Chancellor Merkel, the European debt crisis and the AfD: An analysis of voting behaviour in the 2013 federal election

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ABSTRACT

This article examines several explanatory factors of individual voting decisions in the 2013 federal election in Germany. Building on an augmented version of the Ann Arbor model, it puts forward several hypotheses concerning the impact of long-term and short-term factors on electoral choice and how the short-term factors themselves are influenced by the long-term factors. Using survey data, the hypotheses are tested. The results show that short-term factors had considerable influence on vote choice, but were themselves influenced by long-term factors. In particular, opposition to a continuation of German financial aid to EU member states affected by the debt crisis was the single most important explanatory factor of vote choice for the Euro-critical AfD. The main driving forces of Euro criticism appear to have been socially conservative views rooted in latent ethnocentrism and exclusive solidarity, rather than economic liberalism. The analysis of the candidate preferences revealed that, as far as the individual level is concerned, Steinbrück and Merkel effects were comparably important for vote choice. Interestingly, the popular support for Merkel does not predominantly root in subparts of the population with distinct policy preferences in line with traditional social-conservative guiding principles of Christian Democratic policies. The opposite is true for the candidate of the SPD, Peer Steinbrück, who appears to have attracted his support mostly from within his own political camp. The article concludes with discussing the implications of these findings for the electoral prospects of the parties.

1 INTRODUCTION

On 22 September 2013, Germans elected the federal parliament for the first time after the start of the European debt crisis. This crisis and the austerity and liberalization policies which indebted states were forced to adopt destabilized the governments that implemented them, triggered at least temporarily a further deterioration of the living standards in the respective countries, and let to fierce protest of the affected populations not only against these policies but also against the German government and chancellor Merkel. What is more, the European debt crisis also had repercussions on domestic politics in Germany that might have affected voters' decisions in the 2013 federal election. Despite differences on conditions for further financial aid, all parliamentary parties, except the Left Party, affirmed their support of the Euro and the willingness to help highly indebted European countries (e.g. Kietz 2013). Accordingly, Chancellor Merkel could act as a representative who defended Germany's interests on the international scene – and whose popularity probably benefited from some kind of "rally round the flag" effect. Moreover, the prevailing intra-parliamentary support for the policy of conditional support for indebted Euro-zone countries resulted in a campaign in which the European debt crisis and Germany's role in it played a small role (e.g. Brost & Schieritz 2013).

Given the considerable number of voters who had mixed feelings about or opposed German financial support for Euro-zone countries (see Table 1 below), this campaign focus, at first glance, might come as a surprise. Taking a closer look, it appears to be a consequence, rather than a contradiction. In February 2013, the party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, 'Alternative for Germany') was founded to explicitly address the issue of the crisis and to offer a radical, Euro-critical alternative to the German voters. The initiative to found this party came from economic liberals discontent with the handling of the European debt crisis and the frequently forwarded framing of the policies as being 'without alternative' – hence the name, Alternative for Germany. Instead, this party suggested not to continue the relief efforts for the indebted European countries and to strive for the dissolution of the Euro area into smaller, economically more homogeneous parts. Furthermore, they suggested considering a comeback of national currencies, if economic needs be (e.g. Plickert 2013). Moreover, pundits and critics suspected that the party's anti-Euro stance was combined with conservative views on social issues, e.g., immigration, as well as some kind of anti-partyism (e.g. Bangel 2013; Geis 2013; Gensing 2013). Given a Euro-sceptic party aiming to capitalize on anti-Euro sentiment in the electorate, mainstream pro-Euro parties, relying on issue-ownership theory (Petrocik

1996), might have avoided highlighting this issue because otherwise more voters might have learned about the existence and potential viability of the AfD. Instead, mainstream party campaigns focused on other topics. In particular, the Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU)[1] made considerable efforts to focus the campaign on its popular leader, Angela Merkel. In comparison, neither the SPD nor one of the other established parties succeeded in putting one of their favoured issues on the agenda.

Against this backdrop, the present paper addresses two interconnected questions regarding vote choice in the 2013 federal election. First, we consider the effects of attitudes towards the European debt crisis on voting behaviour. Given the preceding campaign, we expect that the AfD could capitalize on Euro-scepticism as well as, on a more abstract level, on economic liberalism and conservative views in the social domain. Second, we analyse the extent to which candidate preferences for Chancellor Merkel was the decisive factor in citizens' voting decisions. Given the candidate-centred campaign of the CDU/CSU, the question is whether Merkel's popularity transcended partisan and ideological divides and made her party eligible for larger parts of the German population. To address this question, we explore whether voters decided to vote for the CDU/CSU because they held Angela Merkel in high regards. If so, the second question is why citizens actually preferred Merkel as chancellor. If voters vary in their preference for Merkel depending on the policy-predispositions they have internalized, it is hard to argue that Merkel does transcend partisan lines. Put differently, the claim that Merkel does not stand for clearly perceived policy principles would have to be modified.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. In the following section, we outline a model of vote choice and propose several hypotheses. Afterwards, data, measures, and methods are described. We then confront the hypotheses with empirical evidence from regression analyses on how party identifications, policy related predispositions, candidate orientations, and attitudes towards the European debt crisis affected individual vote choice in the 2013 election.[2] In the final section of the paper, the key findings are summarized and implications are discussed.

