The Christian Democratic and the Christian Social Union: Party and Voter Shifts during the Chancellorship of Angela Merkel

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2017 hat die Forschungsgruppe Wahlen die „klassische" Frage wieder gestellt, ob die Leute glauben, dass heute bei uns in Deutschland im Großen und Ganzen die richtigen Leute in den führenden Positionen sind. Diese Frage haben jetzt 46% bejaht, 44% verneint und 10% haben darauf keine Antwort gegeben. Die gleiche Frage war auch im ersten gesendeten Politbarometer vom April 1977 enthalten.

Damals, also zu einer Zeit, in der wir noch charismatische Politiker hatten, ein überschaubares Parteiensystem und in ihrer Autorität weniger stark bedrängte Eliten, fiel dennoch das Urteil ausgesprochen vernichtend aus. Lediglich 28% vertraten damals die Auffassung, dass in der Bundesrepublik die richtigen Leute in den führenden Positionen sind. 47%, also ähnlich viele wie heute, verneinten diese Frage. Allerdings sah sich damals fast jeder Vierte (24%) nicht in der Lage, die Frage zu beantworten.

Ein doch überraschendes Ergebnis angesichts der nicht nur in populisti-schen Kreisen heute weit verbreiteten Elitenschelte auch außerhalb des politischen Bereichs.

1 Der Autor bedankt sich im Namen der Forschungsgruppe Wahlen bei GESIS namentlich Herrn Prof. Dr. Wolf und Frau Dr. Eder. Ohne deren Anregung zu dieser Veranstaltung und die Organisation wäre diese Tagung nicht zustande gekommen.

2 Sprickmann Kerkerinck, Detlef: Die „Erfindung" des Politbarometers. In: Wüst, Andreas (Hg.): Politbarometer. Opladen 2003; S. 17ff.

3 Schönenborn, Jörg: Demoskopie in der beschleunigten Stimmungsdemokratie. In: Machnig, Matthias/Raschke, Joachim (Hg.): Wohin steuert Deutschland? Hamburg 2009, S. 311.

4 Richtlinie für die Veröffentlichung von Ergebnissen der Wahlforschung. Herausgegeben vom Arbeitskreis Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforschungsinstitute e.V. (ADM), der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Institute e.V. (ASI) und dem Berufsverband Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforscher e.V. (BVM). www.adm-ev.de/Richtlinien/ (Download)

5 Die ARD bzw. infratest-dimap stellt offensichtlich nur diejenigen Interviews des DeutschlandTrend bei GESIS zur Verfügung, die aus der Festnetzstichprobe stammen. Dadurch fehlt ca. ein Drittel der Interviews, die in die Sonntagsfrage eingehen. Zudem wird eine fallweise Genehmigung für die Herausgabe der Datensätze verlangt.

6 https://www.zdf.de/gesellschaft/generation-what/generation-what-abschlussbericht-100.html abgerufen am 29.11.2017

7 Gerrit Richter im Interview mit Sabine Hedewig-Mohr http://www.horizont.net/planung-analyse/nachrichten/Wahl--und-Meinungsforschung-Zeit-fuer-einen-fairen-Deal-mit-den-Teilnehmern-157818, abgerufen am 29.11.2017.

8 Hennis, Wilhelm: Meinungsforschung und repräsentative Demokratie. Tübingen 1957.

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The Christian Democratic and the Christian Social Union

Party and Voter Shifts during the Chancellorship of Angela Merkel

The German party system is one of the most stable party systems in the European Union (Saalfeld 2002). Nevertheless, caused by external events, transition of voters, or other structural opportunities, political parties occasionally change their positioning in the party system and new parties emerge (Nestler and Rohgalf 2014; Niedermayer 2015; Poguntke 2014). In the years of Angela Merkel's chancellorship, the Christian Democratic and the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) gradually shifted from a moderate right-wing position in the political system towards the center (Clemens 2013). Through this policy shift, the party aimed to attract voters located at the center of the political spectrum. However, those voters positioning themselves at the politically right margin and having given their voice to the Union in previous elections did not see their interests represented anymore (Decker 2017: 58-59). By moving the party to the left, the ideological distance to former voters located at the moderate right grew. As a result, an unanswered electoral demand on the right side of the German political sphere occurred (Decker and Lewandowsky 2017: 33-43; Franzmann 2016).

