

EXPLAINING THE RISE OF *ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND* (AFD) IN GERMANY WITH FAILED PROMISES OF UNIFICATION

Fatih Çağatay CENGİZ¹

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the rise of a far-right political party, *Alternative Für Deutschland* (AfD), particularly in the eastern part of Germany, in relation to the failed promises of Unification in 1990. Despite the fact that a plethora of literature has primarily focused on the social consequences of immigration and populist rhetoric for the rise of the AfD in German politics since 2013, the paper critically questions why the AfD has a particularly stronghold in Germany's *Neuen Länder* (New States). The paper suggests, based on a political economy analysis that incorporates Durkheim's theory of anomie, that the gradual withdrawal of early euphoria in German Unification and its transformation into economic grievance and political distrust under neoliberalism has created anomic tensions in society, a condition that far-right politics can exploit. In other words, while German unification created euphoric expectations for the future, these expectations were not met under neoliberal conditions. It is, therefore, concluded that the persistence of unequal economic power between East and West Germany, as well as political underrepresentation of Eastern Germans, has exacerbated anomic tensions. As a result, the rise of the AfD is not a pathological issue, but rather can be explained in terms of unmet social demands among Germans.

Keywords: AfD, Far-Right, Anomie, German Unification, Neoliberalism

Jel Codes: D72, D74, Z13

BİRLEŞMENİN GERÇEKLEŞMEMİŞ VAATLERİ ÜZERİNDEN AFD'NİN (*ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND*) ALMANYA'DAKİ YÜKŞELİŞİNİ AÇIKLAMAK

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, *Alternative Für Deutschland* (Almanya için Alternatif, AfD) adlı aşırı sağ siyasi partinin özellikle Almanya'nın doğu bölgelerindeki yükselişini, iki Almanya'nın 1990 yılındaki birleşmesinin gerçekleşmeyen vaatleri üzerinden açıklamaktır. Kurulduğu 2013 yılından bu yana, AfD'nin Alman siyasetindeki yükselişi, literatürde her ne kadar popülist retorik ve göçün toplumsal sonuçları üzerinden açıklanıyor olsa da, bu çalışma AfD'nin *neden* özellikle Almanya'nın *Neuen Länder* (Yeni Eyaletler) olarak geçen coğrafyada güçlü olduğunu eleştirel bir biçimde sorgulamaktadır. Durkheim'in anomi teorisini içeren ekonomi politik bir analize dayanan bu çalışma, iki Almanya'nın birleşmesiyle ortaya çıkan öforinin (yoğun coşku) zamanla geri çekilmesinin ve bu çekilmenin neoliberalizm altında ekonomik ve politik memnuniyetsizliğe dönüşmesinin toplumda anamik gerilimler yarattığını, bu gerilimlerin de aşırı sağ kullanımına uygun bir ortam hazırladığını iddia etmektedir. Diğer bir anlatımla, iki Almanya'nın birleşmesi her ne kadar gelecek için öforik beklentiler yaratsa da, neoliberal koşullar altında bu beklentiler karşılanamamıştır. Doğu Almanya'da yaşayanların yetersiz politik temsilinin ve Doğu-Batı Almanya arasındaki eşitsiz ekonomik gücün sürekliliğinin toplumdaki anamik gerilimleri arttırdığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Böyle bir ortamda, AfD'nin yükselişinin patolojik bir sorun olmadığı, söz konusu yükselişin ancak Almanların gerçekleşmeyen toplumsal taleplerinin göz önüne alınarak açıklanabileceği iddia edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: AfD, Aşırı Sağ, Anomi, İki Almanya'nın Birleşmesi, Neoliberalizm

Jel Kodu: D72, D74, Z13

¹ Assoc. Prof., PhD, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, cagatay.cengiz@omu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-8582-2665

1.Introduction

In a *Mannheimer Morgen* interview in 2016, Frauke Petry, former head of the right-wing populist *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) stated that border guards “must prevent illegal border crossings and even use firearms if necessary” (*Deutsche Welle*, 2016). She also emphasized in another interview conducted by *Spiegel* by contending that “One thing is clear: The immigration of so many Muslims will change our culture. If this change is desired, it must be a product of a democratic decision supported by a broad majority. But Ms. Merkel simply opened the borders and invited everybody in, without consulting the parliament or the people” (*Spiegel*, 2016).

