and I like it the way it is.”* Significant part of this fear of change was a perceived loss of German identity and crumbling of German values that needs to be halted. *“We must return to our German-ness”* as Participant 1 put it. Participants’ critique was directed mainly at an increased general sloppiness, growing diversification of local stores and wider society, and at the increasing use of gender-inclusive language.

Participant 4: *“Even the national team. Now, since it’s the European Championship, it is turned into a political issue. It’s about quota. There need to be more black players playing than white players in the German national team. It is not called national team anymore, it’s called the team. Everything is so absurd.”*

Participant 4: *“The people want their German culture, their German language. Not this gender rubbish.”*

Participant 4: *“When can you hear a German song on TV? Never. Just rubbish. Bulk rubbish from America. This must be systematic.”*

Participant 3: *“The European, in the form he used to be, shall be abolished.”*

Participant 1: *“And those things, they add up. And then you don’t recognise yourself as a German anymore.”*

Participants saw these processes not as a natural societal trend but as a systematic process steered by the liberal elite. In addition to a perceived deterioration of ‘German culture’, AfD supporters were under the impression that ‘the elite’ is aiming to enforce their liberal, left-green values onto ‘the people’. This happens without any consideration of ‘the people’s’ interests or national interests, as those liberal actions such as gender-inclusive language or quotas for women are perceived unnecessary/ not a real problem at best. In more general terms, the increasing consolidation of identity politics in the centre of the political arena generates a reflex of defence, adherence, and preserving. Mau (2019, p. 246) located this reflex in an ingrained

feeling of societal vulnerability and ontological insecurity, which derives from people's experiences of transformation. In reaction to this sentiment, the PRR's appraisal of the past and of normality offers recognition of the achieved and discharge from the obligation to adapt further. This longing for 'normality' and reluctance towards change is taken up precisely by the AfD, showcased by their current slogan 'Germany. But normal.' (ger.: *Deutschland. Aber normal.*). The AfD promises to uphold German traditions and values alongside national interest in contrast to fast-paced change from the political left that is perceived as imposed onto the people. This promise resonates with their supporters, as Participant 1 summarised: *"And then there is a party that says I want things the way they used to be."*

The second element of modernisation grievances that was expected based on the theoretical framework, are accounts of tangible and emotional distress directly related to the transformation period. In partial contrast to the expectations, participants' accounts for the transformation period were Janus-faced. They remembered the transformation as a positive time shaped by hopes for a better future and an end to problems and lack of freedom in the GDR.

Participant 3: *"Now, this really is a feeling of freedom. A feeling of co-determination, of self-determination."*

Participant 4: *"That was my best time, I must say. First, we were excited to get rid of those old structures. And you could see that things changed here."*

On the other hand, participants also narrated issues of mass-unemployment and economic scarcity, which accounts for the tangible and emotional distress that was expected. All participants shared stories of mass unemployment in Mansfeld-Südharz, mostly related to the shutdown of the region's copper mines. Participant 2 shared a story about their father's resignation at work over the lack of resources in his company and the impossibility to change anything. They described the period as highly stressing, creating immense insecurities for the people affected. Participant 3 remembered that many were just *"being kept alive, always just a little bit."*

Participant 1: *“If you need to take care of a family. And suddenly, you are only scared. Will you have a job next week or not?”*

Participant 1: *“And suddenly a man came, turned the switch, and said: So, now we turn off the lights, that’s the end. Well, you are fighting a losing battle. You have no idea. What do you do now?”*

Participant 2: *“But the people that don’t have a job [until today], I can see that here, they become desperate. They give up. They become depressed.”*

While acknowledging the gravity of the transformation, participant did not describe significant after-effects that echo until the present day. Participant 4 and 6 explicitly denied the relevance of modernisation grievances for AfD support today. Participant 6: *“That this still has effects somewhere in some ways I don’t believe that.”* Instead, they argued that those who have lost their jobs now are retired or re-employed; they saw the difficulties as a thing of the past that was overcome. Thus, while the emotional and tangible distress that was expected through the theoretical framework was found, no support was found for current effects of this distress. This casts some doubt on the common view of frustration among modernisation losers manifesting in PRR support. In this case, the results suggest that east Germans should not be viewed as modernisation losers turning to the PRR. Instead, the effects of the transformation period are diffused and more indirect.

In sum, support for modernisation grievances as an element of political dissatisfaction was found, however, not related to historical transformation as expected but to contemporary processes of change. Although east German AfD supporters acknowledge the severe impacts of the transformation period, they do not see themselves as modernisation losers. They perceive the grievances as largely overcome and as unrelated to degrees of AfD support. Nevertheless, a general sense of longing for a past normality emerged as a strong theme, which derives from a difficulty to adapt to contemporary change. In this sense, participants can be seen as modernisation losers regarding the mental distress transformation creates. Tangible distress in

terms of employment insecurity and similar does not apply. Accordingly, AfD supporters' political dissatisfaction is in part constituted by a sentiment of longing for a past normality.

Economic Grievances

The second potential element of political dissatisfaction is economic grievances, which describe perceived or actual scarcity of resources such as jobs, often related to (perceived) competition with an out-group. This competition was only partially reflected in the data, however, general discontent over resource scarcity was confirmed.

Firstly, support for the theme of competition with an out-group was mixed. Participants 1 and 2 saw a competition with immigrants in the low-wage sector and in positions for vocational training for recent school graduates, as the German government provided funding for companies that employed refugees. Further, except Participant 4 all interviewees viewed immigrants as living off the welfare net and thus ultimately off tax money.