This situation might have changed by the formation of the party Alternative for Germany (AfD) in 2013 (Nestler and Rohgalf 2014). At the beginning, the AfD primarily advocated economically right-wing positions closely linked to the European Financial Crisis (Niedermayer 2015; Niedermayer and Hofrich-

ter 2016; Schmitt-Beck 2014). However, from 2014 onwards the party's position on the social dimension has moved to the right too (Niedermayer and Hofrichter 2016).

The aim of this contribution is to reexamine the transition of the German Christian parties as well as vote switching of their former supporters to the AfD. For this, the research focus will be on swing voters from the CDU/CSU to the AfD. We assume that ex-CDU/CSU supporters located at the political right fringe intended to shift their vote to the more conservative AfD in the German federal election 2013.

Part 1:
CDU/CSU's Transition Process under the Chancellorship of Angela Merkel

CDU/CSU's Party Shift – Some Hypotheses

Referring to survey respondents of a study conducted by infratest dimap, the CDU/CSU has moved from a moderate right-wing party to the center of the German party system by the time Angela Merkel served as chancellor, where the party became a viable option at the ballot box for moderates and the conservatives on the left. As a consequence, a political vacuum between the Christian parties and the extreme right National Democratic Party (NPD) emerged (Niedermayer and Hofrichter 2016: 279). Subsequently our first research hypothesis reads as follows:

H1: Under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel, the CDU/CSU shifted to the middle of the German party system which gave rise to a political vacuum.

However, Debus and Müller in 2013 examined the programmatic shift of the German Christian Democrats in a timespan from 1990 to 2011 via election manifesto data and their models reveal that the CDU/CSU's federal association only moved to the left on the social dimension but remained economically conservative. Consequently, our second research hypothesis links to this finding:

H2: Under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel, the CDU/CSU shifted to the middle of the German party system on the social dimension which gave rise to a political vacuum.

Hence, it has been hypothesized that the Union parties' electoral success was due to the lack of a moderate competitor on the right range of the German party system over the years (Bale and Krouwel 2013). Until 2013, no party filled the vacant gap caused by the CDU/CSU's shift to the left. This situation supposedly changed with the formation of the AfD.

The AfD is located to the right of the CDU/CSU on the social dimension but the party's position is rather vague on the economic dimension (Jesse and Panreck 2017; Linhardt 2017). Moreover, the AfD often describes itself as the new conservative party in the German political sphere (Franzmann 2016: 462). Nevertheless, right after its formation the AfD mainly advocated issues closely linked to the European Financial Crisis (Niedermayer 2015; Niedermayer and Hofrichter 2016; Schmitt-Beck 2014).

Hence, we assume that for the 2013 federal election the AfD positioned itself at the economic right of the CDU/CSU while it shifted to the vacuum on the social dimension after 2014. Since Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data for the 2017 federal election are not accessible yet our analyses are restricted to the party's political localization in the time of the 2013 federal election (Volkens et al. 2017). These reflections lead to our third research hypothesis:

H3: For the 2013 federal election, the AfD replaced the former positioning of the CDU/CSU on the economic dimension.

To investigate policy shifts under Merkel (Clemens 2009) our period of study ranges from 1994, the last tenure under the chancellorship of Helmut Kohl as a benchmark, to 2016. In 1998, Angela Merkel became the party's general-secretary and in 2005 its candidate for chancellorship. Before we test our assumptions, we elaborate on how we derive policy positions out of manifesto data.

Measuring Policy Positions and Policy Shifts Using Manifesto Data

The Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2017) contains information on election manifestos of parties for a wide ranging number of countries since 1945. With the information about a party's stance on standard policy preferences one is able to sort parties into party families and to place them into an ideological space or on the classic left-right axis. When trying to obtain a party's position on an ideological axis or in a multidimensional space, researchers are however confronted with numerous scales which differ in their constructions (e.g. Elff 2013; Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; König et al. 2017; Prosser 2014).