It was clear that the AfD saw the refugee crisis as a ‘social problem’ and an anomaly that posed an unwelcome and implicit threat to German society. As a result, as widely argued in the literature, Merkel's 2015 decision to allow nearly one million refugees to enter Germany sparked the rise of the right-wing AfD and PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicization of the Occident), which long for the days when Germany was culturally and ethnically homogeneous. As a result, taking into account the results of the 2017 and 2021 federal elections, the AfD appears to be stabilizing its votes in eastern Germany (See Figure 1 below). It is also worth noting that the AfD has gained more than 20% of voters in former German Democratic Republic states in the 2021 federal elections. In particular, while the AfD under Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel received 12.6% of votes in the 2017 German federal elections with nearly 6 million voters, the party under Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla received 10.3% of votes in the 2021 federal elections with nearly 5 million voters.

As a complementary contribution to the mainstream literature, which focuses on the political consequences of Merkel's 2015 decision to allow refugees into Germany for the rise of the AfD, this paper seeks to understand why the AfD has been more successful in the east of Germany. In other words, it explains why a specific geography in Germany is more susceptible to right-wing rhetoric. As a result, it provides a Durkheimian-based political economy analysis, arguing that the rise and stabilization of AfD votes, primarily in eastern Germany, is the result of German reunification contradictions in 1990. It contends that the absorption of East Germany by West Germany has resulted in an anomic and fragmented society that reaffirms its threatened self-identity in the rise of far-right politics. The paper first provides a brief overview of the literature on the rise of the AfD before introducing a complementary, if not alternative, explanation for its rise. It concludes by following a theoretical framework on anomie that the

'failed expectations' of 1990, combined with unequal economic power between East and West, created an uncertain future for eastern Germans, which the AfD exploited.

2.The 'Issue' of the AfD in German Politics

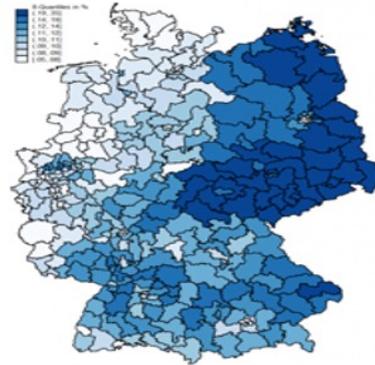
The political shock of the AfD's electoral performance in the 2017 federal election contributed to the proliferation of literature on the reasons for its electoral performance (Arzheimer and Berning, 2019; Decker, 2016; Lees, 2018; Goerres, Spies, and Kumlin, 2018). The consensus on the rise and subsequent radicalization of the AfD in German politics was generally associated with the consequences of 2009 Euro-crisis, shift towards a more hardline leadership, and the manner of Angela Merkel to handle 2015 refugee crisis (Lees, 2018). Initial explanations for the AfD's foundation dated back to divergent reflections of the European debt crisis on German politics since 2009. While Chancellor Merkel (2005-2021) maintained the importance of a single currency for a democratic and free Europe and thus opted for bailouts (Grimm, 2015: 267), she was criticized by the media and economic experts for disrupting Germany's economic stability culture and for the European Central Bank's decision to pursue a loose monetary policy, which would lead to inflation in Germany. According to Robert Grimm (2015), the rise of the AfD as a party of professors and experts was the result of a political void in the Bundestag that would challenge Merkel's Euro-rescue and pro-European policies. Meso level researches, on the other hand, analyzed the party electorate, claiming that "the median AfD voter in the federal election is male, over 30 years old wealthier than the German average and averagely educated" (Siri, 2018: 142). More specifically, it is concluded that the AfD received its support mainly from precarious workers, wealthier middle classes, traditional supporters who pride on German legacy and have doubts about rapid social change as well as the role of Islam and immigration in Germany (Lees, 2018: 303). Moreover, macro level analyses for the rise of the AfD and other far right movements such as PEGIDA, which was recognized by the AfD leader Alexander Gauland as "natural ally", seem to concentrate on their ideology. While Havertz (2021: 5) analyzes the AfD's 'volkish nationalism' that insists on "ethnicization and the subsequent essentialization of the assumed characteristics of certain groups in society", Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller (2018: 184) decipher the discourse of PEGIDA that reflects a "decoupling of democracy as a representative political decision-making system and democracy as a social way of life". When the party's electors are examined, it is clear that it primarily appeals to people with a lower secondary education, people living in the countryside, and men (*Deutsche Welle*, 2021). David Patton, on the other hand, scrutinizes the AfD's radicalization, arguing that when the party suffered an electoral loss, party hardliners