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[1] Although the CDU and CSU are two independent parties, we treat them as one here.
[2] An online appendix to this paper that provides information on methodological details of the statistical analyses is available on the authors' homepages.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The analysis of the determinants of vote choice in the 2013 German federal election builds on the so-called Michigan approach of electoral research (Campbell et al. 1960). Basically, voting behaviour is most appropriately explained by voters' perceptions and evaluations of political objects. In an augmented model, candidate orientations and issue orientations, as short-term factors, and party attachments, values, and policy principles are the main forces that drive individual vote choice (Miller and Shanks 1996). While the latter can lend stability to voting behaviour, the former are suitable to account for change. Moreover, the impact of these determinants is variable, rather than constant. In particular, within a given political system, campaign communication is quite powerful in shaping the magnitude of the effects. A campaign focusing on a specific policy issue or candidates can increase the impact of issue attitudes and candidate orientations on vote choice, respectively. By the same token, a campaign fought strictly along partisan lines is likely to lead to quite strong direct effects of partisan identification on vote choice (e.g. Schoen 2004; 2007).

Given our research questions and the specific context of the 2013 German federal election, we rely on a three-stage model of voting behaviour. Vote choice serves as dependent variable. As proximate determinants, we include candidate orientations and issue orientations. As more distal determinants, we employ political predispositions. In particular, our model comprises party identification and policy principles (Feldman 1988; Peffley & Hurwitz 1985). Both of these are treated as external to the specific election campaign being studied and therefore as potential determinants of candidate orientations and issue orientations (Campbell et al. 1960; Lodge & Taber 2000). This interrelationship implies that analyses of voting decisions that simultaneously include long-term and short-term factors as direct explanatory factors tend to underestimate the total magnitude of the effects of predispositions. As before, campaign communications and other contextual factors must be considered powerful determinants of the magnitude of these effects.

We include four policy-related predispositions that touch on issues central to German politics in recent years and especially to the 2013 election campaign. They also are consistent with more general findings on the ideological structure of citizens' belief systems (Arzheimer 2009; Jagodzinski & Kühnel 1994; Mair 2007). One supposedly important predisposition concerns the question of how much the state should get involved in economic affairs and refers to the socio-economic dimension of political conflict (economic liberalism). A second

important predisposition relates to the potential trade-off between economic and environmental concerns. Should the government actively try to protect the environment even if this has a negative effect on the economy? In Germany, this issue is closely entwined with the question of the nuclear power-phase out since the Green party was founded on this broader policy issue. A third overarching issue relevant in German politics in recent years concerns the adherence to traditional conceptions of morality (moral traditionalism). This predisposition touches on issues such as the role of religion in every-day life, gender roles, same sex marriage, and abortion. It touches on the second dimension in two-dimensional conceptions of the policy space, the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. Finally, we consider a predisposition here that is concerned with ethnocentrism and, more specifically, the question of immigration.

Given the characteristics of the 2013 federal election campaign, we are in a position to form some expectations concerning the role of the short-term factors we are particularly interested in here, attitudes towards the European debt crisis and candidate preferences. Vote choice for the AfD should have been strongly influenced by the attitudes towards the European debt crisis, given the issue's prominence in the party's campaign. Voters that were critical about helping indebted European countries should have been more likely to vote for this party. In contrast, attitudes towards the crisis should have no or only small effects on the vote choice for the other parties. Citizens that preferred giving financial aid might have been somewhat more likely to vote for the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, the Greens, or the Left Party. All of these parties were in favour of such measures. At the same time, they did not campaign on the issue, which is why we expect the effects to be negligible. Positive evaluations of the respective candidate should have made it more likely for citizens to cast their vote for the respective party. Given the CDU/CSU's candidate-centred campaign, candidate effects should have been especially strong in the case of Angela Merkel. If the pundits commenting on the campaign and the likely election outcomes were right, this Merkel effect should be widely prevalent in the German electorate. Specifically, voters without party loyalties should then be more likely to vote for the CDU/CSU.

The long-term factors can be expected to influence vote choice both directly and indirectly. As for the direct effects, the identification with a party should have substantially increased the probability to vote for this party. At the same time, the identification with one party might have decreased the probability of voting for another party, especially if it belongs to another party bloc. Taking into account general, rather than campaign-specific, party positions allows

forming hypotheses about direct effects of policy-related predispositions. The CDU/CSU is traditionally market-oriented, morally conservative, and rather sceptical about liberalizing immigration policies. Consequently, high scores on economic liberalism, moral traditionalism and ethnocentric views might have increased the likelihood of voting for this party. In light of the recent change in policy position regarding the nuclear energy phase-out, we refrain from formulating a hypothesis for the predisposition concerning the environment. The FDP is a strictly market-oriented party, for which environmental concern has only secondary significance. Although the socio-political profile has been less visible in the past, the FDP has retained the image of a rather liberal party in this dimension as well. Thus, economically liberal, environmentally unconcerned voters opposing morally traditional or intolerant policy positions should be more likely to cast their ballot for the FDP. The SPD and the Left party are traditionally welfare-state oriented. Opposition to economic liberalism might thus have made citizens more inclined to vote for the SPD and the Left party. Given the liberal welfare and labour market reforms in the Schröder era, the SPD vote might not be affected as starkly as the Left Party vote. The Green party has always been driven by environmental concern. Consequently, citizens who share this concern should have been more likely to vote for the party. Finally, the AfD has taken economically liberal positions since it exists and has been in favour of stricter immigration rules. Accordingly, economic liberalism and ethnocentric preferences might have been conducive to make citizens more likely to vote for the AfD.