To calculate party positions on different policies we apply an approach proposed by Prosser (2014), which is unbiased by manifesto length and takes the saliency of policy preferences of parties into account. The dimensionality of the policy preferences is determined by sorting policy positions into left and right according to the classic RILE scale (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann 2006 et al.), which works as a *super-issue* incorporating economic and social positions into a one dimensional left-right axis. Whereas the RILE scale makes use of all policy preferences, the approach applied here recommends to include policy preferences only if they meet a certain correlation threshold with all other preferences on the same side of the axis (Prosser 2014: 96). Otherwise, a policy preference is not confined either to a left or a right policy position.

While most researchers apply only one left-right axis, the works of Kitschelt (1995), Bornschier (2010) and Prosser (2016) contest the wideheld view of a one dimensional ideological space and therefore propose multidimensional policy spaces that are better suited to differentiate between party positions.

Again we follow Prosser (2014: 97) who constructed a two-dimensional space. The first dimension represents economic positions ranging from strong market regulation and massive wealth redistribution through welfare states on the left to unregulated free market

economies with little to no redistribution on the right. The second dimension represents a social left-right axis based on value orientations ranging from liberal to conservative or authoritarian positions. For higher comparability, each axis ranges from 1 left, to 10 right.
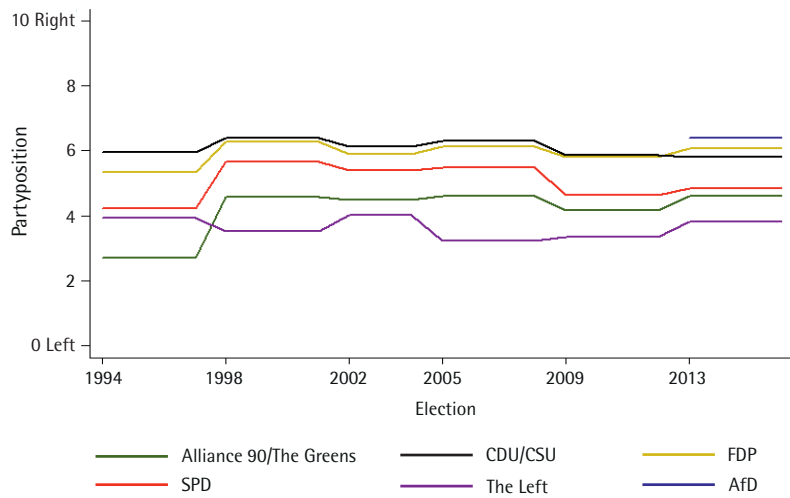
The Programmatic Shift of the CDU/CSU and the Positioning of the AfD in the German Party Sphere – Results Based on Manifesto Data

Figure 1 shows how German parties moved over time on the general left-right axis between 1994 and 2013. Changes in party positions only occur in election years when new manifestos are released. Hence, for years without a general election the positions of the latest election year are used. CDU and CSU have to be analyzed together because they compete on a shared election manifesto in general elections. Over time the federal association does not move considerably, keeping a conservative right position. Although changes are small, we see how during Angela Merkel's tenure as chancellor the party is on a constant move to the center of the party spectrum confirming other studies. Especially after campaining on a manifesto proposing strong market liberalism in 2005 and nearly losing the election, the party has started to hold more mainstream positions in subsequent elections.

The AfD positioned itself right of the CDU/CSU in 2013, the first time the party took part in a general election. Although the AfD holds a position furthermost to the right, it could not be considered an extreme position due to relative closeness to the FDP and the CDU/CSU position. The centrist trend of the CDU/CSU might have turned the AfD into an appealing alternative for more conservative voters. However, the AfD is facing the well-established FDP as a contender for similar conservative positions.