refused to accept it and instead proposed a more radical program based on a right-wing social movement. Furthermore, this program was bolstered by a change in party composition in 2015, when Bernd Lucke, one of the AfD's founders, lost the party leadership to Frauke Petry. Petry then used external factors like the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks in Europe to justify the party's radical and extreme-right wing program (Patton, 2017). As a result, the AfD is viewed as a pragmatic right-wing political party that has radicalized its rhetoric in response to changes in the political and social arenas, according to this analysis.

However, these analyses are silent to explain why the AfD is particularly powerful in the *eastern* part of Germany. Moreover, the mainstream analysis which tries to explain this puzzle focus on *only* earlier authoritarian political character of the eastern part of Germany in such a way that Marco Wanderwitz, the government's commissioner for eastern Germany, said in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that "We are dealing with people who have partly been socialized by a dictatorship in such a way that they haven't yet arrived in democracy even 30 years later" (*Deutsche Welle*, 2021, September 27).

It should be noted first and foremost that the far right has never been eradicated, if not contained, in Germany since the end of WWII. It appeared as 'waves' in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The first wave can be traced back to 1949, with the formation of the Socialist Reich Party of Germany, which was banned in 1952 (McGowan, 2014: 148). The second wave was the establishment in 1964 of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), which is still a marginal party but was able to win one seat in the European Parliament in 2014. Indeed, elected Udo Voigt, former leader of the NPD from 1996 to 2011, is well-known for nominating Adolf Hitler's secretary and deputy Rudolf Hess for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 (*Spiegel International*, 2007, August 24). And the third wave corresponded to the establishment of *Die Republikaner* in 1983 and *Deutsche Volksunion* (DVU) in 1987 (McGowan, 2014: 148). However, the rise of the AfD is a new phenomenon because it is also a result of the contradictions of German unification in 1990, with its voting power concentrated primarily in the east of Germany (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows that the AfD was especially successful in Germany's *Neuen Länder* (New States) in the 2017 and 2021 elections. As a result, understanding the rise of the AfD in those areas requires a political economy perspective that incorporates Durkheim's theory of anomie.

Figure 1: AfD's Voting Power in 2017 Elections and the AfD's Stronghold in 2021 Elections



Source: Berning and Arzheimer (2018)



Source: Deutsche Welle (2021, September 28)
Note: (Red = SPD; Black = CDU/CSU; Green = Greens; Blue = AfD)

3. Anomic Conditions for the Rise of the AfD in Germany

First and foremost, voters in eastern Germany have been suffering from economic anomie and frustration since the country's unification in 1990. Anomie is a term coined by French sociologist Émile Durkheim to describe a deviant social condition in which traditional social behavior and mechanisms are in conflict with society's new realities as a result of rapid economic transformation. Durkheim suggests in *The Division of Labour in Society* that the transition from organic to mechanical society creates a disequilibrium in the functioning of society. According to Durkheim, “if the division of labour does not produce solidarity it is because the relationships between the organs are not regulated; it is because they are in a state of *anomie*” (1984: 304). As a result, anomie is a pathological result of societal dysfunction in which connections between social organs are disrupted.