As concerns effects of party identification and policy-related predispositions on candidate preferences, we first anticipate that party identifiers were substantially more likely to have a preference for their party's candidate to be the future chancellor. Regarding policy-related preferences, we would suspect that voters' holding predispositions in accordance with traditional political values of a given party and its candidate should enhance the likelihood of supporting this party's candidate. Yet pundits have commented on both candidates as being somewhat atypical representatives of their parties, i.e. Mrs. Merkel as less conservative in the social domain and Mr Steinbrück as economically more liberal than their parties. This might have made it difficult for voters to reconcile their perceptions regarding the party's and the candidate's values and thereby weakened the link. What's more, chancellor Merkel has been characterized as a national mother figure (*Mutter der Nation*, or just *Mutti*) that stands beyond specific political content. In light of these circumstances, we refrain from formulating explicit hypotheses for the policy-related predispositions on candidate preferences and treat this part of the analysis as exploratory.

3   DATA, MEASURES, METHODS

The analysis utilizes data from a web survey of a random sample drawn from an online recruited panel conducted as part of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). 1012 German citizens eligible to vote completed the questionnaire. The survey was in the field from the 6th to the 21st of September 2013. Given the fact that the online panel the sample was drawn from is not representative for the German population, the results of the empirical analysis can only cautiously be generalized. To attenuate the problem of non-representativeness, we use a representative weight that uses information from the 2012 micro census regarding gender, age, education, and regional origin.

The analysis of the determinants of vote choice is confined to voters of the four political parties that entered the German Bundestag (CDU/CSU, SPD, the Greens, and the Left Party) plus voters of the FDP and the AfD, which failed to leap over the 5%-threshold by a small margin. Respondents that indicated a voting intention for another party, did not give an answer to the question on intended vote choice, or indicated that they did not intend to vote are excluded from the analysis.

To measure party identification, the standard indicator was used (Since only few reported a party identification with the FDP, the Left Party or the AfD, these variables were not included in the following analysis.[3] Additionally, a dummy variable indicating voters with no party identification was included. This allows us to analyse whether some party garnered a disproportionately large share of votes from this growing part of the electorate. Three of the four policy-related predispositions we consider here were measured with two survey items, respectively, one predisposition was measured with three items. Using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with nine statements. To aggregate the respective items to one predisposition measure we computed factor scores from a confirmatory factor analysis.[4] Given the large amount of variation in single-item measures that is due to short-term events, this procedure ensures a greater validity of the measures given the theoretical concepts.[5]

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[3] See section 1 of the online appendix for the German question wording.

[4] See section 2 of the online appendix for information on the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis we conducted.

[5] In addition to these variables capturing partisan and policy-related predispositions, we include a measure tapping into voters' general ideology. Although we run the risk of over-controlling for the predispositions' effects, we do this to avoid two potential sources of omitted-variable bias. One potential source is our inability to include variables measuring party identification for the Left Party and the AfD due to small-N problems. A second one stems from the conceptual overlap between ideological affiliation and policy-related predispositions.

To capture candidate orientations respondents were asked whether they preferred Angela Merkel, Peer Steinbrück, or neither as chancellor of the Federal Republic. Two dummy variables were created identifying respondents with a preference for the CDU/CSU candidate and the SPD candidate, respectively. Finally, the issue positions concerning the European debt crisis were measured with an item that asked respondents to rate their disagreement with the statement that Germany should help other European countries which are in financial trouble during this time of the European debt crisis.[6] Respondents were able to grade their answer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

As Table 1 shows, roughly one third of the survey respondents that have given a valid answer are affiliated with the CDU/CSU and the SPD, respectively. The last third consists of respondents identifying with the Greens, some other party, or exhibit no long-term party loyalty. At the same time, roughly a majority of respondents prefer Angela Merkel as chancellor, while only a third has a preference for Peer Steinbrück. Provided candidate effects on vote choice, Mrs. Merkel's popularity might have gained the CDU/CSU some additional votes. The short-term factors are clearly structured by long-term party affiliations. Virtually all CDU/CSU identifiers favour Mrs. Merkel (94 %) and most SPD partisans support Steinbrück (73 %). This difference in support probably stems from the fact that Steinbrück was controversial on the left SPD's left wing for supporting the liberal welfare and labour market reforms of the Schröder chancellorship. While more Green identifiers support their natural coalition partner's candidate Steinbrück than the opponent's candidate, the unaffiliated segment of the respondents show a stronger preference for Merkel. While only about four in ten respondents oppose giving financial aid to indebted European countries, it is noteworthy that opposition is considerably higher among respondents without party identification. As for the policy-related predispositions, the majority of the respondents show low support for economic liberalism.[7] A majority also rejects moral traditionalism. Finally, more respondents are ethnocentrically predisposed and environmentally concerned than not.

-- Table 1 about here --

To gauge citizens' ideological position, the standard measure of self-placement on a left-right continuum was used.

[6] In the following, we use the term 'opposition to financial aid' as a synonym for these attitudes.

[7] See Table A2.4 of the online appendix for detailed descriptive statistics on the policy-related predispositions.

In the following section, we present results from a series of regression models designed to confront the hypotheses formulated in the preceding section with empirical evidence. We first turn to the short term determinants of voting behaviour, i.e. attitudes towards the European debt crisis and candidate orientations. Given the causal order assumed by the Michigan model, these are proximate concepts that have an (exclusively) direct impact on vote choice. To quantify these effects, results of a multinomial regression analysis are presented, in which vote choice is the dependent variable and both short- and long-term psychological factors are included as explanatory variables. Including the latter in this stage of the analysis is necessary because we would otherwise overestimate the impact of the former.

In a second step, we analyse whether long-term factors, i.e. party identification and policy predispositions, drive both short-term factors and electoral choice. Given the causal order implied in our model, as more distal concepts they can influence vote choice in two ways. First, they can shape the proximate concepts which in turn exhibit an impact on voting behaviour. We analyse this mechanism empirically by regressing the short term factors on the long term factors. Second, they can have a direct effect. Citizens then decide to vote for a given party because they identify with this party or because it is most consistent with their policy predispositions. To gauge these direct effects, we present further evidence from the multinomial regression analysis in which vote choice is the dependent variable and both short-term and long-term determinants are included. Finally, to give an impression of the long-term factors total effects, vote choice is regressed on the long-term factors exclusively.[8] While we discuss the findings in an untechnical fashion here, methodological details and all results, including regression tables, can be found in the online appendix.