Figure 2 plots the party positions of all relevant parties on the economic as well as the social left-right dimension as standard deviations. A position close to zero reflects a position close to the mean of the party sphere. This way we

Figure 1   Left-right placement of German parties 1994–2013

Dataset: Comparative Manifesto Project

can test whether the CDU/CSU held a central position in the party spectrum in 2013 trying to gain voters at the center and opening a void in the party spectrum to be filled by the AfD.
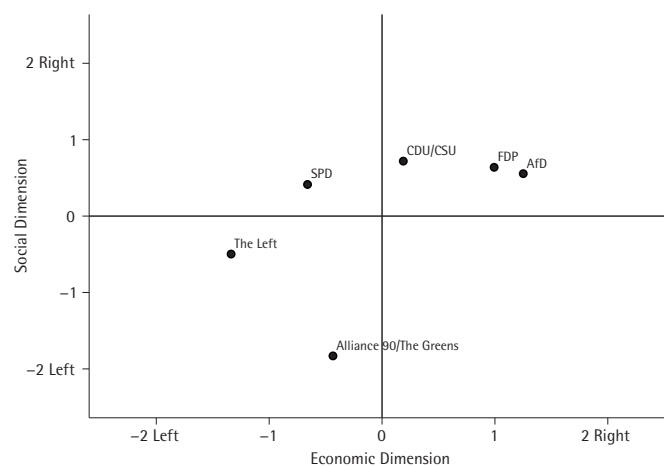
In 2013 the CDU/CSU is indeed in the center of the German party system. Its position is the result of a centrist economic position and rightmost position on the social dimension. The AfD in contrast is located at the right fringe of the economic dimension but poses no clear alternative on the social dimension. Again the party faces a strong competition from the FDP over the same ideological territory.

But did the CDU/CSU move within the two dimensional space leaving a void which could be filled by a party holding conservative views and there-fore challenging the Union as the go-to-choice for conservative voters?
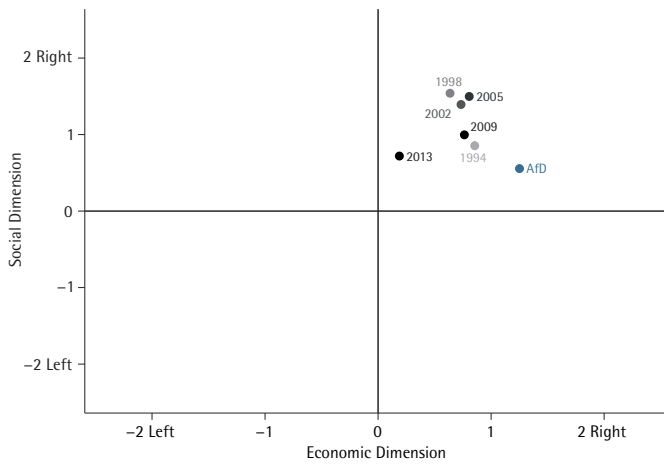
Figure 3 plots former positions of the CDU/CSU against the position of the AfD in 2013. After Helmut Kohl was defeated and Angela Merkel had taken over as general-secretary, the CDU/CSU became socially more conservative. However, during her tenure as chancellor the party moved considerably to the center beginning on social issues and later during the 2013 campaign on less conservative economic positions. Subsequently, the CDU/CSU indeed left a void in the party spectrum. In 2013 however the AfD did not hold any position the CDU/CSU ever held during Angela Merkel's tenure as party leader. Nevertheless, through the foundation of the AfD, a new conservative party in the

Figure 2   Two dimensional placement of German parties in 2013

Dataset: Comparative Manifesto Project

Figure 3   Comparing the two-dimensional position of the CDU/CSU 1994–2013 to the AfD in 2013

Dataset: Comparative Manifesto Project

German party system emerged. Hence, although the AfD did not fill the mentioned gap arisen by CDU/CSU's shift, the party constituted a conservative alternative to former CDU/CSU voters.

Preliminarily, we can conclude that the CDU/CSU indeed moved to a more centrist position and left a void in the party spectrum to be filled by an economically and socially more conservative party. Thus hypotheses 1 and 2 are confirmed. However, as the AfD did not fill this void in 2013 hypothesis 3 has to be rejected.

Part II: Shift of Votes from the CDU/CSU to the AfD

Ideological Shift of CDU/CSU's Loyal and Swing Voters – Results Based on Survey Data

In addition to analyses on party positions, we also want to locate CDU/CSU as well as AfD voters on the general left-right dimension to isolate some major differences between these groups. Schwarzbözl and Fatke (2016) considered data provided by the GLES team to investigate the AfD's electorate. Their results demonstrate that AfD supporters place themselves at a position comparable to CDU/CSU proponents on the economic dimension. On the contrary, AfD voters take significantly different positions on the social dimension compared to all the other parties.