Similarly, Robert Merton defined anomie as an abnormal form of social deviance caused by a contradiction between culturally propagated goals and structural mechanisms (Merton, 1938). In other words, whereas Durkheim saw the rise of anomie as a result of the devastating effects of industrialization on society's regulatory mechanisms, Merton saw it as “the lack of regulation of the economy or lack of laws” (Cengiz, 2023: 4). Rosenfeld and Messner, on the other hand, upgraded the concept of anomie and developed an Institutional-Anomie Theory (IAT) in reference to the inconsistency of the ‘American Dream’. They contend that the American Dream compels individuals in a competitive environment to pursue material rewards without regard for non-material social institutions such as family, education, and government.

According to Rosenfeld and Messner, the values of achievement, individualism, universalism, and the fetishization of money underpin American culture, which would nonetheless produce an ethos of “anomic quest for success by any means” (Rosenfeld and Messner, 2019: 227). They argue, when these normative institutions fail to fulfill their social functions under the control of economic imperatives, society is conducive to crime (Cengiz, 2023: 4). From a very different socioeconomic context than United States, Nikos Passas (2000) highlights the collapse of the ‘post-Soviet Dream’, which created new normative and comparative referents with the West and resulted in economic crime. Passas (2000) claims that while Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) led to political and economic liberalization, it also created unrealistic expectations in Soviet Russia. Russian elites aspired to be a part of the 'civilized world' that was demonized during the Cold War, hoping that once structural reforms were implemented in Soviet Russia, the country would be prosperous and modernized. However, the end result was high unemployment, poverty, corruption, and looting of Soviet assets during privatization. Moreover, the “forceful and impressive presentations of consumerist lifestyles as “desirable”, “modern”, and feasible” equated economic modernization with ostentatious consumption (Passas, 2000: 29-30). As a result of unattainable dreams in a neoliberal market economy, “people who are not objectively deprived now feel relatively deprived” (Passas, 2000: 30). Not surprisingly, by combining Durkheim's theory of anomie with Karl Polanyi's criticism of disembedded market economy in which social relations are controlled by economic interests, Jón Gunnar Bernburg (2002: 737) concludes that contemporary social changes under unregulated neoliberalism and commodification of labor lead to an unconstrained ethic of profit maximization at the expense of professional values.

Taking Durkheimian theory of anomie into consideration, it is possible to argue that German unification in 1990 was a sudden shift from organic to mechanical society under unregulated neoliberalism, wreaking havoc on the social functioning of Eastern Germans. This inevitably resulted in anomic tensions, which can be attributed to a misalignment between the desired goals of unification and structural barriers to its institutional capacity to address economic insecurity. In other words, the rise of the AfD as a ‘alternative’ to the establishment is rooted in the region's historical and economic processes, where euphoria gave way to accumulated frustration.

Without a doubt, German unification in 1990 represented a tremendous hope for a better future, and the political elite attempted to mobilize the masses. As former Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1982-1998) put it in 1990, the euphoria of unification was tremendous:

“Nobody will be worse off but many better off. Only monetary, economic and social union offers the chance, indeed the guarantee, that living conditions shall change rapidly and improve thoroughly. By our joint efforts we will soon turn Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony and Thuringia into thriving lands agreeable to live and work in” (as cited in Nick, 1995: 86).