4   RESULTS

We first turn to the question whether attitudes towards the European debt crisis had an impact on electoral choice. For the sample we analyse here, Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities of vote choice for the AfD, the CDU/CSU, the SPD, and the Greens, conditional on opposition to financial aid and differentiated by partisan and candidate preferences.[9] As

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[8] For more details on this simple strategy of analyzing mediation effects (and its drawbacks), see e.g. Baron & Kenny (1986) and Hayes (2009).

[9] We have chosen the combinations of partisan and candidate preference we present depending on empirical significance. E.g., since the number of CDU/CSU identifiers who do not have a candidate preference for Mrs. Merkel is negligible (see Table 1), we do not present predicted probabilities for this group here. Voting decisions

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the slopes of the graphs in the upper left show, strong opposition to financial aid made a voting decision for the AfD considerably more likely within the group of citizens without any party identification. In fact, given the virtually inexistent combination of support for granting financial aid to indebted European countries and AfD vote choice, opposition to this practice can be understood as a necessary condition for voting for this party. Thus, citizens that preferred either Merkel or Steinbrück for some other reason than their position on handling the European debt crisis were willing to support a party clearly in opposition to both the CDU/CSU and the SPD. In contrast, additional analyses suggest that this effect was much smaller, albeit still present, among citizens who also had a party identification with one of the established parties.[10]

-- Figure 1 about here --

As the other three diagrams show, opposition to financial aid only weakly, if at all, affected decisions to vote for the CDU/CSU, the SPD, and the Greens. There is some evidence that citizens without party identification but with a preference for the chancellor Merkel were somewhat more likely to cast a vote for the CDU/CSU at low and medium levels of opposition to financial aid (see diagram in the upper right of Figure 1). Similarly, it seems that in some subsections of the electorate strong opposition to financial support for indebted Euro-zone countries tended to decrease the likelihood of casting votes for the SPD and the Green Party (see diagrams in the lower section of Figure 1).

In sum, the evidence supports our hypothesis that only the vote choice for the AfD was influenced by attitudes towards the European debt crisis. This expectation was founded on the issue's menial role in all of the established parties' campaigns and the latter's agreement on this issue. If there is no real difference concerning an issue between parties perceived to be legitimately eligible, it is impossible to base one's decision on this criterion.

-- Table 2 about here --

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for the FDP and for the Left Party are completely unaffected by opposition to financial aid, which is why we do not present analogous graphs for these parties here.

[10] See Figure A3.1 of the online appendix.

We now turn to the second short-term factor, citizens' candidate preferences. The graphs in Figure 1 referring to the CDU/CSU and the SPD, respectively, show the considerable impact candidate orientations appear to have had on voting decisions for these parties. The difference between the probability of voting for a party for citizens without party identification decisively depends on whether they have a preference for that party's candidate (dark-grey line with diamond-shaped markers), or not (light-grey line with triangular markers). To give a more detailed impression of these patterns, Table 2 shows differences in the predicted probabilities depending on citizens' candidate preference.[11] Irrespective of party identification, voters were much more likely to vote for a party if they had a preference for that party's candidate. This effect seems to have been strongest for citizens who had no longstanding party affiliation. Our data analysis suggests that in this subgroup of the electorate the probability of voting for a candidate's party was more than 40 percentage points higher when citizens' had a corresponding candidate preference than for citizens without a candidate preference. At the same time, a preference for one of the two party's candidates decreased the probability of voting for the opposing party. This effect appeared to be especially pronounced for party identifiers preferring the opposing party's candidate.

In the second step of the analysis, we consider the long-term factors underlying the short-term orientations. Figure 2 lends support to our expectations concerning the value-related underpinnings of the attitudes towards the European debt crisis. As the positive slopes of the graphs indicate, economic liberalism and ethnocentrism both appear to have increased citizens' opposition to granting financial aid to indebted Euro countries. While both predispositions' effects can be considered substantial, the evidence suggests ethnocentrism to have been more important in determining citizens' attitudes.[12] Moreover, net of predispositions,, CDU/CSU identifications, but not others, appear to inhibit citizens from holding sceptical views about financial aid to indebted Euro-zone countries.

-- Figure 2 about here --

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[11] The absolute predicted probabilities were calculated for average levels of policy predispositions, ideology, and opposition to financial aid. See Table A.3.2 of the online appendix for the estimates and the 95% confidence intervals.

[12] The regression coefficient of ethnocentrism equals .52 ($p<.001$), the coefficient of economic liberalism equals .22 ($p=.006$). Both variables were rescaled to 0-1. See Table A4.1 of the online appendix.

