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Abstract

This thesis applies the concept of multi-level governance to the study of regionalism, arguing for its distinct role as a catalyst in the shaping of political culture, particularly as a source of political radicalization. The thesis argues that the pressure exerted upon regions and municipalities is reciprocated through the initiation of political movements that challenge higher levels of governance in efforts to achieve a balance of power. In this equation, the position of the nation state and its role as a container of political memory is fundamental to its outcome. The principal objective of this thesis is to investigate the role and relevance of the sub-national, i.e. regional, level. It does so by investigating the past and present political processes and tensions unfolding within a specific region. As a case study, the history of the German state and region of Saxony is explored. Saxony is notable for its disproportionate rise of political extremism in comparison to other German regions over recent years. This thesis applies theories based on the existing literature on regionalism, nationalism, and forces of European integration. Additionally, it explores concepts related to studies on populism, reactionary political movements, as well as contemporary political culture and political memory in Central Europe. This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing information from several branches of knowledge, such as history, political science, anthropology, and sociology. Social science theories, such as constructivism, play a significant role in highlighting the ideational factors at the core of the thesis argument. The thesis demonstrates that the German region of Saxony maintains a unique political culture, as a result of social, political, and economic constructs developed over centuries, which unfold today in the form of a uniquely high degree of political polarization and as a source of attraction for political extremists. The thesis intends to complement existing research on the development of political culture in Europe and to underscore the relevance of the sub-national level of governance in the shaping thereof.

Diese Masterarbeit befasst sich mit dem Regionalismus als Teil des europäischen Mehrebenensystems und argumentiert für dessen bedeutende Rolle bei der Gestaltung politischer Kultur, insbesondere als Quelle der gesellschaftlichen Radikalisierung und Polarisierung. Die Untersuchung dieser These beruft sich auf die mehrstufigen Governance-Prinzipien, die erklären, wie der Druck, der auf Regionen ausgeübt wird, durch die Initiierung politischer Bewegungen erwidert wird, welche höhere Regierungsebenen wiederum herausfordern. Als Grundlage wird die Geschichte des deutschen Freistaats Sachsen untersucht, wo in den letzten Jahren, im Vergleich zu anderen deutschen Gebieten, ein überproportionaler Anstieg an politischem Extremismus bemerkbar geworden ist. Diese Arbeit demonstriert, dass Sachsen dank Jahrhunderte entwickelter sozialer, politischer und wirtschaftlicher Konstrukte eine einzigartige politische Kultur bewahrt, die sich heute in Form einer erhöhten politischen Radikalisierung entfaltet. Die Relevanz der subnationalen, d.h. regionalen, Ebene soll somit erläutert werden und die bestehende Literatur zu politischen Bewegungen ergänzt werden.

Table of Contents

Title Page	
Abstract	
Table of Contents	
Introduction.....	01
Chapter I : Saxony Today.....	04
1.1 The Political Landscape.....	04
1.2 Distrust and Disenchantment.....	08
1.3 Covid-19 and Other Crises.....	11
Chapter II : Saxony in the Past.....	15
2.1 From Duchy, Electorate, and Kingdom to the Free State	15
2.2 The Saxon Pride.....	18
2.3 Hub for Industry and Democracy.....	20
Chapter III : The Third Reich and Re-unification of Germany.....	22
3.1 Saxony in Times of Nazism.....	22
3.2 Remnants of Communism.....	24
3.3 The Lingering East-West Divide.....	30
Chapter IV : The European Integration Project.....	33
4.1 The Journey of European Union.....	33
4.2 Supranationalism in Times of Crisis.....	34
4.3 The Phenomenon of Euroscepticism.....	35
Chapter V : Levels of Governance.....	37
5.1 Regions as Political Agents.....	37
5.2 The Power of Narratives.....	39
5.3 Saxony's Push Against the Current.....	41
Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	47
Appendices.....	51
Pledge of Honesty.....	61
Vita.....	62

Introduction

The European continent has never been devoid of crises. Following the Second World War, the European Union (EU) found its beginnings as a post-war project with the intention to secure peace and stability within and across European nation states. The EU is a Union of unprecedented nature, which has been exceptionally successful in achieving its goal for sustaining peace; what used to be a continent riddled by war and conflict amongst empires and nation states, the European Union of today can be identified as one of the strongest regional integration projects in terms of human and economic development. As such, it is a cause of grave concern that the benefits of the Union for its citizens are subject to increasing scrutiny amongst and within its own Member States (MS). The exit of Great Britain from the EU in 2016, and the subsequent calls from leaders in other MS to follow this lead, was not only a source of outrage, but it also signalled a fundamental political shift in Europe; one which can be characterized by greater polarization, radicalism, and Euroscepticism. Euroscepticism, a political position opposing the Union and further European integration, may be the product of a variety of factors, although one is certain; segments of society which are more likely to be negatively impacted by globalization and cross-border integration, or which hold pre-disposed illiberal views and ideals against 'Others', are much more prone to opposing the EU and its institutions.