Similarly, on 13 February 1991, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* corresponded with economics minister Jürgen Möllemann about increasing private investment, establishing new businesses, and decreasing unemployment as a result of the Strategy Upswing East, which would turn the euphoria into reality (in Jarausch and Gransow, 1994: 235). However, the unification did not produce the desired results, resulting in societal economic disequilibrium. In other words, the East underwent a massive neoliberal transformation as a result of the unification (Weisskircher, 2020: 617). According to Hanna Behrend, the *Treuhandanstalt*, an agency established to privatize *Volkseigene Betriebe* (GDR-owned public enterprises), was primarily responsible for the destruction of the East German economy through liquidation procedures:

“By the end of 1992 industrial production in East Germany sank to less than one-third of the 1989 figure, and, of the 4.1 million industrial jobs there had been, every second one was lost. By that date every fourth employable person in East Germany was out of a job, supplemented by those coerced into early retirement, or (particularly women) into accepting lower qualified employment. Mecklenburg-West Pomerania’s former status as an investment site moved down to rank 240 after Sicily according to one EC statistic. Crime rose to 300 per cent of its previous level, and the suicide rate to 180 per cent; the birth rate sank to 55 per cent, the rate of marriages to 50 per cent. Women were particularly seriously affected, with their unemployment at 65 per cent, only a little over 40 per cent being involved in temporary job-creation schemes” (1995: 11-12).

Following the unification, people's psyches were rocked by rapid economic change and its devastating consequences. Not surprisingly, when crime rates in eastern Germany began to rise after unification, people began to yearn for the pleasant, old, and authoritarian days of the previous socialist regime, whose authoritarian approach to education under Honecker had kept crime rates lower by harshly criminalizing offenders (Thomanek, 1995: 23).

Indeed, the disappearance of the GDR's 'culture of equality' exacerbated societal anomic tensions. It is unquestionably necessary to inquire to what extent the culture of equality was a "reality" in all areas of the GDR. Gender equality in terms of female labor force participation was, however, factual in the GDR. In 1989, for example, while women's labor force participation in West Germany was around 56%, it was around 90% in the East. Furthermore, unification resulted in the convergence of a conservative notion of "male breadwinner and female part-time caregiver" for East and West, referring to the fact that Eastern women did not benefit from the "dual earner-state caregiver" model anymore (Rosenfeld, Trappe and Gornick, 2004: 110-111). As Peter Schneider had argued in 1990:

“Regardless of how GDR-citizens now assess their forty-year experience, compared to the Federal Republic, they lived in a society of equals. It does not take much imagination to predict that their experiences may result in a social explosion. In an economic crisis east Germans will easily perceive themselves as second-class citizens. Given such a crisis, the culture of equality which they have inherited is undoubtedly more likely to provide a breeding ground for extreme right-wing populists than for left-wing agitators. In any case, there is bound to be a conflict” (as cited in Thomanek, 1995: 24-25).

Moreover, 'East-West divide' manifests itself in economic prosperity as well. GDP, overall economic development, internationalization, new technologies, R&D and innovation policy still concentrate in industrial zones of Germany such as Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart, and Munich. 2021 Annual Report of the Federal Government also figures out, the economic power of the new federal states (*neuen Länder*), including Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Thüringen, measured as GDP per employed person in 2020 was 77.9% of West German levels, showing that the gap between East and West continues (Annual Report of the Federal Government, 2021: 56).

Overall, the gap in GDP per person between the Old and New States persists, despite the fact that it has shrunk dramatically since unification. According to Table 1, GDP per person in the Old States was around 23.000 euros in 1991, but it was only 7.395 euros for the New States. In other words, eastern Germans produced and owned only one-third of western German prosperity. However, in 2020, when eastern Germans earned 30.000 euros, Western Germans earned around 42.000 euros, representing 70% of the latter's economic prosperity (Table 1).