Candidate preferences seem to have been shaped by party identification and policy predispositions as well. Not surprising is that an identification with the CSU/CSU raised the likelihood of preferring Merkel. Voters that identified with the CDU/CSU were 49 percentage points more likely than voters without any party identification to prefer Angela Merkel (94% vs. 45% probability to support), while voters that identified with the SPD were 50 percentage points more likely to prefer Peer Steinbrück (72% vs. 32 %).[13]

More interesting are the results concerning the way policy-related predispositions affect candidate preferences. As an illustration, Figure 3 shows the likelihoods of the respective candidate preferences for citizens without party identification and different levels of policy-predispositions. To begin with, support for economic liberalism was effective in decreasing the probability of preferring Mr. Steinbrück. This finding fits nicely with the notion of Peer Steinbrück being a candidate of a party that endorses the welfare state, but is at odds with his image as economically liberal politician. Moreover, liberal preferences in the socio-economic domain and low levels of environmental concern somewhat increased the likelihood of holding a preference for Mrs. Merkel. These findings are accordance with traditional images of CDU/CSU leaders. The (tentatively) negative relationships between a preference for Mrs. Merkel and high scores on moral traditionalism and ethnocentric views do not fit nicely with these traditional images. Taken together, these findings suggest that Mrs. Merkel attempt to modernize her party by giving up long-held (conservative) positions has affected citizens' perceptions. In turn, it appears to have gained her some support from non-traditional CDU/CSU supporters.[14]

-- Figure 3 about here --

So far, we have demonstrated that candidate preference and issue orientations affected vote choice and were shaped by party attachments and policy-related predispositions. Put differently, the latter appear to have affected vote choice indirectly, i.e. via short-term

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[13] Changes in probabilities were calculated for voters with average values for the policy predispositions and opposition to financial aid from the regression model reported in Table A3.3 of the online appendix.

[14] The (tentative) relationships reported in this paragraph hold, irrespective of whether party attachments are controlled for or not.

orientations. To get a fuller picture of the role of party attachments and policy-related predispositions, we estimated models of vote choice in which these variables were the only predictors. This strategy permits to gauge the total – the sum of direct and indirect – effects of the long-term factors.

The evidence can be interpreted as evidence for considerable total effects of the long-term factors. This is especially true for party identifications because they do not only shape candidate and issue orientations but also affect vote choice directly. In effect, they make a considerable (total) difference in vote choice. Similarly, policy-related predispositions had a considerable (total) impact on voting behaviour. As the results on voters without party attachments in Figure 4 illustrate, at least economic liberalism, ethnocentrism, and environmental concern appear to have had an influence on vote choice. Moral traditionalism, however, did not. Starting with environmental concern, as the diagram in the lower right shows, voters who are environmentally concerned are most likely to choose the Greens. This pattern is in accordance with traditional notions of party competences. The same holds for the finding that support for economic liberalism decreased the probability to cast votes for the SPD and, somewhat stronger, the Left Party, whereas it somewhat increased support for the CDU/CSU and the FDP. It is remarkable, however, that economic liberalism did not affect vote choice for the AfD. By contrast, the AfD vote was strongly driven by general preferences concerning immigration that are rooted in some kind of ethnocentrism. Thus, while the AfD leadership attempted to present the party as being pragmatic and un-ideological regarding the European debt crisis, many of its voters appear to have cast their vote predominantly because of the denouncement of European solidarity implied in this policy position.

-- Figure 4 about here –

The findings concerning the explanatory factors of vote choice can, in conjunction with the distribution of these factors in the electorate, be used to draw some tentative conclusions regarding the driving forces of the aggregate electoral outcome. Most importantly, the greater popularity of Angela Merkel not only among the respective party identifiers but also among the politically unaffiliated was most likely a driving factor behind the strong electoral result of the CDU/CSU. In contrast, despite an apparent majority of voters critical of economic liberalism, the SPD as the traditional welfare-oriented party could not capitalize on this

majority preference prevalent in the German public. The especially among the unaffiliated voters unpopular candidate Steinbrück appears to have been unable to draw away votes from the economically liberal segment of the electorate as well to have failed to mobilize the socio-economically left leaning citizens to a sufficient degree. The relative success of the AfD, in contrast, can be attributed to the German citizens' critical stance on granting financial aid to indebted European counties. At the same time, long-standing loyalties towards one of the established parties and the majority's rejection of economic liberalism might be considered factors that have prevented an even greater electoral success of the AfD.

5 DISCUSSION

Building on an augmented version of the Ann Arbor model, this paper discussed several determinants of individual voting decisions in the 2013 federal election in Germany. In particular, opposition to a continuation of German financial aid to EU member states affected by the debt crisis was the single most important explanatory factors of vote choice for the Euro-critical AfD. Thus, despite the campaign tactics of parliamentary parties, in the 2013 federal election, attitudes towards European integration appear to have played a role for vote choice. By implication, European integration seems to have the potential to become an issue cleavage as in other European countries (e.g. de Vries 2007; Schoen 2008). Taking a closer look at AfD voters and Euro-criticism, the main driving forces appear to be socially conservative views rooted in latent ethnocentrism and exclusive solidarity, rather than economic liberalism.[15] This finding, which fits nicely with postfunctionalist accounts of European integration (Hooghe & Marks 2009; see also Kriesi et al. 2008) suggests that there will be a considerable potential for Euro-critical parties in Germany, particularly under the conditions of an ongoing European debt crisis.

Consequently, the future of the Euro-critical AfD will be dependent on how the European debt crisis and its salience in German politics will develop. If a constant or increasing share of the electorate opposes a continuation of German financial aid to EU member states affected by the debt crisis and the salience of the issue increases, the electoral results of the AfD in the upcoming elections might improve. Yet, whether these conditions will be met depends, inter alia, on the responses of other parties to the crisis as well as to the AfD. What is more, the

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[15] As noted above, these results are somewhat preliminary in that they are derived from a small empirical basis. Further research utilizing richer data are needed to reaffirm this finding.

AfD's programmatic mix of economic liberalism and social conservatism might prove viable and attract votes from various subsections of the electorate. Alternatively, it might lead to intra-party strains and endanger the party as unitary actor. Certainly, these implications point once more to the complex interplay of party behaviour and positions, political discourse about them, and voters' preferences and behaviour.