Participant 3: *“They directly receive their welfare, their full support, and don't have to do anything for it.”*

Participant 6: *“Half the world wants to go to Germany because here everyone receives endless social support.”*

Participant 6: *“But there is a large share of those who are coming here that are of no use for anything but to burden the social welfare state.”*

While they did express discontent about this allocation of public funds and about migrants receiving support allegedly without having to do anything for it, participants did not see themselves or other members of their in-group in competition for these funds. This is surprising as it does not confirm the expectations from the theoretical framework and goes against a common frame among PRR supporters claiming ‘Immigrants are taking our jobs’. Solely Participant 6 argued that *“the social welfare state has been, originally, created for the citizens of this country. And not for one, two, I don't know, million temporary refugees.”*

Nevertheless, a general disapproval about the allocation of public funds, irrespective of competition, was found in most interviews. Participants expressed discontent about public

spending on the EU, the Euro bailout following the global financial crisis 2007/08, or the recovery plan for Europe after the Covid-19 pandemic. Participant 5 perceived this allocation of tax money as particularly unfair and frustrating: *“And our people are told they need to work until 68 or 70 to pay for this shit?”* just as Participant 6, who saw people’s *“hard worked tax money”* as being burned senselessly due to flawed allocation of funds. Participant 6 shared several instances in which they criticised the way public funds were allocated, one example being the UN’s large administrative apparatus absorbing funds that could be used elsewhere. Also, many participants complained about Mansfeld-Südharz and its communes being severely underfunded and thus hardly able to fulfil their basic duties. Participant 2 complained about the financial situation in their region: *“Every commune here, every commune in Saxony-Anhalt is more or less poor or extremely in debt.”* Participant 3 accorded for a separation of society into the poor and the rich. Participant 5 remembered a workshop they gave to pensioners, where they pointed out how none of them could afford to replace a hypothetically broken TV, a washing machine, and a car at the same time despite living in Germany. *“So now tell me again we are a rich country?”* Participant 6 expressed lamented their local commune not being able to afford a new truck for the fire brigade or to repair a leaking roof in the local school. Seeing that their subsidy applications for these causes were denied for no understandable reason, while millions of Euros were made available over night to fight the pandemic, Participant 6 expressed frustration and a lack of understanding. *“For years, for decades, the only thing that is administered here is scarcity. There are no innovative ideas coming from above. And everything coming from the bottom is not financeable, is not good. There is something really going wrong.”*

Misallocation of public funds is the main element of economic grievances participants identified. They perceived it as a general defect of present-day politics rather than an effect of recent immigration. Funds are allocated in a non-transparent and incomprehensible way regardless of the needs of ‘the people’. The funds are perceived as ‘the people’s’ money, since

it is tax money. They should hence have a right in deciding how it is allocated. Through their engagement in the AfD, participants hoped to shed light on an impact these processes.

In sum, economic grievances were partially supported as an element of political dissatisfaction. Although competition with an out-group seems to play only a subordinate role, significant discontent about the allocation of resources, specifically public funds, was expressed. Thus, discontent about the allocation of resources constitutes an important element of AfD supporters' political dissatisfaction.

Cultural Grievances

The third expected element of political dissatisfaction are cultural grievances. Cultural grievances are here defined as negative attitudes towards immigration as such and as hostility towards minorities, mostly immigrants or other groups perceived as non-native. They also account for issues of underrepresentation of one's own in-group in high-ranking positions in public and private sphere. Data analysis confirmed a pattern of negative attitudes towards immigration and an alleged cultural incompatibility. Issues of underrepresentation were however not found relevant and are therefore not outlined further.

All interviewees were of the general opinion that immigration to Germany should be decreased, arguing that a limit has been reached. Participant 3 found: *“Eventually, there must be a stop to this.”* Interestingly, most participants explicitly stressed that they do not refer to stopping or hindering immigration of asylum-seekers or others in need. Participant 6 expressed agreement with *“the social thought that every EU country should, also according to their population, accept a certain share of refugees – temporarily.”*

Participant 1: *“I am not talking about those poor people that sat at the train station at some point and were in need. Yes, there were a few people who were in need. And I am the last one who says, you cannot help people in need. I'm the last to say that.”*

This relative openness to provide support for immigrants however comes with a high degree of selectivity and/ or the claim that people should receive help in their home countries or other European countries rather than in Germany.

Participant 1: *“Helping them to help themselves.”*

Participant 2: *“Because realistically, only 2% are entitled to asylum. Those you can integrate. That should be possible, without major effort.”*

Participant 3: *“You cannot take away people’s existence and then say everyone come here.”*

Participant 3: *“More must be done in those countries. Peace must be built there; it must be rebuilt, and they must have a future in their countries.”*

Participant 6: *“If I flee North Africa or the Arab region, I am passing a multitude of safe third countries to then arrive to Germany.”*

Apart from a general reservation towards immigration, the second element of cultural grievances could be confirmed: an alleged incompatibility of immigrants’ cultural values with what is perceived as German values. This was reflected in all interviews:

Participant 1: *“The gap between Muslims and Christians is getting bigger and bigger in Germany.”*

Participant 2: *“For one thing, it’s the culture that doesn’t fit. Then it’s the values. We have different values than they have, and those you’d need to melt first. It doesn’t work that way.”*

Participant 3: *“Also the cultures don’t necessarily fit together. We already know that. Muslims have a completely different culture. Cultural values and religious values. It doesn’t fit.”*

Participant 4: *“It is two different cultures that are simply and absolutely not compatible. It is a crime. It’s a crime to bring them here in the first place.”*

Participant 5: *“We are an enlightened society. ...¹⁴ Such a denomination is not compatible with our form of society.”*

Participant 6: *“They of course have the right to live their religion. Let them do. But they must stop trying to foist it on us.”*

A central value that interviewees perceived as fundamentally different is engagement and a general attitude to work. In contrast to Germans, immigrants are seen as lazy, lacking drive and aspiration; a behaviour that is fostered by public support schemes. Most interviewees also

¹⁴ Intentional omission of racist slur

associated immigrants with criminality, ranging from petty crimes, drug dealing, to gang crime and felony. Furthermore, most participants equated immigrants with Muslims, making an open distinction between migrants from different countries of origin:

Participant 2: *“There have never been problems, at least not to this degree, with Asians and East Europeans.”*

Participant 4: *“It is mainly about Arabs. Arabs don’t fit out clientele here. Absolutely not. And I’m not a racist. But I mean Bosnians, for example, that I work with. They are Muslim, but I haven’t had any problems with them. But Arabs are a special kind of people.”*

In this equation of immigrants with Muslims, the role of women in Islam arose as another aspect of alleged cultural incompatibility. Facets mentioned were wearing of Niqab and Burka, polygamy, and violence against women. This ties in neatly with the discourse common for the PRR in which Muslim women are constructed as oppressed victims of their misogynist religion, which stands at odds with what is seen as Christian/ German values of equality (Fangen & Lichtenberg, 2021, p. 20).