Table 1. GDP in real terms per person, euro (1991-2020)

Year	Old States (<i>Alte Länder</i>)	New States (<i>Neuen Länder</i>)	Germany	Old States/New States
1991	22.767	7.395	19.829	32
1995	25.126	14.681	23.302	58
2000	27.840	16.792	25.892	60
2005	30.057	19.041	28.134	63
2010	33.573	22.418	31.942	66
2011	35.573	23.456	33.554	66
2012	36.163	24.072	34.135	67
2013	36.885	24.833	34.861	67
2014	38.193	25.997	36.149	68
2015	39.113	26.601	37.046	68
2016	40.140	27.306	38.067	68
2017	41.532	28.465	39.438	69
2018	42.586	29.127	40.485	68
2019	43.567	30.127	41.508	69
2020	41.940	29.553	40.088	70

Source: Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity (2021)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that these new states have begun to attract investment from the United States, China, and other countries. For example, investment projects such as Tesla, a US automobile and battery manufacturer, were directed to Brandenburg; CATL, a Chinese battery manufacturer, invested in Thuringia; and Vodaphone requested the construction of its new mobile communications development center in Dresden (Annual Report of the Federal Government, 2021: 56-57). Nonetheless, these investments, according to Weisskircher (2020: 618), did not scale down small towns but thrived in downtowns.

Furthermore, the divergent economic structures of the East and West are reflected in average gross hourly wages. In 2020, hourly wages in the new federal states (excluding Berlin) were 20.28 euros, while they were 26.26 euros in the old federal states (including Berlin). While employees in the new federal states are primarily employed in service sectors with low requirements and small and medium-sized businesses, employees in the old federal sectors are primarily employed in knowledge-intensive industries and service sectors (Annual Report of the Federal Government, 2021: 65). Furthermore, despite the fact that the gap between old and new federal states in terms of real estate and financial assets has narrowed significantly since 1993, households in the old federal states have assets worth around 182,000 euros on average,

while those in the new federal states have assets worth around 88,000 euros (Annual Report of the Federal Government, 2021: 69).

Neoliberal social security reforms in the 2000s also dampened the initial euphoria and exacerbated economic insecurity. In addition to the failed promises of German unification, the Schröder government instituted the Hartz Reforms between 2003 and 2005, with the goal of activating labor markets against welfare dependency. According to the model, the first-tier unemployment benefit system, *Arbeitslosengeld*, which previously funded 63-68 percent of previous income for 32 months, was reduced to eighteen months (later rose to two years). The second-tier unemployment benefit, *Arbeitslosenhilfe*, was converted into social assistance with a flat-rate benefit for those who could not receive the first tier (Starke, 2022: 311; Fervers 2018). It also became more difficult for unemployed workers to refuse available jobs; otherwise, they would be exempt from the benefit system, forcing them to work in low-skilled jobs (Fervers, 2018: 5). It was also ineffective for unemployed non-beneficiaries (UNB), as only 23% of UNB were able to find a part-time or full-time job between 2007 and 2008 (Betzelt, 2015: 7). Despite the fact that Hartz reforms were successful in lowering unemployment rates in Germany, they inevitably resulted in dissatisfaction with democracy and a preference for extremist parties (Fervers, 2018). The commodification of labor with the activation paradigm limits the individual autonomy that can be achieved through protection from humiliation, unfair treatment, and social exclusion (Bothfeld and Betzelt, 2011). Furthermore, the social protection scheme demonstrated a distinct labor market for Eastern and Western Germans. According to Table 2, the neoliberal transformation of the German labor market since 1993 resulted in a 5.2% decrease in socially insured employment. This decline, however, was unequally distributed between East and West Germany. While socially insured employment fell by 0.7% in Western Germany between 1993 and 2010, it fell by nearly 20% in Eastern Germany (Table 2). Overall, Hartz reforms prioritized the right to work over the right to welfare, reducing unemployment to an individual issue rather than a structural issue (Gook, 2018: 11).