As the prevention of radicalization of a political culture is a far easier task than the process of de-radicalization and integration, it is of utmost importance for States to consider the historically contingent nature of society, which is further tested with every coming crisis. In order to pre-emptively address the alarming increase of political polarization and extremism in Europe, as well as in many other parts of the world, the role of civil society and the historically constructed environment in which it functions should be taken into consideration. It may be assumed that matters of identity and belonging are inherently powerful for altering the direction of political thought; this sense of identity is often linked to the local and regional upbringing of people, as this most clearly defines their family ties and ancestry, traditions, language, norms, values, and behaviours. Whereas state borders have changed and may continue

to change, manifold over time, individual regions maintain their unique character as a result of historical path dependency.

Saxony, Germany's most eastern state, is taken as a case study in this research investigation, as it is a prime example of a region that prides itself in its rich history, while also facing the challenge of right-wing extremism as a significant, and growing, subset of its political culture. It is important to study these issues because with the rise of polarisation in regions like Saxony, there is also a much greater risk to the overall political stability in Germany, and thereby in the EU and the international system in general. Germany is highly influential in the European Union, a result of its relative strength in decision-making and economic power; thus, its national political stability is a key indicator for the security of the EU. A rise in political radicalisation in Saxony could imply a radical political change for Germany, and consequently, the EU as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the EU's institutional structure and the levels of governance upon which it rests, to determine the correlation between them and the growing radicalisation in Germany. Additionally, Germany's own convoluted past will be taken into consideration to pinpoint why Saxony serves as a symbol of Euroscepticism in Germany, offering insights into the parallels and distinctions to other regions. It should be noted that the objective of this thesis is by no means to excuse the activities of extremist movements and organizations, or to encourage sympathy for the growing aversion to democratic institutions. On the contrary, the aim is to illustrate the ongoing political processes in a way that shed light on the causes behind their success, so as to enable relevant actors to push back against these trends accordingly.

The principal research is dedicated to the past and current conditions within Saxony as a region itself, exploring the many factors that make Saxony uniquely attractive for radical assembly. The investigation into these issues raises some critical concerns, such as why are some regions more prone to radicalization than others or in what ways the historical path dependency and the established political structures of Germany, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), and Saxony itself shape the mindset and behaviours of its people. In a similar connection, one may inquire to which extent the respective local leadership has promoted, intentionally or

unintentionally, a sense of disenchantment of its people with sub-national, national, and supranational policies and the institutions that support it. While it is not possible to investigate each concern, there appears to be a common interrogative element at play; why do regions matter? This thesis finds that a region's unique historical background shapes its political culture today, which, within the dynamics of a system of multi-level governance, pushes back against the leadership and institutions through various avenues of political radicalization. As such, the EU's increasingly supranational influences and regional integration efforts can invoke a powerful reaction from regional actors, which aim to assert their own political culture in return.

Chapter I – Saxony, Today

In order to explicate the political dimension of the thesis argument, it is necessary to first consider Saxony's challenges today. As with any other regional example, the relationship between Saxons and their political orientation is inherently complicated and impossible to generalise. However, the scale and impact of the challenges faced by Saxony in comparison to other parts of Germany is observable and noteworthy. This chapter introduces the contemporary situation of Saxony, as one of the 16 *Bundesländer*, or States, of the Federal Republic of Germany. The aim of this chapter is to explore how Saxony has been impacted in the wake of crisis, such as the financial crisis of 2008, the Syrian refugee crisis, the sovereign debt crisis, and specifically the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which have all profoundly provoked an increase in radicalisation across the region, and the European continent in general.