As for the vote decisions for the established parties, party identifications and candidate preferences were the most important determining factors. As far as we could account for them, party identifications appear to have had an equally substantive effect across all parties. This finding is interesting with regards to the SPD, as it was not clear before the election whether this party would be able to mobilize their supporters given the somewhat controversial candidate and because of the dominating opponent, i.e. chancellor Merkel. The analysis of the candidate preferences revealed that, as far as the individual level is concerned, their effects were in large part comparable as well. At the same time, considering the fact that most voters preferred Angela Merkel to be the next chancellor, these equally sized effects on the individual level translate into many more CDU/CSU voters than SPD voters in the aggregate. Interestingly, the analysis points to the fact that this popular support for Merkel can only weakly be traced back to subparts of the population with distinct policy preferences that are in line with traditional guiding principles of Christian Democratic policies. What's more, Merkel appears to have clearly been the candidate of the economically liberal segments of the German populace. The opposite is true for the candidate of the SPD, Peer Steinbrück. The analysis did not lend evidence that Steinbrück attract much support from beyond traditional supporters of his political camp, i.e. identifiers with the SPD or the Greens.

An important implication can be drawn from this analysis concerning the role of candidates for the electoral outcome. Although the SPD tried to raise several policy issues in their campaign, candidate preferences remained an influential determinant of voting. It appears that against the popularity of Angela Merkel it was impossible for the SPD to draw attention away from the candidates to the issues. The comparison of Merkel and Peer Steinbrück remained the most commented on feature in the run-up to the election and an important determinant of individual vote choice. In this situation, it was probably a mistake of the SPD to nominate a candidate that did not really fit the policy profile advertised in the campaign. In contrast, it appears that (by now) voters have a reasonably clear picture of the policy principles Merkel stands for and that she can capitalize on this image by gathering votes beyond those parts of the population loyal to the CDU/CSU anyway. Maybe the next election will show whether an

SPD candidate that clearly stands for traditional social democratic values and that can authentically claim to be a candidate of the left is better suited to challenge chancellor Merkel.

The reliability and generalizability of our results is subjected to restrictions stemming from the data source. First, the online survey we used was not drawn from a representative sample but from an online access panel. In these panels, the politically interested and better educated are typically overrepresented (Faas & Schoen 2006; Sanders et al. 2007). Second, it was conducted before the election actually took place, which is why we analysed intended and not actual voting behaviour here. Third, due to data limitations, we were not able to utilize completely appropriate measures in all instances or even to include relevant concepts, e.g., anti-partyism. Finally, analyses of cross-sectional data are no tests of causality but yield only correlational evidence. Thus, it is not possible to foreclose that e.g. attitudes towards the European debt crisis are influenced by candidate preference or vice versa. It is also possible that the policy-related principles that we assumed to be causally parallel to a party identification are in fact subordinate to it.

These limitations point to the need for further research on the underlying long-term psychological phenomena that drive short-term perceptions and behaviour. Most importantly, analyses of panel data would allow testing central theoretical assumptions of electoral research. The *pre*dispositional character of e.g. policy-related predispositions might be confirmed in such an analysis, but it might also turn out that they are in fact influenced by campaign events and communications. This kind of research necessitates not only conducting panel surveys, but also employing reliable and valid measures of more general psychological constructs such as policy predispositions, social identities, or personality traits in these surveys.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics of party-political explanatory factors

	All Respondents	By Party Identification			
		CDU/CSU	SPD	Greens	No PI
Party Identification					
PI CDU/CSU	33 %				
PI SPD	29 %				
PI Greens	11 %				
no PI	17 %				
other	10 %				
Candidate Preference					
Merkel (CDU)	51 %	93 %	16 %	27 %	46 %
Steinbrück (SPD)	31 %	3 %	73 %	41 %	20 %
Neither	18 %	4 %	12 %	32 %	33 %
Issue Orientation					
Opposition to Financial Aid[a]	38 %	38 %	33 %	26 %	49 %

Notes: Weighed data. [a] Reported are percentage of respondents indicating moderate or strong opposition to financial aid.

Table 2: Changes in probabilities of CDU/CSU and SPD vote choice

|	CDU/CSU Vote Choice			SPD Vote Choice		
	PI CDU/CSU	PI SPD	No PI	PI CDU/CSU	PI SPD	No PI
Merkel	+36	+30	+41	-8	-20	-8
Steinbrück	-30	-5	-5	+39	+23	+44

Notes: Entries show changes in probabilities of voting for the CDU/CSU or SPD for voters with average values for the policy predispositions and opposition to financial aid. Results are calculated from the regression model reported in Table A3.1 of the online appendix. For example, the entry '+36' in the first row of the table indicates that voters who had a candidate preference for Merkel were 36 percentage points more likely to cast a CDU/CSU vote than a voter without a preference for either candidate.