Table 2. Cumulative change in socially insured employment, % (1993-2010)

	1993-2010	'93-'98	'98-'03	'03-'10
Socially Insured Employment	-5.2	-5.3	-3.8	4.1
West	-0.7	-4.2	-1.0	4.7
East	-19.6	-9.9	-13.2	2.8
Male	-10.4	-6.4	-6.0	1.9
Female	2.0	-3.9	-0.8	7.0

Source: Burda and Seele (2016:21)

Consequently, Weisskircher (2020: 615) shows, majority of East Germans 'perceive' themselves as second-class citizens. In 2016, 63% of East Germans felt attached to the GDR, up from 43% in 2012 (Kuper, 2021). The perception of being a "second-class citizen" was exacerbated by another fact, which is reflected in the political underrepresentation of Eastern Germans, resulting in a legitimacy and recognition problem. It can be demonstrated that eastern Germans are underrepresented in both the state bureaucracy and the private sector. For example, in eastern German courts, less than 10% of the high judiciary staff is equipped with eastern German ones. It is also predicted that eastern Germans make up less than 2% of the German elite (Weisskircher, 2020: 620). Not surprisingly, the legitimacy crisis has manifested itself in East Germany as the rise of regional identities over national and European ones. Similar to the political mobilization of masses against the GDR's authoritarian regime in 1989, the AfD has called for renewed protests, albeit with populist rhetoric. Reclaiming the sovereignty of pure and courageous people against the corrupt and sluggish elite, the AfD has evoked a nostalgic imagination in its campaigns, chanting "*Wende 2.0*," "The East rises up," "Accomplish the *Wende*," and, most importantly, "*Wir sind das Volk* (We are the People)", all of which remind and mobilize the resistant psyche of masses in 1989 protests in the opposite direction (Weisskircher, 2022: 93).

4. Conclusion

Anomie, according to Durkheim, arises when social solidarity is disrupted and society ceases to fulfill its functions as a result of a sudden shift in the division of labor. In other words, "a state of anomie is impossible wherever organs solidly linked to one another are in sufficient contact, and in sufficiently lengthy contact" (Durkheim, 1984: 304). In other words, as defined by Passas (2000:20), "anomie is a withdrawal of allegiance from conventional norms and a

weakening of these norms' guiding power on behavior". As a result, this paper concludes that high but unmet expectations following Germany's unification in 1990 have resulted in anomic tensions. The paper first attempted to decipher the economic and political consequences of German unification in 1990, such as de-industrialization, unemployment, and the economic gap between the West and the East, using Durkheim's concept of anomie (Akman, 2019: 24). The paper briefly examined the extent to which dissatisfaction with the unification resulted in economic and political anomie, highlighting that economic disparity between East and West, retrenchment of the German welfare state labor market, and political underrepresentation of East Germans appear to be the main causes of anomic tensions for eastern Germans. Furthermore, it demonstrated that anomic tensions created a political environment conducive to being exploited by far-right politics in eastern Germany, where the AfD has a stronghold.

Taking this into consideration, the paper argued, the AfD essentially benefits from the evaporation of 'pipe dreams' following Unification, which crystallizes itself in the East-West divide. Initially opposing the consequences of the eurozone crisis when it was founded in 2013, the AfD now opposes anything related to the idea of 'European Union'. While clinging to the idea of national states and regional identities in opposition to federal Europe, the AfD attempts to reclaim people's sovereignty, albeit in a right-wing populist manner, against the corrupt political *nomenklatura* in Berlin and Brussels.

It is not surprising that, with the demise of class-based politics, people have gravitated toward identity politics, particularly in eastern Germany, where the AfD has grown (Akman, 2019). The AfD, on the other hand, successfully mobilizes the nostalgic past in which East Germans resisted the GDR in 1989 protests by chanting "*Wir sind das Volk.*" As a result, the AfD has successfully reversed the psyche of resistance and courage in order to oppose national/transnational elites and immigrants. The AfD, therefore, appears to uncover real causes of economic and political insecurity while mobilizing masses' dissatisfaction with neoliberalism and political elites into immigrants. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to argue that a far-right discourse on immigrants is instrumental in 'taming' popular discontent.

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