1.1 The Political Landscape

To begin, it is important to understand the current political landscape of Saxony. Saxony is one of the 16 *Bundesländer*, or States, of the Federal Republic of Germany. At the national level, the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic republic comprised of 16 states ("Länder").¹ Power is distributed between the federal and state governments. As laid out in the Constitution or Basic Law ("Grundgesetz"), all 16 states are granted equal powers in authority. However, for symbolic reasons – such as to honour past historical liberations –, three German states refer to themselves as a 'Free State' ("Freistaat") in their own respective constitutions; namely Thüringen, Bavaria, and Saxony.² The German 'Basic Law' delegates the division of powers at the federal level to the judicial, legislative, and executive branches. The federal chancellor holds the most important office within the executive branch, as he or she acts as head of state and controls the federal government, appointing the leaders of the ministries.³ Although the federal assembly ("Bundesversammlung") of Germany also

¹ Uwe Leonardy, "Länder Power-Sharing in International Relations and European Affairs," in *The institutional structures of German federalism* (London: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1998).

² Arthur B. Gunlicks, "German Federalism and Recent Reform Efforts," *German Law Journal* 6, no. 10 June, 2011.

³ Christian Tomuschat and David P. Currie, "Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany," *Deutscher Bundestag: Public Relations Division*, April 2010.

elects a president, this person tends to act in a predominantly representative, integrative, and symbolic capacity.⁴

At the regional level, the *Länder* (or ‘states’) are typically regarded as provincial with their own elected governments, diplomats, and unique laws and regulations. By territorial and functional definitions, German regions and provinces tend to be rather fragmented and throughout the evolution of the federal system, the *Länder* have given up certain legislative powers while maintaining other political competencies. Certain “regional” functions (e.g. spatial development policy, economic policy and infrastructure planning) are frequently assigned to levels of governance below the *Länder*.⁵ Some scholars claim to observe an ongoing trend of transformation from regional government to regional governance, as administrative institutions and local associations evolve to include a diversity of political actors. In an article on “Sub-National Government and Regional Governance in Germany”, Arthur Benz and Anna Meincke explore the evolution of regionalisation in Germany, highlighting in their research the strength of decentralised forces in German political and economic development over the past decades and centuries, which is particularly relevant for this area of research.⁶ Despite Germany being a federal republic, it is truly the States themselves which are most relevant in guiding their respective jurisdictions.

Germany’s fairly new far-right populist party, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), has consolidated its position and political power in Saxony, infamous for its blatant racism and “hatred against immigrants”, further attracting attention for its “proximity to National Socialism or its relativization” thereof.⁷ In German political culture, this type of orientation is at best considered taboo. Yet, the political and economic crises of the past decade have granted the AfD the momentum it needed to grow as the biggest opposition party in Germany and the first right-wing party since the Second World War to enter the Bundestag/national parliament. Particularly in the

⁴ Christian Tomuschat, David P. Currie, "Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany," *Deutscher Bundestag: Public Relations Division* (April 2010).

⁵ Christian Tomuschat, David P. Currie, "Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany," *Deutscher Bundestag: Public Relations Division* (April 2010).

⁶ Arthur Benz and Anna Meincke, “Sub-National Government and Regional Governance in Germany,” in *State and Local Government Reforms in France and Germany* vol. 7, 2006.

⁷ Hans Pfeifer, “The AfD in Saxony: Germany's far-right stronghold,” *Deutsche Welle*, 14 September, 2021.

east of the country, in regions which have not yet recovered from the impacts of Germany's re-unification, this momentum for political change and a challenge to the status quo is notably met with significant public support.

The German political scientist and senior research fellow at the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism (HAIT), Steffen Kailitz, has spearheaded research on this unusual development in Germany with two relevant works published in 2021. The HAIT specializes in comparative studies of democracy, extremism, totalitarianism, electoral systems and studies of political parties. Kailitz' research is extremely pertinent to the study of Saxony and its political developments. In his 2021 book "Sachsen zwischen Integration und Desintegration: Politisch-kulturelle Heimaten", Kailitz considers the threats to democracy and social cohesion as a result of political division and radicalization in this region. According to him, conflicts of interpretation about integration and disintegration have become more frequent and more intense in recent years in Western democracies, and especially in Germany, as a result of the refugee crisis since 2015. According to Kailitz, Saxony is particularly suitable for theory-based empirical research into the development of integration and dis-integration, and the determinations of the factors and consequences thereof. Both the increase in right-wing populist mobilization in local spaces across Saxony and the changes in the party landscape due to the successes of the AfD raise the question of the extent to which "democratic cohesion has become fragile" in Saxony.⁸