However, since *Politbarometer* data do not enable to distinguish between the social and the economic dimension, we can only portray voters' self-placements on the general left-right dimension. The advantages of *Politbarometer* data are twofold. On the one hand, for all the years of interest monthly data are available. This means that we have 45 survey points so far, which include the question if a respondent is willing to vote for the AfD in the upcoming election. On the other hand, all the survey waves under investigation include questions on the voting decision in the last election as well as self-placement on the political left-right axis.
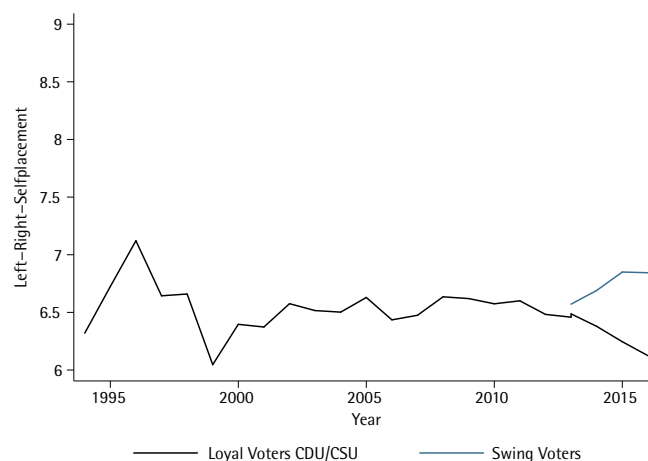
The following graph shows the localization of loyal CDU/CSU voters and of swing voters to the AfD on the general left-right dimension. Loyal voters are defined as those respondents who voted for the CDU/CSU in the previous election and intend to vote for the party at the upcoming election. In contrast, swing voters are former CDU/CSU voters now intending to cast their ballot for the AfD.

Despite some comparatively small movements in the early and mid-nineties, the loyal voters of the CDU/CSU maintain a firm middle right position which consolidated under Angela Merkel's party leadership. However, during her second tenure as chancellor the loyal voter base started to move to a more moderate position. Turning to the swing voters, the story is not as clear cut. By 2013, swing voters are almost indistinguishable from the voter base of the CDU/CSU. But as time goes by, more and more former voters of the CDU/CSU which are ideologically more conservative want to cast their ballot for the AfD in the forthcoming election and thus the mean of the left-right self-placement of swing voters moves to the right. Hence, the loyal voter base and the swing voters represent two ideologically distinguishable groups.
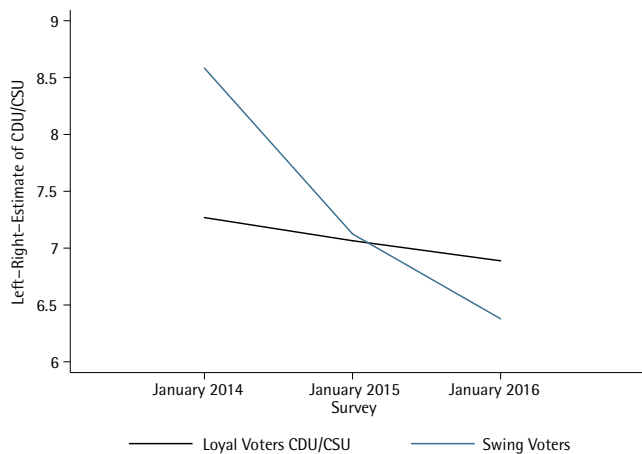
It remains an open question if the CDU/CSU is able to win back conservative voters in the future. But as Figure 5 shows, the party is perceived by both voter groups differently. The loyal voter base did not change its perception of the CDU/CSU considerably from 2014 to 2016. They located the CDU/CSU on a firm but not extreme conservative position. The swing voters however

Figure 4   Left–right self–placement of loyal CDU/CSU voters and swing voters

Dataset: Politbarometer 1994-2016, own cumulation[1]

Figure 5   Voters estimation of left–right placement of the CDU/CSU

Dataset: Politbarometer, own cumulation 2014-2016[2]

perceived their former party choice on the conservative fringe in 2014. In contrast to that, in 2016 they see the party of Angela Merkel as even more liberal than the loyal voter base does.