All the above confirms the high relevance of cultural grievances for AfD supporters’ political dissatisfaction. This is unsurprising, as anti-immigratory attitudes have been identified as the single most important driver of the radical right vote (Arzheimer, 2018, p. 5). Mayer and Perrineau’s (1992) study of Le Pen supporters in the 1988 French presidential election, followed by multiple others (e.g. Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000; Norris, 2005) have demonstrated a positive correlation between the prevalence of anti-immigratory sentiments and voting for a radical right party. Further, if political dissatisfaction is met by anti-immigratory attitudes, the likelihood for an extreme right vote increases significantly (Lubbers et al, 2002, p. 365).

In sum, a strong pattern of racist overtones towards immigrants as an out-group could be found. Immigrants are equated with Muslims, who are perceived as living by a culture considered as fundamentally different and thus deeply incompatible. The analysis found full support for cultural grievances, i.e. anti-immigratory attitudes and incompatibility of the

cultures, as an element of political dissatisfaction. Hence, anti-immigratory attitudes account for a large share of AfD supporters' political dissatisfaction.

Inductive Patterns: Mistrust and the Defence of Democracy

Next to the grievances that were deducted from the theoretical framework, this study assumes that AfD supporters' political dissatisfaction is composed of further building blocks. In order for those to emerge, the study was designed with strong inductive elements. This allowed for two additional elements of political dissatisfaction to emerge: mistrust in media and mistrust in politics. Further, another theme appeared strongly across all interviews: the AfD as the only true defender of democracy. Constituting a response to rather than an element of political dissatisfaction, this theme will be presented at the end of this section.

Mistrust in Media

With exemption of Participant 6, a strong and highly generalised criticism of 'the media' became apparent across all interviews. Not further defined, participants related 'the media' to what is often termed 'mainstream media', all major mass media that represent opinions perceived as mainstream in opposition to alternative media. Interviewees' critique of 'the media' included three aspects: media's one-sidedness, media as a tool of the powerful, and constant accusations of racism.

Firstly, participants experienced media as highly imbalanced, covering stories only from a dominant mainstream perspective. Thereby, alternative, non-conformist viewpoints are ignored and portrayed in a discrediting manner in an attempt to decrease their credibility and appeal to the public. Participant 2: "*Opinions are being suppressed*", and Participant 5: "*Media and neutral, that's a contradiction in itself.*" Related to the AfD, some participants recounted AfD events where journalists were present, who later presented the event in a different light than what they experienced:

Participant 1: "*If I only think about the work of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt. All the swindle they uncovered. Nobody is shouting that from the housetops.*"

Participant 2: *“It [the report] turned out to be 39 seconds. And everything completely out of context.”; “This could’ve been covered as a protest. But they didn’t want to, didn’t have any interest in that.”*

Participant 4: *“The Mitteldeutsche Zeitung [a local newspaper] here in [town’s name], a horrible left rag. Everything is done so one-sidedly.”*

Closely connected is the second aspect of this theme: media as a tool of the powerful. Participants saw media as controlled by ‘the elite’, who strategically distort and censor information broadcasted through media channels aiming to manipulate ‘the people’. ‘The people’ shall be prevented from uncovering the truth, as this would endanger ‘the elite’s’ power position. Participant 2: *“But it is, in the end, being kept a little bit under wraps.”* Other participants suggested:

Participant 3: *“I believe that the media is bought. I think media actually are the most dangerous part in this thing that’s happening right now because they are framing. They only cover what is supposed to be heard in their channels or newspapers. And this is being directed. And they are doing it, almost unscrupulous.”*

Participant 4: *“All those propaganda programmes. And especially in the supervisory boards themselves. Only greens, lefts, lefts, greens sitting there.”*

The term propaganda was used strikingly often in participants’ accounts of today’s journalism. Distrust in media was considerable, journalistic objectivity was dismissed entirely. In this vein, the third aspect of mistrust in media is the sensation that, if opposing opinions are expressed, they are discredited immediately by labelling them as racist or as conspiracy theories. Participants expressed frustration about not being able to express their opinions without instantly being branded racist. They felt there was no room for their beliefs in media and in wider public discourse.

Participant 1: *“But if you now say exactly these words that I just said, then you immediately are a racist.”*

Participant 2: *“People are fed up, and now I’m referring to the AfD, if their opinion is not asked for. Or you do have an opinion and it is discredited as conspiracy theory. With this, they don’t feel included. They just don’t feel included.”*

Participant 3: *“Yes, it is very critical, and one would many treat it as conspiracy theory. At least in mainstream media would this be a contribution that one does not want to hear.”*
“You are at least a populist, if you have a diverging opinion.”

Participant 5: *“Because everything that’s right-wing today used to be just middle or to some degree even left. Today all that is right-wing.”*

Participant 6: *“And you’re being insulted as a Nazi, or as a Querdenker¹⁵, climate denier, covid denier, or whatever, as soon as you express a contrary opinion. But democracy is actually living of opposing opinions. You just have to discuss them. But that is not possible nowadays.”*

In contrast to their perception in media, participants emphasised how their beliefs were distinct from the right-wing. Some argued that these issues were dear to them due to their conservative orientation, not because of a right-wing orientation. Participant 4 wished for a conservative change: *“After Merkel’s end, I hope the CDU will do more reasonable politics again, a little more conservative. I am catholic, namely.”* Participants 5: *“I have a conservative, not a right orientation. Let alone extreme right”* and 6 also self-identified as conservative. This eagerness to differentiate themselves from the right-wing was accompanied by frustration about not feeling restricted in their right of free speech.

Participant 3: *“And why should one deny everything that has been created in Germany? By now, I have become a little patriotic and I say Germany is my homeland. ... Why can’t we be proud of this? Why can’t we say we preserve our cultural heritage and our scientific heritage? Why must all this be called extreme right, just because one says I am German and I want to preserve my German words and my German roots. ... We must have the right to say I am German and I love my country and I love my culture.”*

In sum, mistrust in media constitutes a strong element of political dissatisfaction in AfD supporters. This mistrust is composed of the generalised perception that mainstream media is highly imbalanced, functions merely as a tool of ‘the elite’ and discredits alternative opinions as racist or conspiracy theories. Subject to censorship and control ‘the media’ works at the hands of ‘the elite’, aiming to impede access to truthful information for ‘the people’. Ultimately,

¹⁵ *Querdenken* (engl.: lateral thinking) is a protest movement against the Covid-19 regulations which was founded in 2020.

this serves to maintain ‘the elite’s’ power, as ‘the people’ are deprived of unbiased information, which, if accessible, would enable ‘the people’ to understand present defects and potentially lead them to rebel.