Figure 1: Effects of attitudes towards the European debt crisis on vote choice
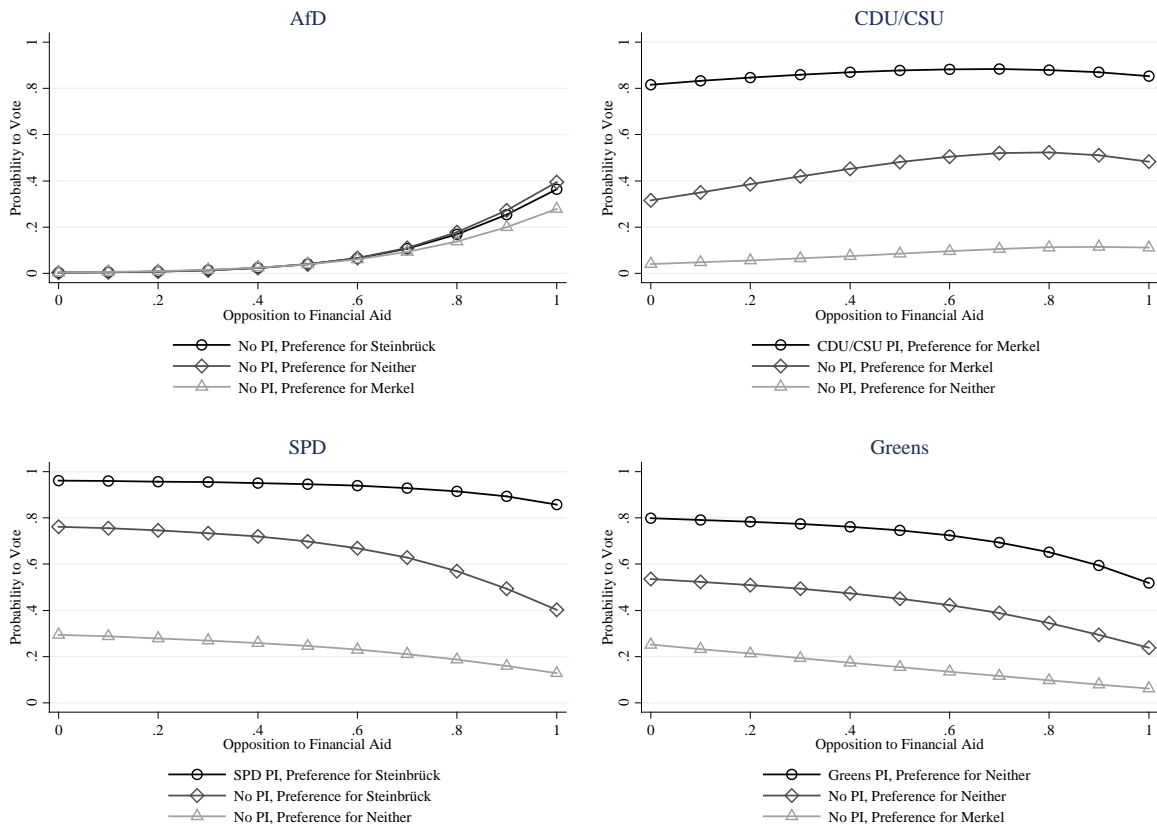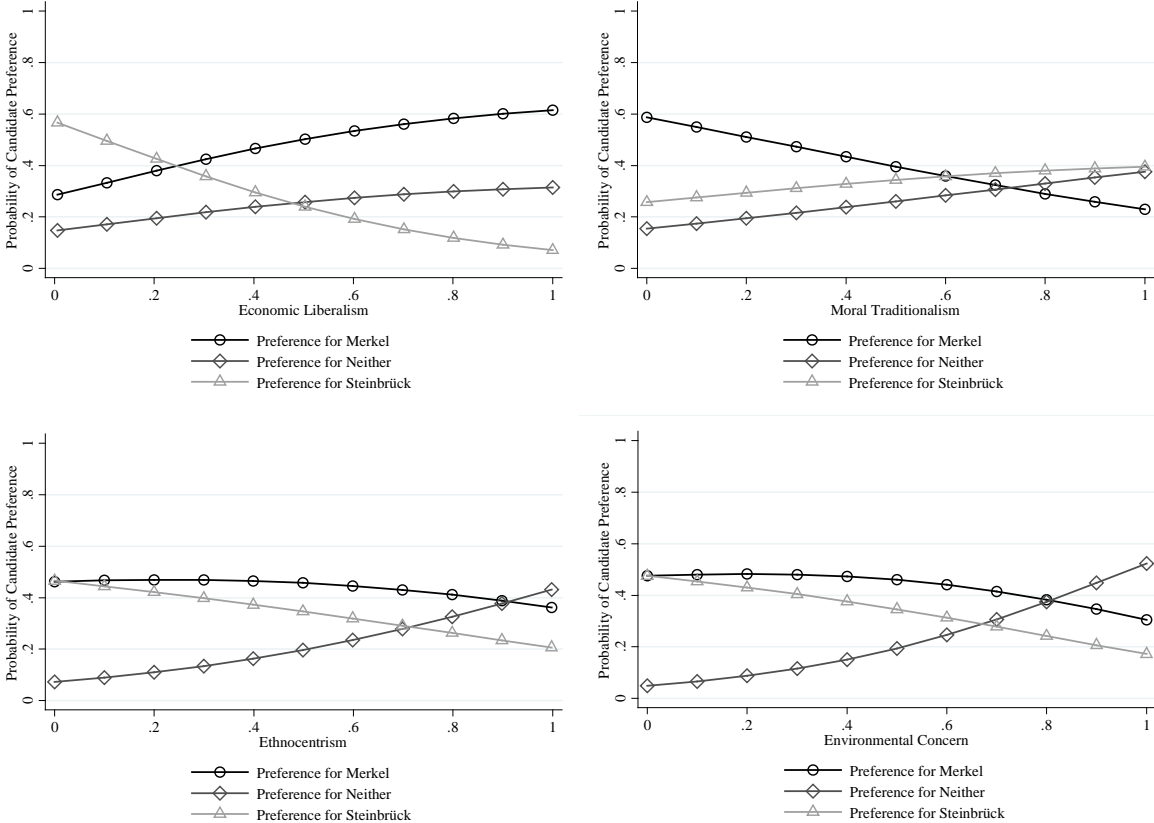

Notes: The graphs show predicted probabilities to vote for the respective party. They are derived from the multinomial regression model reported in Table A3.1 of the online appendix. Predictions are for citizens with average values for the policy predispositions and ideology.