In *Rechtsextremismus und Rechtspopulismus*, Kailitz explores right-wing extremism and right-wing populism as part of Saxony's political landscape. In his second book published on the political processes in Saxony, Kailitz offers an extensive and highly relevant look into right-wing extremism and right-wing populism in Saxony, such as the PEGIDA movement, a Dresden-based movement referring to 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (or "West")' and known for its inflammatory racism, providing recent data regarding the levels of radical violence in Saxony and politically motivated criminal activity. Kailitz finds that in recent years, Saxony has drawn into the focus of public attention several times due to

⁸ Steffen Kailitz, *Sachsen zwischen Integration und Desintegration: Politisch-kulturelle Heimaten*, 2021.

right-wing populist and right-wing extremist events.⁹ He evaluates whether Saxony can really be considered a stronghold for the politically radicalized and provides information about the actors and events that are at the forefront of these developments. It is indicated that the areas of uncertainty and ambiguity between right-wing populism and right-wing extremism create difficulties in ascertaining the developments, while also highlighting the importance of acknowledging nuance in this argument. For purposes of clarity, the relative success of the AfD party serves as a tool of reference for the relative dissemination of radical political beliefs.

The 'AfD Sachsen', namely the state association of the AfD in the Free State of Saxony, is led by Jörg Urban as state chairman. The state party ran for the first time in the 2014 state elections and then entered the Saxon state parliament. The AfD Sachsen also took part in the 2017 federal elections, becoming the strongest party in Saxony for the first time in terms of second votes with 27.0% and entered the 19th German Bundestag/national parliament.¹⁰ In the 2019 European elections, the party's candidate Maximilian Krah defended the AfD's position as the strongest party with 25.3% and extended their lead over the CDU. The CDU, or Christian Democratic Union, is one of the oldest parties in Germany and a historically a stable and electorally successfully ruling majority party in Saxony, with a centre-right orientation. In the wake of the aforementioned crises, the integrity and ability of the CDU to lead was placed under growing scrutiny. In the 2019 state election, the AfD Sachsen received 27.5% of the votes with top candidate Jörg Urban, this time 4.6% less than the CDU, despite gaining votes. Over the years, and as political tensions over the refugee crisis, economic disparities, and the Covid-19 pandemic rose, the language used by AfD politicians had become increasingly radical in its tone and discriminatory nature. In response, in January 2021, the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Saxony had classified the state association as a suspected right-wing extremist party, according to media reports.¹¹

⁹ Steffen Kailitz, *Rechtsextremismus und Rechtspopulismus*, 2021.

¹⁰ "AfD ist in Sachsen jetzt die stärkste Kraft," *Die Welt*, September 25, 2017.

¹¹ "AfD in Sachsen und Thüringen stärkste Kraft," *MDR Aktuell*, September 27, 2021.

1.2 Distrust and Disenchantment

Understanding the current situation of Saxony means understanding the greatest obstacle of all: the political disenchantment, and simultaneous radicalization, from the population. In a recent case of escalation, *Die Zeit* reported that the ‘Citizens’ Movement Leipzig 2021’, which regularly organises protests against the Corona measures in place in Saxony, had officially been declared a ‘right wing extremist’ movement in December.¹² This implies that the movement is officially considered anti-constitutional and may be monitored by the federal intelligence services. In particular, the online activities of the group are shown to systematically target democratic institutions and merge facts with ‘fake news’ and conspiracy myths to amplify the level of uncertainty and fear within the population. As such, the movement is said to provide a breeding ground for heightened radicalisation in social networks. Among others, the former chairman of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt, André Poggenburg, who is attributed to the nationalist wing of the party, had already appeared within the group. Additionally, the group is said to have connections to the “Pro Chemnitz” and the “Free Saxony” movements which have also been classified as right-wing extremist. In October, the MDR summarized a recent report on domestic security issues by the German constitutional office which highlighted the significant increase in right-wing extremism in Saxony. As can be seen from the report, the number of right-wing extremists in the Free State of Saxony rose to 4,800 in 2020. In the previous year, 2019, there were just 3,400 people observed as such. This sharp increase can be explained by the fact that the right-wing extremist movement of the AfD “Der Flügel” / “The Wing” with its 1,400 members is now being closely observed by the Verfassungsschutz [Federal and State Office for the Protection of the Constitution], due to its increasingly radicalized behavior in the public sphere.¹³

In a separate instance, radical vaccine opponents were reported in late 2021 to have exchanged ideas in a Telegram chat group about plans to murder the president of Saxony, Michael Kretschmer. Since then, several raids by the police and special forces

¹² “Bürgerbewegung Leipzig 2021 als extremistische Gruppierung eingestuft,” *Die Zeit*, December 10, 2021.