In the next step we will test to what extent this modification in the German party system has affected voters' electoral behavior. Through CDU/CSU's shift to the left of the political spectrum, former CSU/CSU voters located at the right fringe might have abstained or drifted to more right-wing political groups (Clemens 2009: 135).

Voter Shifts from the CDU/CSU to the AfD – A Hypothesis

Berbuir et al. (2015: 168) have shown that most AfD supporters in the 2013 general election had previously voted for the CDU/CSU in the election of 2009. Since our research focus is laid on vote switchers from the CDU/CSU to the AFD, the following explanations refer to this group of voters solely.

Politbarometer data are analyzed to trace back vote shifts of former CDU/CSU voters to the AfD. To this end, the focus will be on the era since the formation of the AfD in spring 2013.

After the CDU/CSU's movement to the center, some voters did not see their interests represented by the party anymore. Subsequently, we assume that through the shift of the CDU/CSU to the middle of the party spectrum the ideological distance to former CDU/CSU voters on the right fringe grew. As a consequence, this growing distance might have moved some ex-CDU/CSU voters to cast their ballot for the AfD in the federal election 2013. Therefore, our research hypothesis on voter movements to the AfD is as follows:

H4: The more right-wing former CDU/CSU voters positioned themselves on the general left-right dimension in comparison to the CDU/CSU, the more likely voters were to switch their vote to the AfD in the federal election 2013.

Voter Shifts from the CDU/CSU to the AfD – Results Based on Survey Data

Unit of Analysis

The aim of this work is to investigate the motivation of former CDU/CSU electors to shift their vote to the AfD. Subsequently, our analysis is restricted to *Politbarometer* interviewees who had given their voice to the CDU/CSU in the last federal election and intend to vote for either the CDU/CSU or the AfD. We use monthly surveys from March 2013, the first time vote intention for the AfD was included, until December 2016.

Method of Analysis

To analyze if the ideological distance between former CDU/CSU voters and the CDU/CSU affected the decision to vote for the AfD in the federal election 2013, diverse regression analyzes are performed. At first, multilevel logistic regression analyses are conducted and in the next step their results are verified by logistic regressions.

Variables Used in the Regression Models

Our dependent variable in all statistical models is the voting intention. For this purpose a dummy variable was build. This dummy variable takes the value "1" if a respondent intends to vote for the AfD in the next federal election. On the contrary, it adopts "0" if the respondent once again plans to vote for the CDU/CSU.

Our independent variable of interest constitutes the ideological distance between former CDU/CSU voters and the CDU/CSU on the political left-right axis. This variable was measured via two different calculation formulas.

The first computation (c1) uses data provided by the CMP and the *Politbarometer*. Therefore, the *Politbarometer* variable asking for a respondent's left-right self-placement and CMP data on the position of the CDU/CSU on the left-right dimension are utilized. To position the CDU/CSU we apply a formula on CMP data developed by Prosser (2014). For computation of our distance variable, the position of the CDU/CSU is substracted from the values of the respondents' left-right self-placements.

The second computation (c2) builds on *Politbarometer* data only. Instead of using data on objective party positioning, a variable asking for respondents' perception of political parties is deployed. Like in calculation one, the second computation subtracts the subjective position of the CDU/CSU from respondents' left-right self-placement.

In addition to our variables of interest, several control variables are included in our statistical models to check for their impact on the voting intention. To that end, variables that already proved their application in former research are added. Table 1 shows a list of all variables in our statistical models.

Results

Table 2 depicts two regression models conducted to answer research hypothesis 4. On that account, Model 1 measures

Table 1   List of Variables

dependent variable	independent variable	control variables
vote switching 0 = CDU/CSU 1 = AfD	ideological distance of voters to the CDU/ CSU on the general left–right axis	political interest, strength of party affiliation, personal economic situation, frequency of church attendance, sex, age, graduation, vocational training, place of residence (East/ West Germany)

the impact of the ideological distance on vote switching via a multilevel logistic regression analysis. Level one portrays *Politbarometer* survey respondents whereas level two constitutes the cross-sectional surveys included in our model. The distance variable in Model 1 is calculated according to our first computation formula (c1). The results show that all variables in the model, except education, significantly affect vote switching from the CDU/CSU to the AfD. Our variable measuring the ideological distance displays a highly significant positive effect on the dependent variable. This means that the more right former CDU/CSU voters positioned themselves to the CDU/CSU, the more likely voters intended to switch their vote to the AfD in the 2013 federal election. Hence, voters cast their vote for a party with a more similar ideological position. As a result and to refer back to research hypothesis 4, our assumption is confirmed through Model 1.