Mistrust in Politics

The final element of political dissatisfaction that emerged is a sentiment of deep-seated mistrust in politics. All participants expressed discontent with politics and governing politicians, leading up to general suspicion.

Participant 1: *“Politics is a whore.”*

Participant 2: *“The incredibility of politics. No one is believing this anymore. Untrustworthy all along.”*

Participant 5: *“The dirtiest thing that exists in this world are politicians.”*

Participant 6: *“The government’s work is getting worse year by year.”*

This sentiment includes four aspects: hypocrisy of politics, a perceived loss of democracy, inefficacy and incompetence of governance, and a personalised hatred against chancellor Angela Merkel.

First, all participants expressed frustration about a perceived hypocrisy of politics. They recounted stories of politicians who did not live up to their promises, or political actions that were not executed the way they were announced. These stories included recent actions as well as some taken several legislative periods ago. Participant 1 referred to Norbert Blüm’s promise of security of people’s pensions in 1986. Blüm was minister for employment during the transformation period and member of the CDU.

“This dishonesty that arose in the past 15 years. If I think only about the pension system. Mr Blüm said our pensions are secure. Five years later in an interview he was asked: Why did you say that? And Mr Blüm responded: Well, at that point in time pensions were secure. You can figure out the rest by yourself. He did not lie. But the real question is will our pensions be secure in the future? Well, a politician either does not answer the question at all if you don’t listen carefully. Or they lie to you so much, there is no use of asking the question in the first place.”

Participant 5 shared a story about how, after the 2016 election, the Minister President of Saxony-Anhalt Rainer Haseloff (CDU) had promised not to collaborate with the green party but ended up doing so anyway. Despite initial positive expectations of Haseloff's term, the interviewee expressed frustration, saying they were: *“disappointed that also Mr Haseloff had lied to his voters.”* Similarly, Participant 6 complained that although after the latest election in Saxony-Anhalt in June 2021 more than 50% voted conservative by voting for either CDU or AfD, a left-leaning government will be formed.¹⁶ Within this criticism, a major frustration participants expressed dealt with the perception that no matter how grave their mistakes are, politicians do not take any harm. Participant 2 referred to Andreas Scheuer, federal minister of transport, who has been widely criticised for his attempt to introduce a road toll on German highways:

“Look at Scheuer, the minister of transport. He blew the toll, he blew this, he blew that. He is not held accountable at all. Back in the days people stepped back from office or were stepped back. This doesn't work at all.”

This ingrained perception of politics and politicians as inherently hypocritical and mendacious was accompanied by a desire for honesty and an appraisal of politicians that are perceived as honest, such as Tilo Sarazzin and Hans-Georg Maaßen.¹⁷

Participant 1: *“I want conscientiousness. I want to be able to rely on one's word.”*

Participant 3: *“The biggest problem is that they [politicians] are not telling the truth.”*

Participant 4: *“This is what I am missing most in these days. Honesty. Talking to each other, yes, also listening instead of screaming.”*

The second aspect of mistrust in politics is a perceived loss of democracy, mainly centred around elections. Interviewees generally doubted the rightfulness of elections and their

¹⁶ At the time of the interview (late July 2021), the coalition negotiations were still ongoing.

¹⁷ Tilo Sarazzin gained widespread popularity through controversial perspectives on multiculturalism and immigration policies, particularly through his disputed book ‘Germany abolishes itself’ (ger.: *Deutschland schafft sich ab*) published in 2010. Hans-Georg Maaßen was retired in 2018 from his position as president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution after a range of controversies around his political perceptions.

political efficacy, i.e. the trust in their ability to influence political change. They experienced decisions as being made by ‘the elite’ merely for their own benefit without any consideration of ‘the people’s’ interests. Further, ‘the people’ are stripped of any chance of participation in the decision-making process driven by the inherent desire of ‘the elite’ to preserve their power. Political participation of ‘the people’ would constitute a threat to ‘the elite’. Many participants gave the 2020 Thuringia crisis as an example. Thomas Kemmerich, member of the liberal party FDP, was elected Minister President of the federal state Thuringia with votes from FDP, CDU, and AfD. His election constituted a cesura as it was the first in the history of the federal republic where a minister president got elected by votes from a PRR party. Faced with great public outcry, Kemmerich resigned the following day. Participants experienced Kemmerich’s resignation as deeply undemocratic, as he has been regularly elected following democratic standards.

Participant 1: *“That was the biggest scandal. Not because I’m AfD, but already because of democracy. The majority voted for him. How, why does the chancellor arrogate for herself to say: this must be changed. How can that be a thing? What does that have to do with democracy in our state?”*

Participant 6: *“A Mr Ramelow¹⁸ acts in Thuringia like a little duke from the Middle Ages. I cannot do such things. This way I don’t regain the citizens I have lost, no, I just fuel the problem even more.”*

Instead of ruling in name of the people, participants saw the government and the parliament as completely detached from German citizens, and further not interested in people’s needs.

Participant 4: *“The will of the electorate is being thwarted”* and Participant 3: *“the state has become the enemy of the German public.”* Participant 6: *“If people say here: No, we don’t want a mosque in Erfurt.¹⁹ The majority of people. Then this must be accepted. I shouldn’t get*

¹⁸ Bodo Ramelow of the Left party is the incumbent minister president of Thuringia. After Kemmerich’s resignation and much political debate, he has been elected minister president with the votes of The Left, Greens, SPD, and CDU.

¹⁹ In Erfurt, capital of Thuringia, plans for the first new construction of a mosque in the federal state have caused considerable protest, also from far right parties incl. the AfD. Construction is still ongoing.

confrontational with citizens but approach them and try to discuss the problems. And not force things through by means of the power I have as a governing party or whatever.” Participant 6: *“The connection to the people has definitely been lost.”* In this vein, participants assumed the existence of a general will that derived from the needs of ‘the people’, which is being ignored by ‘the elite’. In light of the pandemic and the Covid-19 restrictions at the time that included a lockdown, some participants compared the state of democracy to a dictatorship.