Figure 2: Effects of economic liberalism and ethnocentrism on attitudes towards the European debt crisis
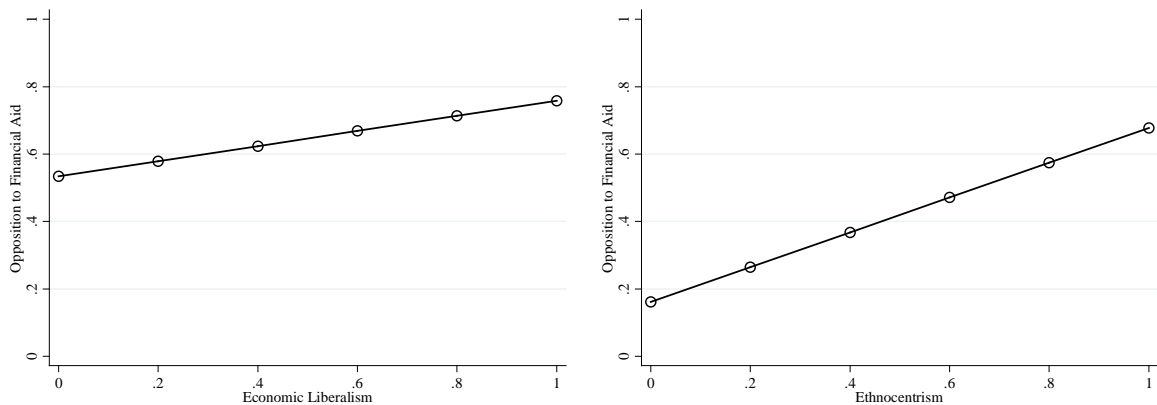
Notes: The graphs show predicted values of opposition to financial aid. They are derived from the regression model reported in Table A4.1 of the online appendix. Predictions are for citizens with average values for the policy predispositions and ideology and with no party identification.

Figure 3: Effects of policy-related predispositions on candidate preference

Notes: The graphs show predicted probabilities for party preference. They are derived from the regression model reported in Table A5.1 of the online appendix. Predictions are for citizens with average values for the other policy predispositions and ideology and with no party identification.

Figure 4: Effects of policy-related predispositions on vote choice
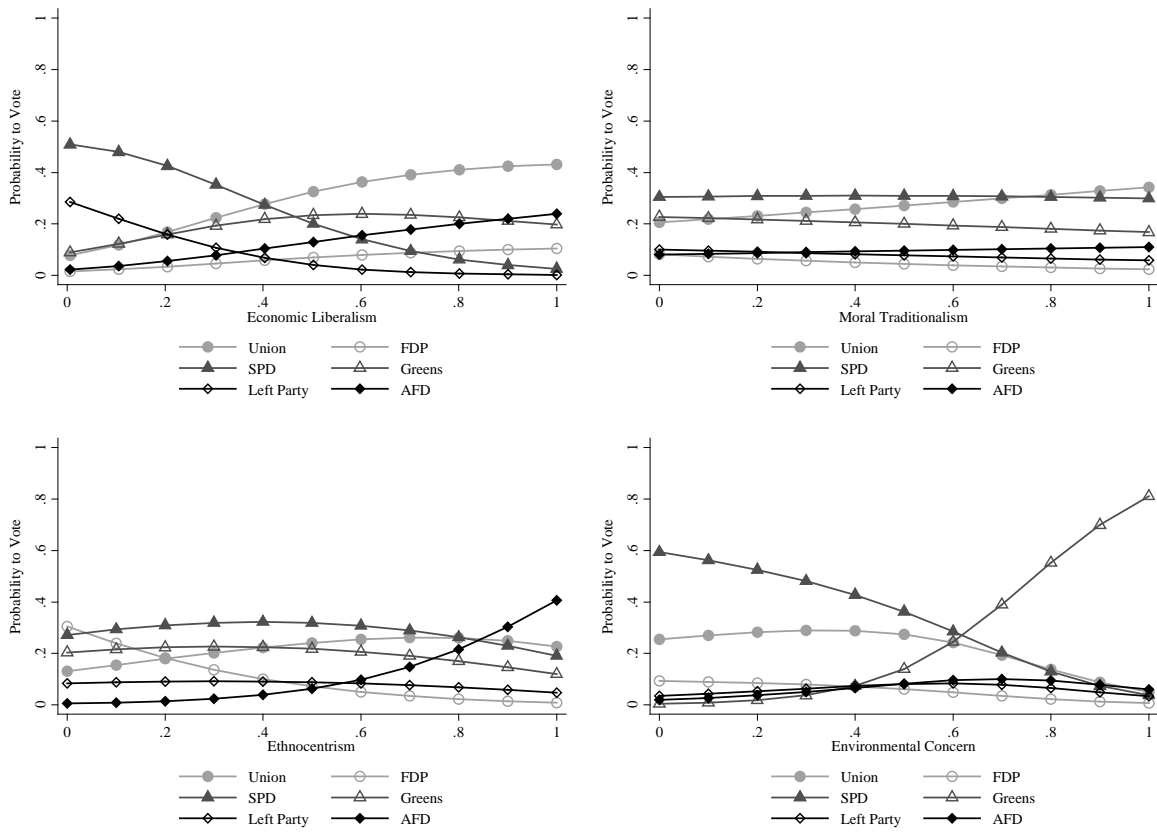
Notes: The graphs show predicted probabilities to vote for the respective party. The graphs are derived from the regression model reported in Table A3.3 of the online appendix. Predictions are for citizens with average values for the other policy predispositions and ideology and with no party identification.