In contrast, Model 2 includes the second distance calculation (c2) and displays a logistic regression analysis. It was not possible to perform a multilevel model here as only three *Politbarometer* surveys since the establishment of the AfD in spring 2013 included the question on respondents' perception of political parties on the left-right axis. By comparing the results of the two models, one can conclude that the second model confirms the findings of the multilevel analysis. Hence, Model 2 can be seen as a robustness check for Model 1 as both our computations of ideological distance as well as the two types of regression analyses lead to quite similar regression results.

Discussion

This article wants to shed some light on party and voter shifts of the Christian Democratic and the Christian Social Party under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel. We show that the CDU/CSU did indeed move to the center of the German political sphere – which is a prevalent notion in research and public – but we challenge the assumption that the CDU/CSU simply turned left. By constructing a multidimensional policy space that incorporates economic and social policy positions separately, our analyses show that the CDU/CSU became more moderate in both dimensions under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel and positioned itself at the most centrist position in the German party sphere.

The political shift of the CDU/CSU indeed left a void in the German party sphere: no party held strong right or conservative positions on the economic and social dimension simultaneously. Even the AfD was not able to position itself as the true heir to the CDU/CSU of bygone days. In 2013, the AfD mostly campaigned on economic issues with a strong opposition to the fiscal policies of the coalition government stabilizing the European economy and thus was economically the party on the right extreme. However, the AfD was not able to pose a viable alternative on the social dimension in the 2013 federal election.

Furthermore, our analyses of data provided by the *Politbarometer* show that the shift of the CDU/CSU to the center of the party system had disenchanting effects on its voter base. Loyal and swing voters differ in their ideological self-placement as considerably as they do in their perception of the party's position. The difference of ideological self-placement and the party position as well as the perceived party position

Table 2   Regression analysis; standard errors in parenthesis

Vote switching	Model 1	Model 2
Distance respondent – CDU-CSU (different calculations M1 & M2)	0.213*** (0.031)	.264** (.116)
Political interest	0.728*** (0.070)	.772*** (.268)
Personal economic situation	-.485*** (.109)	.159 (.451)
Frequency of church attendance	-.135*** (.036)	.028 (.137)
Sex (Ref.: male)	-.808*** (.112)	-1.537*** (.505)
Age	-.064** (.025)	-.079 (.082)
Graduation	.034 (.050)	-.119 (.193)
Vocational training	.412*** (.138)	-.234 (.475)
Strength of party affiliation	-.773*** (.069)	-.840*** (.250)
Place of residence (East/ West Germany) (Ref.: West-G.)	.725*** (.103)	.908** (.375)
_cons	-2.124*** (.522)	.233 (-1.775)
N (individuals)	16,023	580
N (group)	45	
ICC	0.18	

p < 0.10, * *p < 0.05,* ** *p <0.01,***; Dataset: own cumulation*[3]

of the CDU/CSU had modest but significant effects on voting intentions. If former CDU/CSU voters ideologically positioned themselves to the right of the CDU/CSU, the probability of voting for the AfD increased.

As a consequence, our insights reveal the CDU/CSU to be in a difficult position. If it moves further to the center it might lose more voters on the conservative side, especially if the AfD is able to distinguish itself as a party representing true conservative values. If it returns to the right in both dimensions, it can regain the conservative votes but might lose its dominant position. The future will show if and how the CDU/CSU reacts to the emerging opposition represented by the AfD. After publication of CMP and *Politbarometer* data for the 2017 general election, we will test our hypotheses again. We assume that the social dimension has played a bigger role for the voting intention after the European Migration Crisis.

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Entgrenzung religiös-politischer Milieus?