Participant 2: *“Those are parallels to 1933 or to the Weimar Republic. Yes, it began the same way after the takeover. People weren’t allowed to go to some places. Opinions, opinions were suppressed.”*

Participant 3: *“I am afraid that we won’t be able to leave this dictatorial system that is slowly developing now. That we will have less rights in the future. If the constitution, the way we know it know, will ever or in a long time come back. I am really afraid of that. And I believe that this way, we won’t be living in a democracy but in a dictatorship in the future.”*

In addition to tampered elections, participants viewed the government as acting in breach of current laws, particularly in the context of immigration. The government’s actions are framed as smuggling and as standing in contradiction to international asylum and sea rescue laws. Lastly, participants saw a loss of democracy also in uniformity of political decision-making. The green, the left, and the social democratic party are perceived as essentially the same, and the Christian democrats are criticised for moving further to the left. Participants criticised those parties’ consolidation against the AfD, which they perceive as unfair, undemocratic, and cowardly.

The third aspect of mistrust in politics is inefficacy of governance. Political decisions on all types of issues were perceived as ineffective and incomprehensible.

Participant 2: *“government failure”; “Nobody sees a real sense behind all this.”*

Participant 4: *“If they would have at least achieved something.”*

Participant 5: *“To me, the federal government is an epicentrum of stupidity.”*

Participant 6: *“We are governed by idiots.”*

This critique of governance efficacy includes an element of doubt of the competence of political staff. Hence, next to being driven by their mere desire to remain in power, participants also saw politicians as generally unqualified to advocate for the interest of ‘the people’. Participant 6: *“I have the impression that there is more and more personnel in top positions that has no clue about what they are doing.”* Central issue showcasing this political incompetency was the political performance in reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite latent doubt about the severity of the disease in some interviews, and with the exemption of Participant 4 (*“The pandemic. What pandemic am I asking. Fraud was that, only fraud.”*), interviewees acknowledged the pandemic and an overall need for measures to decrease the spread of the Coronavirus. That said, discontent with these measures was significant. In line with the above, decisions were perceived as ineffective to ridiculous, and decision-makers as incompetent and corrupt. Participant 1 shared a detailed explanation of why wearing face masks was not only ineffective but also harmful to people’s health, particularly for older generations. Participant 2 and 3 criticised the severe impacts the lockdown and shutdown of businesses had on business owners and employees, as well as the effects of closure of schools on children. Participant 3 further expressed their concern about a deeper aim behind the measures: *“Such a complex thing has developed, so that one says now someone needs to say stop. Or one has to question. What actually are the causes for all these measures? To me, it is not Covid anymore, not this virus or this pandemic, but I fear very different objectives behind this.”* Similarly, Participant 6 argued: *“The entire corona politics is currently only being abused and exploited for their own purposes.”* While some interviewees perceived this incompetence of politicians as an omnipresent feature of politics in general, others direct this alleged incompetence towards specific political personalities, above all chancellor Angela Merkel. Other allegedly incompetent politicians that were mentioned by several participants are Annalena Baerbock, current chancellor candidate of the Green party, and Ursula von der Leyen, current president of

the EU Commission. All three of these high-profile politicians identify as women. This salience can be an indication of sexist tendencies in PRR supporters.²⁰

The criticism of a perceived incompetence culminates in a disparagement of single politicians, which can partially be described as hatred. Especially Angela Merkel becomes a culprit for almost everything, Merkel and “*her consortium*” as Participant 4 and 5 titled. In parts, these two interviewees became highly emotional when talking about Merkel and drifted off into intensive insults. In order not to allow room for inept affronts and defamation, this thesis explicitly forgoes quotation at this point.

In sum, mistrust in politics manifested as a strong element of political dissatisfaction in AfD supporters. The sentiment is multi-layered; it includes a perceived hypocrisy of politics, a feared loss of democracy, inefficacy of governance and incompetence of political staff, as well as hatred towards chancellor Angela Merkel. Hereby, the populist logic of the elite vs. the people is central. Mistrust in politics emerged due to ‘the elite’s’ ignorance of ‘the people’s’ general will. At the expense of ‘the people’, the elite is pursuing their own interests and, through this ignorance of the general will, slowly deteriorating democracy.

The AfD as the Only True Defender of Democracy

In light of these elements of AfD supporters’ political dissatisfaction, another theme emerged that can be understood as a response to all the above. Perceiving those deficiencies as fundamental threats to democracy, participants saw it as their obligation as ‘the true people’ to try to counteract these deficiencies, meaning standing up against ‘the elite’. In this perception, AfD supporters are active agents rather than protest voters who passively reject current politics. The means to (attempt to) restore democracy is their engagement in the AfD, as the AfD is seen as the only true alternative to the corrupted elite and as the only party truly advocating for the people’s general will.

²⁰ The relation between gender and the PRR is complex and research is still limited. For an overview of the field refer to e.g. Coffé, 2018.

A strong urge to act was prevalent throughout all interviews. Participants directed this desire to themselves as well as to a wider group of people, which they are calling to conscience and to action.

Participant 1: *“And there I, as a German, must say: People wake up! It is enough! Wake up!”*

Participant 4: *“And this was my main motivation to join the AfD. To change something.”*

Participant 6: *“I will always fight against those machinations.”*

In reference to the pandemic, Participant 3 said: *“Yes, we must take the streets. We must create clarity. We must question.”* Recounting the restrictions people were faced with during the pandemic, they continued: *“So it is just normal that people rise up and form resistance.”* This quote exemplarily shows how interviewees perceive their acts of resistance as vital and necessary and further also as natural defence mechanism that is inherent to the people. When asked for their motivation to get engaged in the AfD, Participant 2 shared their experience of a weekly demonstration they organise in the participant’s hometown, which is becoming increasingly popular. Participant 2 accounted for the demonstration as a platform that brings people together, and that empowers them to speak up. *“And it is getting more and more popular among the people. Many, many also find words. They take the microphone and get their frustration off their chests. And that encourages others to do the same.”* And further: *“More and more people are realising this. They don’t even ask why is it that way? They just sense that something is going wrong. If you then get them to question a little or to reflect, and woosh, we have new supporters.”* In their description of these demonstrations, Participant 2 also shared how some attendees turn aggressive during the statements they give. *“We have to step in between, so that everything stays within limits. So it doesn’t get aggressive or anything. Calls to murder or something, to crimes. Some people really step out of themselves. So sometimes you need to tell them: calm down, breathe. You need to take them aside a little bit.”* Similarly,