¹³ “Bürgerbewegung Leipzig 2021 als extremistische Gruppierung eingestuft,” *Die Zeit*, December 10, 2021.

of the LKA have been conducted across the region to source possible threats. Under the command of Saxony's Polizeilichen Terrorismus- und Extremismus-Abwehrzentrums (PTAZ) / Police Center for Defense Against Terrorism and Extremism (PTAZ), the "Sonderkommission Rechtsextremismus (Soko Rex)", a special commission on right-wing extremism in Saxony, was deployed to investigate the claims. Kretschmer himself had emphasized that the state must "use all legal means to prevent such a dissolution of boundaries", as those who hold public office "should not be afraid to speak their mind and do their job."¹⁴ The ongoing phenomenon of political radicalisation observed across Germany in recent years has led to greater demands for protecting the safety and security of acting politicians. In several cases, the hostilities have already cost lives.

Infamously, the president of the district of Kassel, Walter Lübcke, was shot dead on his terrace in Wolfhagen in western Germany in the summer of 2019. Lübcke was considered a hated public figure in right-wing extremist circles because he campaigned for the admission of refugees. In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, even policy on healthcare and virus containment measures have become a politically charged topic and cause for tension nationwide; as such, health care workers are increasingly voicing demands for police protection. In September 2021, a violent incident in the western town of Idar-Oberstein was considered particularly symbolic as a reflection of the tensions between the people and the authorities. The murder of a 20-year-old employee of a petrol station sparked outrage across Germany, as the young man was fatally shot by an angry customer following numerous requests to wear a mask inside the establishment. The shooter had openly expressed his support for the far-right AfD prior to the incident; since the early stages of the pandemic, the AfD has circulated extremely inflammatory messages urging people to resist government regulations such as mask mandates. According to media reports, the murder was praised across chat groups popular amongst far right conservatives and conspiracy theorists; one commenter claimed the attack to be a 'natural step' in resisting the "Merkel dictatorship", as reported by the *Tagesspiegel*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Lukas Rogalla, "Mordpläne gegen Kretschmer: Telegram-Gruppe hatte Unterstützung aus den USA," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, January 12, 2022.

¹⁵ "Nach Streit um Maskenpflicht: Rechte jubeln über Mord von Idar-Oberstein," *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 21, 2021.

Stephan Kramer, the head of domestic intelligence in the eastern state of Thüringen, warned of a notable increase in aggression in everyday life, not only in Eastern parts of Germany, but nationwide. According to Kramer in an interview with the RND network, “the escalation of right-wing conspiracy fantasies among aggressive and violence-prone citizens has been obvious for months.” The developments raise questions about political (in-)stability in Germany today, such as where these sentiments originate from and how these attitudes have been able to fester in the private sphere over generations.

A report by the *Tagesschau* on December 15th 2021 voices criticism of the political strategy in Saxony over the past 6 years; the “strategy in Saxony has been to console the concerned, demand greater engagement by the civil society as a whole, to mostly look away and brush off misanthropy as an element of free speech and expression”, as well as to even “offer the prettiest backdrops and police protection” for radical protestors who call for violence against politicians. Accordingly, Saxony has been described as being “on its way to fly out of the federal republic’s orbit, into a right-wing parallel-society and a bleak future – culturally, economically, intellectually, morally, and empathetically.”¹⁶ This idea of a ‘parallel-society’ gradually forming in Germany is not new. The term was used for the first time in 1996 by the social scientist Wilhelm Heitmeyer of Bielefeld in *Die Zeit*, claiming that “there is a risk that religious-political groups could build up a difficult to understand ‘parallel society’ on the fringes of the majority society.”¹⁷ Since then, several scholars have re-interpreted the phrase and made it their own, most recently to identify populist and extremist groups consolidating themselves in certain regions to reject the political status quo. In Germany, this status quo has long been driven by democratic and liberal ideals.

A recent protest march organized by opponents of Covid-19 measures, carrying torches and inflammatory signs, gathered in front of the private residence of Saxony’s health minister, Petra Köpping (SPD). Alongside other politicians and representatives

¹⁶ “Polizeieinsatz in Dresden: Razzia nach Morddrohung gegen Kretschmer,” *Tagesschau*, December 15, 2021.