Der Wandel religiöser Einflüsse auf die Parteipräferenz 1977 bis 2016 in Deutschland

Die Zeiten, in denen die katholische Kirche wie 1980 per Hirtenbrief zur Wahl von CDU/CSU aufrief, dürften in der Bundesrepublik größtenteils Vergangenheit sein. Auch die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland veröffentlicht schon lange keine Wahlempfehlung mehr und die Reichweite der Predigtworte schwindet durch die sinkenden Mitgliederzahlen der christlichen Kirchen und Gottesdienstbesucher. Als Folge dieses Säkularisierungstrends schließen manche Autoren auf einen Rückgang der Bedeutung religiöser Identitäten, religiösen Glaubens und der religiösen Praxis für politische Einstellungen und politisches Verhalten. Sie vermuten eine Angleichung der religiösen und nicht-religiösen Bevölkerung in politischen Fragen, also eine Entgrenzung der religiös-politischen Milieus. Religiös-politische Milieus zeichnen sich durch einen starken Zusammenhang zwischen der Zugehörigkeit zu einer religiösen Gruppe und den politischen Einstellungen der Individuen aus. Zudem vertreten einzelne Parteien die religiösen Gruppen im politischen Prozess. Die Existenz dieser Milieus geht auf politische Konfliktlinien zwischen verschieden Konfessionen (wie zum Beispiel in den Niederlanden) oder zwischen religiösen und säkularen Gruppen (wie z.B. in den südeuropäischen Staaten) zurück.

Trotz allem bleiben religiöse Eigenschaften der Individuen wichtige Prädiktoren für politische Einstellungen und insbesondere das Wahlverhalten (Elff & Roßteutscher 2011). Für die Vereinigten Staaten konnte sogar eine Polarisierung zwischen religiöser und nicht-religiöser Bevölkerung nachgewiesen werden (Chaves 2011). Und auch wenn existierende empirische Studien keine Anzeichen für eine Polarisierung, sondern Hinweise für eine Entgrenzung in Deutschland finden konnten (Wolf & Roßteutscher 2013), stellt sich die Frage, ob eine Entgrenzung der religiös-politischen Milieus tatsächlich stattgefunden hat und ob dieser Trend weiterhin anhält.

Die Fragestellung an sich ist dabei nicht neu, hat aber in den letzten Jahren wieder an Relevanz gewonnen: die Pegida-Demonstrationen in Dresden und weiterer Städten, die explizit die Rettung des christlichen Abendlandes vor einer drohenden Islamisierung für sich beanspruchen, hoben das Thema prominent auf die politische Tagesordnung, insbesondere, weil die Kirchenmitgliederzahlen, wie weiter unten aufgeführt, im Osten der Republik vergleichsweise niedrig sind. Die AfD nahm sich des Themas ebenfalls an. Gleichzeitig sehen die beiden großen Kirchen sich selbst nach wie vor

als relevanter sozialer Akteur, der auch zur aktuellen Tagespolitik Stellung nimmt, insbesondere zu sozial- oder entwicklungspolitischen Themen oder der Flüchtlingskrise. Beispiele dafür sind auch die regelmäßigen Papstbesuche ranghoher Politiker flankiert von entsprechender Berichterstattung oder der Auftritt von Kanzlerin Merkel und dem ehemaligen US-Präsidenten Obama beim evangelischen Kirchentag.

In Deutschland konzentrieren sich die Studien zur Bedeutung der Religiosität für das Wahlverhalten vor allem auf die christdemokratischen Parteien (u.a. Arzheimer & Schoen 2007; Minkenberg 2010). Dabei wird meist der Einfluss religiöser Eigenschaften auf die Wahrscheinlichkeit der selbstberichteten Stimmabgabe für die christdemokratischen Parteien untersucht - es werden also in der Regel die Wähler der Christdemokraten mit den Wählern aller anderen Parteien verglichen. Die Referenzkategorie für die Regressionsanalysen ist dadurch sehr heterogen, umfasst sie doch genauso Anhänger linker und linksextremer Parteien wie liberaler und rechtsextremer bzw. rechtspopulistischer Parteien. Darin liegt dann auch eine Schwäche existierender Studien, weil Wähler sich nicht für oder gegen eine Partei entscheiden, sondern zwischen Alternativen wählen.