Participant 5's outline of their own and others' frustration about public spending of 'their' tax money gave account of the degree of people's anger: *"You know, some even thought about showing up with flail and pitchfork."*

The need to defend democracy is supported by the sub-theme of a strong east German identity. Interviewees understood their experiences as citizens of the GDR as an asset in the fight of today's challenges to democracy. Having lived in a non-democratic system increased their awareness for anti-democratic tendencies and thus enabled them to detect those earlier than west German citizens can. All interviewees self-identified as east German, as *"children of the GDR"* as Participant 1 put it. They further admit the relevance of the experiences they made during the GDR until today, also for the people in their surroundings. Participant 2 said the memory of what happened during and after the GDR was still awake, shaping the people until today: *"They were all children of their time."* All participants perceived their east German identity as a distinguishing marker from west Germans.

Participant 4: *"The east Germans, they just work differently."*

Participant 6: *"If I talk to people from the old states and the new states, the east, the basic attitude, the experienced, is completely different. Grown up completely different. Through this constant caution, what do I say, where am I going, to whom do I talk about what, during GDR times."* Participant 6 limited this distinction however to people born around 1980 or later, who have actively experienced the GDR rule. *"And this is the generation that is more awake than those in the old states. Regarding when it goes into the wrong direction somewhere."*

Further, interviewees understood these particular experiences resulting from the GDR rule as an asset. Through a re-occurring comparison of the current status quo with the lack of freedom they experienced during the GDR, they found themselves enabled to detect anti-democratic tendencies earlier than others who have not made these experiences, referring to west Germans.

Participant 2: *"This reminds people, especially the older generation, of the worst times, worst GDR times. That's the problem."*

Participant 4: *“And I must say, honestly, it wasn’t event his bad in the GDR. So I am a child of the GDR. The Neues Deutschland²¹ is a real innocent in comparison to what is happening here today in media and journalism. Anything but truthful. And of course the people notice this. We are just completely differently sensitised here in the east, you know? You can’t lead us up the garden path. They know exactly if something is propaganda and if they are being lied to. And they only lie.”*

Participant 5: *“East Germans sense what is happening here. That we are being controlled.”*

Participant 6: *“They experienced and formed this live, experienced the beginnings of democracy in person. So, to many, it is of course difficult to accept the direction in which things are going now.”*

In response, participants perceived their engagement for the AfD as the channel through which they aim to address the challenges to democracy. They complimented the AfD’s work in parliaments, perceiving them as the only party that adheres to current law and as the only true opposition, as the only defender of democracy.

Participant 1: *“Since the AfD is in federal parliaments, there are critical questions. What an opposition is supposed to do.”*

Participant 2: *“We demand, as it is written in law.” (referring to public spending)*

Participant 3: *“The AfD is the only party that dares to be critical and to question and that doesn’t just sign off everything. That’s why I said this really is the only party that is electable, electable at this moment.”*

Participant 4: *“The AfD is the only party that articulates and pursues national interests.”*

Participant 5: *“Then I need to support an alternative party that tries to be an opposition here. Because, where do we have an opposition? An opposition in the parliament? Do we have that? Or, would we have one, if there wasn’t the AfD?”*

While participants have expressed agreement with the AfD’s policies, their support for the party also seems to be driven by a lack of alternatives. In their view, all other parties form part of the corrupt and undemocratic system and are thus not electable. They have disqualified

²¹ During the GDR, *Neues Deutschland* was a state wide newspaper, that was under control of the SED, the country’s ruling party. Today, it is a supra-regional newspaper associated with the left party *Die Linke* that describes itself as a socialist newspaper.

themselves as democratic parties for the time being. This supports the understanding of AfD support as a protest vote that emerges out of disagreement with the established parties.

In sum, AfD supporters perceive a deep-seated and urgent need to defend democracy from ‘the elite’ currently in power. The AfD channels this desire by presenting itself as the only defender of democracy and interests of ‘the people’, as the only party that adheres to laws and as the only one that dares to step out of a conformity that’s enforced ‘from above’. AfD supporters east German identity plays a major role in identifying this need and mobilising for the defence.

Synopsis

This study aims for an increased understanding of the concept of political dissatisfaction as a driver of populist radical right voting through a micro-level. Thereto, two research questions were defined, which will now be answered making use of the above-presented results. The first research question targets an increased understanding of the concept of political dissatisfaction by changing the focus to the micro level. *RQ 1: Which issues within the wider political sphere do voters of the AfD in rural areas of east Germany identify that account for their personal dissatisfaction with politics?* The interviews conducted with AfD supporters in Mansfeld-Südharz, a rural area in east Germany, clearly present individuals’ experience of political dissatisfaction as a multi-layered sentiment that is composed of combination of grievances and mistrust. Through the interviews, AfD supporters’ individual understandings of their political dissatisfaction could be assessed. More precisely, AfD supporters in rural east Germany identify the following issues as accounting for their political dissatisfaction: a sense of longing for a past normality, discontent over allocation of public funds, anti-immigratory attitudes, a biased media at the hands of the elite, and hypocritical, ineffective politics at the verge of a loss of democracy. Inevitably, these elements are highly interlinked, and distinctions between them are blurry. Ultimately, AfD supporters’ political dissatisfaction is driven by concern for the well-being of Germans, or ‘the people’, that is seen at odds with the interests of

politics, or ‘the elite’. Referring to ‘the elite’, participants conflate perceptions about politicians, lobbyists, and conglomerates such as Apple, Google, and Amazon. They are perceived as a colluding group, whose differentiation is neither possible nor important. AfD supporters seem to have internalised the antagonism the elite vs. the people, which constitutes the core of the populist logic.