¹⁷ “Gibt es Parallelgesellschaften in Deutschland?” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 10, 2016.

of intelligence and security serves, Dr. Gerd Landsberg, Chief Executive of the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, had warned that local politicians may “give up” their positions due to the increasingly tense climate and called for better protections for public servants due to the heightened security risks in a radicalized environment. For instance, several mayors across Saxony are said to “not feel sufficiently protected from radicalized citizens.”¹⁸

1.3 Covid-19 and Other Crises

The year 2020 introduced a new source of tension to an already hostile political culture in Saxony. The Covid-19 pandemic challenged the entire world to adjust to an entirely new way of life, also dramatically impacting the global economy, inflicting the most harm on the most vulnerable. Saxony has been hit particularly hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Saxony is unique in having a vaccination rate that is lower than in any other of Germany’s 16 states. According to Germany’s public health authority, the Robert Koch Institute, only around 61.7% of Saxony’s population is fully vaccinated compared to a national average of 72.5%, at the end of 2021.¹⁹ Saxony has also repeatedly made headlines, as vaccination sceptics take to the streets, opposing COVID-19 restrictions and denouncing politicians who promote them. During previous waves of the pandemic, Saxony reported the highest number of new infections in all of Germany. Epidemiologists also warn that in Saxony, fewer tests are being administered than elsewhere in the country.²⁰

As mentioned previously, the AfD has often spoken out against the health measures implemented by the local authorities and used particularly inflammatory language to garner public support for its own political agenda. In the past few years, especially as the Covid-19 pandemic has escalated tensions across the world, studies have been conducted to analyse the regional discrepancies in the way the crisis has been handled, and how certain populations and demographics have reacted to, or been impacted by, the situation. Recent studies focusing on developments in Germany

¹⁸ “Ministerin verurteilt Fackel-Proteste vor ihrem Haus – Kretschmann beklagt ‚SA-Methoden“ *Die Welt*, December 5, 2021.

¹⁹ Matthias Janson, “Sachsen: Niedrigste Impfquote, höchste Inzidenz,” Statista, November 24, 2021.

²⁰ Matthias Janson, “Sachsen: Niedrigste Impfquote, höchste Inzidenz,” Statista, November 24, 2021.

show, for instance, that Saxons persistently demonstrate a greater tendency towards harbouring anti-establishment sentiment and overall distrust in democratic leadership and institutions, resisting measures ordered by authorities and being more likely to believe conspiracy theories and myths. The following reports identify Saxony as a political anomaly in Germany, and call for attention to its growing political radicalization.

“Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens (2021),” translated as “COVID-19 in Saxony: Socio-spatial and political-cultural framework conditions of the pandemic”, is an in-depth analysis of the responses to Covid-19 in Saxony by a team of researchers at the Technische Universität Dresden, composed of Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik, and Cyrill Otteni.²¹ This analytical study concerns itself with the specific situation in pandemic laden Saxony and the attitudes that have emerged in the region as a result. The analysis considers, amongst others, elements such as the general perception of Covid measures in Saxony, the performance of the local government in managing the pandemic, the relative pressures on the population as a result of the local restrictions, the readiness to receive a vaccination against Covid-19 and the scepticism surrounding vaccination, the features of conspiracy-thinking related to the coronavirus, and the public sympathy for protesters, as frequently initiated by the so-called ‘Querdenker’ groups. The empirical basis of the study is a survey conducted from May 10 to 15, 2021 among eligible voters in Saxony aged 18 and over. For this purpose, a total of 1,008 people were interviewed in cooperation with the opinion research institute D|MAP.²² The survey is representative of Saxony as an aggregate measure of four municipal parts of the state. Three of these four regions coincide geographically with the former, existing as of July 31, 2008 administrative districts (Chemnitz, Leipzig and Dresden), the fourth part includes the three major cities Chemnitz, Leipzig and Dresden. Each regional subgroup consists of a sample of approximately 250 people.²³ By means of weightings according to age, gender, education and population,

²¹ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, “Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens,” 2021.

²² Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, “Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens,” 2021.

²³ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, “Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens,” 2021.

representative statements can be made for the respective sub-regions as well as for Saxony as a whole. Over the course of a 'second wave' in the winter of 2020/21, Saxony in particular developed as a 'hot-spot' for rising infection cases, deaths and restrictions on public life affected.²⁴ This study was intended to contribute to the research on as to why – particularly in Saxony – certain socio-spatial and political-cultural factors have further aggravated these challenges; *Der Spiegel* even described Saxony as the 'state of down-players', in which 'the coffins would pile up'.²⁵ Even Germany's federal commissioner for the East, Marco Wanderwitz, described his homeland as somewhat 'careless' and 'unruly' in regards to the pandemic situation.²⁶