Based on these accounts, the second question sets them in relation with the AfD. *RQ II: In what ways do these voters consider the AfD as a potential corrective to these perceived defects of politics?* During the interviews, participants were noticeably emotional when narrating their discontent with current politics, perceiving it as a time in which democracy itself is on the line. They consider the AfD as a way forward, as the only true opposition dedicated to the interests of the German people. Driven by the urge to defend democracy, the AfD presents as the only viable option as other political parties are perceived as part of the corrupt elite. The AfD becomes a tool rather than an affective lasting party orientation. The party thus benefits from the need to defend democracy, a sentiment to whose creation they actively contributed to. Based on previous research, this thesis assumes that political dissatisfaction constitutes a driver of AfD vote. Theoretically also possible is the reverse: support for the AfD driven by other factors, which are later rationalised as political dissatisfaction. This direction of causality was not assessed in this thesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

In a time in which the PRR has established itself as a globally relevant political actor and in a time in which levels of political dissatisfaction are high in democracies across the world, concern about the repercussions of political dissatisfaction is significant well beyond the German context. The present study offers an in-depth micro-level analysis of political dissatisfaction as a driving factor of PRR support and thereby contributes to our understanding of the concept. It further argues for the consideration of local context specificities in the analysis of the PRR’s electorate.

When accounting for their dissatisfaction, participants repeatedly referred to local issues and frustration arising due to those. Much of their political dissatisfaction seems to derive from context-specific circumstances. The emergence of a strong east German identity further stresses the relevance of the historical local context, as an analysis on national level would have probably not allowed room for this theme. A geographical focus in the study of the PRR's electorate hence seems necessary in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their sentiments. It should thus be included in further analyses. Nevertheless, the localised accounts of political dissatisfaction identified in this study might also be transferrable to other regions, particularly those with a similar history and socioeconomic demography such as other places in east Germany and possibly in Eastern Europe as well as structurally weak areas in other countries. Comparative analyses of political dissatisfaction in PRR supporters contrasting different geographical foci on national or regional level may enable us to detect patterns and overarching reasons for people's discontent. Echoing general discussions in the field of Global Studies, local experiences are embedded in and expression of a global context and vice versa. Detecting internationally overlapping patterns in local political dissatisfaction can hence broaden our understanding of the PRR and potentially help identify common trigger factors for PRR support. Hence, while this thesis demonstrated the multi-faceted nature of political dissatisfaction based on a specific local context, its claims are relevant also for an international study of the PRR.

In this thought, central take-away from this study is a clear multi-dimensionality of political dissatisfaction. Five highly interlinked elements were identified that account for the sentiment of political dissatisfaction: a sense of longing for a past normality, discontent over allocation of public funds, anti-immigratory attitudes, a biased media at the hands of the elite, and hypocritical, ineffective politics. Binding element of these discontents is a strong fear for the state of democracy, which lies at the core of political dissatisfaction. Democracy, which is regarded as the best form of government, is perceived as fundamentally endangered by 'the

elite' – the elements of political dissatisfaction are expression of this threat. In response, deriving from a self-declared dedication to democracy, PRR supporters see it as their task and duty to defend democracy. The PRR becomes a tool for this purpose. Following the populist logic, the PRR presents itself in opposition to the corrupt elite as the only one advocating for the general will of 'the people'. Branding itself as the only true opposition the PRR is perceived as a potential corrective. It thus appears that the sentiment of political dissatisfaction in PRR supporters constitutes a reflection of the populist logic that has been internalised by PRR supporters. All discontents are read through the lens provided by the PRR. Furthermore, although PRR support is often understood as an affective decision, a passive rejection of the status quo, the above shows PRR supporters' self-perception as taking on an active position as defenders of democracy. In opposition to a corrupted system that is moving away from democracy, they make a conscious decision to support the PRR in an attempt to hinder this trend. This implies that they understand themselves as having political efficacy. This populist logic sets the PRR apart from other parties, and it seems to be resonating with many in channelling their political dissatisfaction.

Narrowing down the results to the case of rural east Germany, the results cast doubt on the currently rather dominant victim-discourse of east Germans as modernisation losers who still are economically disadvantaged and live in a region where the GDR's social homogeneity still echoes. On the contrary, the analysis has shown that people do not invoke the post-1989 transformation period for their political dissatisfaction. Thus, instead of victimising east Germans as modernisation losers we need awareness of and an open discussion about the more indirect after-effects of the transformation period. As a matter of course, the events of the transformation are historical precursors of today and will always be relevant, alongside their historical reappraisal. Rather than continuously circling around a presumed aftermath of the transformation, attention should be paid to all elements of political dissatisfaction in order to address the sentiment. In addition, discourse around PRR support tends to turn rather emotional;

unsurprisingly, as it challenged long-established fundamental democratic values. In this emotionality, the PRR and their supporters are often accused of racism and ideological delusion. While those reproaches are in parts certainly valid and should by no means be diminished, they do, however, not make up the whole picture. If we aim for sincere conversations, we need to avoid adopting a patronising view that denies PRR supporters the potential for rational agency. This thesis takes a balancing act between giving AfD supporters a space to share their part of the story and not being a mouthpiece on the other side. Again, the neglect or even endorsement of racist and discriminatory beliefs in their electorate shall not be downplayed. However, it should neither be used as a generalised excuse to avoid confrontation, labelling all AfD supporters as hopeless cases. In the analysis, many of the concerns participants expressed were understandable to even relatable and have in parts also been raised by other political parties.

The question that thrusts itself upon the reader then is the following: Why is it that the AfD, or the PRR more generally, proves more effective than other parties at channelling individuals' political dissatisfaction? This thesis can only give a glimpse of an answer to this question. PRR supporters seem to be driven by a deep-seated fear of deterioration of democracy, the PRR functions as a tool to defend it. This dedication to democracy may explain why people turn to the PRR rather than to extreme right parties such as the *NPD* or *Der Dritte Weg* for the German case. The PRR calls for a full reform of the political system – not, however, for an elimination of all forms of democracy. This separates the radical right from the extreme right, who are directly opposed to democracy. While the dividing line can be difficult to identify in practice²² (Golder, 2016, p. 478), the radical right still moves in democratic waters, not outside of the democratic system. PRR supporters seem to be driven by a basic support of democracy,

²² For the German case, both *NPD* and *Der Dritte Weg* are regarded as extreme right (*rechtsextrem*) and anticonstitutional (*verfassungsfeindlich*), not however as unconstitutional (*verfassungswidrig*), which would be against the democratic system.

on which they align their party preferences. Extreme right parties hence appeal to a smaller share of people given their anti-democratic tendencies.

Considering all the above, this thesis contributes to an increased understanding of the concept of political dissatisfaction and further points to relevant considerations for further research. As mentioned above, there is a need for further local as well as for comparative analyses of political dissatisfaction. Another aisle to further unpack the concept and understand its ramifications within the PRR discourse can be Laclau and Mouffe's considerations of populism in political discourse. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Laclau and Mouffe's view social change as requiring a discourse which enables activists to frame power inequalities as oppression, thereby creating an antagonism that helps to mobilise people. Laclau (2005) understands populism as based in the creation of empty signifiers expressing a universal idea of social justice. On first sight, this seems to resonate with the logic applied in the case at stake. Weaving the now deepened understanding of political dissatisfaction into the analysis of the wider political discourse and societal context through the lens Laclau and Mouffe provide may contribute to a broader understanding of the PRR's electorate and its motivations.

Lastly, a comprehensive understanding of the why and how supporters of the PRR are dissatisfied with politics in their respective contexts not only enriches our academic understanding, it can also be a useful starting point to take action. Through a candid interest in people's concerns, we gain the chance of an open and hence comprehensive picture, which is a necessary first step in the attempt to halt a seemingly growing global divide of societies into proponents and adversaries of the PRR. Hence, this thesis offers both, a call for conversations as well as a starting point.

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Appendix A: Interview guide (Translated into English)

Interview guide Political Dissatisfaction

- Thanks for participation
- Technical details:
 - Anonymous
 - Exclusively for Master's thesis
 - Recording
- Process:
 - Ca. 60 min
 - Introductory questions, three bigger blocks
 - No right or wrong, answers are voluntary, you can end the interview at any time
- Questions?

→ Recording

1. Intro
 - a. Age, occupation, role in AfD
 - b. Since when are you interested in politics?
 - i. What sparked your interest in the AfD?
 - ii. Start of engagement for local AfD group?
 - c. Assessment of the work of the current regional and federal government?
 - i. Functioning of the political system/ general state of democracy in Germany?
 - ii. Dissatisfied yes/ no?
 - iii. Motivation for AfD support?
2. Transformation period: Changes after fall of the wall (Modernisation Grievances)
 - a. How did you experience this time?
 - b. What has changed for you and the people in east Germany through the fall of the wall?
 - i. Was it difficult for many to adapt to the change?
 1. Reason for anger or worry?
 - ii. Does that apply to you personally?
 - c. Would you say there are winners and losers of this transformation period?
 - d. Is the transformation period a topic in the local AfD group?
 - i. Handling of those problems by federal government?
 - ii. Reason to vote for AfD?
 - e. Sufficient east Germans in important political offices?
3. Work and retirement (Economic Grievances)
 - a. Assessment of general economic situation in east Germany
 - b. Big topic among members in local group? Personal experiences?
 - c. Difficult to find a good job?
 - i. Reasons?
 - ii. Changes lately?
 1. More competition today?
 - d. Work of the federal government regarding this? AfD?
4. Migration (Cultural Grievances)
 - a. How is immigration to Germany perceived in your surroundings?
 - b. Topic in local group?
 - c. Assessment of handling of immigration to Germany through federal government?
 - i. Biggest issues?

ii. Connection with jobs/ pension?

5. Conclusion

a. Biggest problem of politics?

i. Addressed by AfD?

-
- Concluding & Thanks
 - Questions?

Appendix B: Original Interview guide in German

Interviewguide Political Dissatisfaction

- Dank für die Teilnahme
- Technische Details:
 - Anonym
 - Ausschließlich für MA
 - Gespräch aufzeichnen
- Ablauf:
 - Ca. 60 min
 - Eingangsfragen, drei größere Blöcke
 - Kein Richtig oder Falsch, Antworten sind freiwillig & Sie können das Interview jederzeit beenden
- Rückfragen?

→ Aufnahme

6. Intro
 - a. Alter, Beruf, Rolle in AfD?
 - b. Seit wann **interessieren Sie sich für Politik?**
 - i. Wie entstand Interesse für AfD?
 - ii. Beginn des Engagements in OG/ KV?
 - c. **Einschätzung der Arbeit der aktuellen LReg & BReg?**
 - i. **Funktionieren des pol. Systems/** Zustand der Demokratie in Deutschland allgemein?
 - ii. → Unzufrieden ja/ nein?
 - iii. Motivation für Unterstützung der AfD?
7. **Nachwendezeit:** Veränderungen nach Mauerfall (Modernisation Grievances)
 - a. Wie haben Sie diese Zeit erlebt?
 - b. Was hat sich durch die Wende und danach für die Menschen in Ostdeutschland verändert?
 - i. Hatten viele Menschen Schwierigkeiten, mit dem Wandel klarzukommen?
 1. Grund für Wut oder Sorge?
 - ii. Gilt das auch für Sie persönlich?
 - c. Würden Sie sagen es gibt **Wende Gewinner & Verlierer?**
 - d. Ist die Nachwendezeit Thema in OG/ KV?
 - i. Umgang BReg mit diesen Problemen?
 - ii. Grund für Wahl der AfD?
 - e. **Genug Ostdeutsche in Politik**, wichtigen Ämtern?
8. **Arbeit & Rente** (Economic Grievances)
 - a. Einschätzung der ökonomischen Situation in Ostdtl generell
 - b. Großes Thema unter Mitgliedern in OG/ KV? Persönliche Erfahrungen?
 - c. Schwierig, einen guten Job zu bekommen?
 - i. Gründe?
 - ii. Veränderung in letzter Zeit?
 1. Mehr Konkurrenz heute?
 - d. Arbeit der BReg dazu? AfD?

9. **Migration** (Cultural Grievances)

- a. Wie wird Zuwanderung nach Deutschland in Ihrem Umfeld wahrgenommen?
- b. Thema in OG?
- c. Wie bewerten Sie **den Umgang der BReg/ LReg** mit Zuwanderung nach Dtl?
 - i. Wo sehen Sie die größten Probleme?
 - ii. Verbindung mit Arbeitsplätzen/ Rente?

10. Zusammenfassung

- a. Das größte Problem der Politik?
 - i. Adressiert durch AfD?

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- Beenden & Dank
 - Fragen?