Other key findings include, amongst others, the observation that the population is largely divided nationwide in its opinion on the restrictions in place to contain the virus. The regional distribution of rejection for measures is inconsistent and not easily describable by a simple urban-rural difference – the respondents in northern Saxony and Leipzig expressed the greatest acceptance of the Corona measures, the strongest rejection of such was found in the districts Görlitz and the Erzgebirge.²⁷ The restrictions associated with the Corona measures are perceived by the Saxons less as an economic and financial burden and more as a social and psychological burden. Skepticism towards the vaccination is predominantly observed among younger demographics, often from lower income areas – in socio-spatial terms, many vaccine skeptics are at home in East Saxony. Moreover, people who position themselves to the right of the center or lean towards the AfD are also far above average of the opinion that they would "rather not" or "not at all" be vaccinated. A majority of Saxons rate the pandemic management of the Saxon government positively (more so than of the federal leadership), but around 42% indicated their dissatisfaction with the regulations. Pandemic-skeptical attitudes and corona-related conspiracy thinking – understood as

²⁴ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, "Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens," 2021.

²⁵ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, "Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens," 2021.

²⁶ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, "Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens," 2021.

²⁷ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, "Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens," 2021.

a tendency to distrust the actions of political and social actors in the pandemic, even assuming that they have a 'secret agenda' – are notably widespread in Saxony.²⁸

In a rather alarming statistic, almost half of Saxons believe that the government withholds information about side-effects and long term damage of the vaccine 'out of consideration for the pharmaceutical corporations', while 35% of Saxons percent think the government is using the pandemic as an excuse increase the surveillance of citizens. Finally, around half of the respondents believe that the danger posed by the virus is exaggerated by the media, even though a majority supports basing policy on advice of scientists and experts.²⁹

²⁸ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, "Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens," 2021.

²⁹ Hans Vorländer, Herold Maik and Cyrill Otteni, "Covid-19 in Sachsen: Sozialräumliche und politisch-kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen des Pandemiegeschehens," 2021.

Chapter II – Saxony in the Past

In order to gain a better understanding of the political developments today, it is necessary to revisit the historical background of the region and assess its contingency. Hans Vorlander, Professor of Political Theory and History of Ideas in Dresden, refers to a phenomenon of “Saxon chauvinism”, whereby Saxons exhibit a particularly high degree of ethnocentrism.³⁰ Although the causes are manifold and the implications multi-faceted, the depths of both earlier and more recent history alike offer insights to the root causes. According to Vorlander, the abundance of societal problems in Saxony today is a reflection of the vulnerability of human nature and the loss of humanistic ideals. Moreover, scholars tend to agree on the presence of a sort of victim mentality, by which the people of Germany’s East, particularly in Saxony, find themselves to be on the receiving end of loss and injustice, lending itself to an explanation of historical path dependency.³¹

2.1 From Duchy, Electorate, and Kingdom to the Free State

Saxony’s history spans over a millennium, during which its territorial identity has changed considerably over time. One of the longest lasting narratives of the region, as illustrated by the Cultural Institute and various tourism agencies of Saxony, is that of Saxony as the “Motherland of the Reformation”.³² The 16th century Protestant Reformation began in 1517, when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses at the castle church of Wittenberg, which remains a notable attraction to this day. This occurred under the protection of the Electorate of Saxony, which had been formed following the dissolution of the medieval Duchy of Saxony, and remained a “focal point of religious strife” throughout the Reformation and the Thirty Years’ War.³³

³⁰ Justus Bender, “Fremdenfeinde in Sachsen: Viele fühlen sich heimatlos, ausgesetzt und abgehängt,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 February, 2016.

³¹ Justus Bender, “Fremdenfeinde in Sachsen: Viele fühlen sich heimatlos, ausgesetzt und abgehängt,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 February, 2016.

³² Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

³³ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

Its more recent history, beginning in the 19th century, may be regarded as most relevant as a foundation for today's 'Free State'. During the Napoleonic Wars, Saxony notably changed sides. Initially fighting on the side of Prussia, Friedrich August III., endowed with royal dignity after a peace agreement and accession to the Confederation of the Rhine, in the Battle of the Nations in Leipzig in 1813, sided with the French Emperor Napoleon, who ended up on the side of the losers and became a prisoner himself. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Saxony eventually lost a considerable two-thirds of its area and one-third of its population to Prussia, subsequently becoming a member of the German Confederation.

The aim of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 was to "restore" the old political system by re-arranging the balance of power in Europe.³⁴ In the numerous individual states of the German Confederation, a national movement gained strength during the 'vor-März' period, culminating in the March Revolution of 1848. However, the Saxon king rejected the Paulskirche constitution, which provided for a federal state with a central government headed by a hereditary empire and a Reichstag as the legislature, for Saxony.³⁵ This was further followed by armed riots, which had been brutally suppressed with the help of Prussian troops. Later in the 19th century, Saxony developed into a fast-growing, powerful industrial state and becomes the cradle of the German labor movement.³⁶ In 1871, Saxony became part of the newly founded German Empire.³⁷ The constitutional monarchy continued to exist in Saxony, but was increasingly losing its importance and relevance. Saxony became increasingly the leading German industrial state and a hub for manufacturing, particularly textiles. In World War I, Saxony fought with its own army and lost more than a quarter of its soldiers.³⁸ In the course of the November Revolution, the United Revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council (right, center, SPD) was founded in Saxony. On November 10, 1918, King Frederick Augustus III of Saxony was dethroned and the monarchy abolished, after which Herrmann Fleissner proclaimed the Republic of

³⁴ James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics (1830-1993)*, University of Michigan Press, 2000.

³⁵ James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics (1830-1993)*, University of Michigan Press, 2000.

³⁶ James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics (1830-1993)*, University of Michigan Press, 2000.

³⁷ James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics (1830-1993)*, University of Michigan Press, 2000.

³⁸ James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics (1830-1993)*, University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Saxony.³⁹ The Kingdom of Saxony, which had lasted from 1806 until 1918, had been an independent member of a number of historical confederacies in what may be considered Napoleonic- and post-Napoleonic Germany. In this new era as a free state of the Weimar Republic in 1918, after the end of World War I, its capital became the city of Dresden, which remains the capital of its modern successor state, the ‘Free State of Saxony’ in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁰

Saxony is a *Land* with a rich, yet evidently convoluted, history. Henrik Böhme, senior editor at the *Deutsche Welle*, argues that understanding the regional historical background to the state is necessary in order to understand and analyze its contemporary issues and political developments. According to Böhme, rampant extremist ideologies, such as those targeting ethnic minorities as discussed earlier, are ‘inexcusable’; however, the Saxons are also “widely misunderstood”.⁴¹ Saxony consists of a total of 419 politically independent cities and municipalities, as of January 1, 2021. These are divided into 169 cities, including three urban districts and 50 large district cities as well as 250 non-urban communities. Some of the municipalities belonging to the district have merged to form administrative communities in order to carry out their administrative business. 160 municipalities are integrated into 65 administrative communities and 21 municipalities in six administrative associations.⁴² After reunification, a large number of cities initially lost a lot of their population rather quickly. The cities of Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz and also the former city of Zwickau, where the consequences of suburbanization and emigration to the old federal states had the greatest impact, were hit the hardest. Since reunification in 1990, the number of inhabitants in the Free State of Saxony has fallen by 600,000 due to emigration and excess deaths due to low birth rates.⁴³

Since the turn of the millennium, however, this development began to change, which has only intensified in the years that followed. Since about 2000, Leipzig and

³⁹ James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics (1830-1993)*, University of Michigan Press, 2000.

⁴⁰ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

⁴¹ Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

⁴² Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

⁴³ Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

Dresden, as well as their immediately neighboring cities of Markkleeberg and Radebeul, have been able to grow continuously again thanks to a slight excess of births and positive net migration, thus counteracting the trend towards shrinkage. The Saxon state capital has even been one of the cities with the highest average population growth in the Federal Republic in recent years. In Chemnitz, the shrinkage has largely decreased and stronger stabilization is beginning. Zwickau, on the other hand, has not been a big city since 2003 and is gradually losing population. All other cities in the Free State, especially those in rural areas, are affected by a greater or lesser degree of emigration, referring to spatial population development, and birth deficit and the resulting aging, or natural population development. There are also regional discrepancies; for instance, areas in eastern and southern Saxony are more affected by the population decline than areas in central and western Saxony. Cities that experience a large and diverse number of educational, research and cultural institutions, as well as a strong trade and industry, benefit the most from population growth.⁴⁴ In this sense, the modern *Bundesland* is significantly impacted by its demographic development over time.

2.2 Path Dependency: The Saxon Pride

The analytical method of multi-level governance in political science is a useful tool for understanding the forces at work and, additionally, historical and sociological path dependency is critical for understanding current circumstances and challenges faced by the region. In the case of Saxony, its region in eastern Germany is in many ways politically and historically distinct from others in the country, with a reputation for attracting increasingly radicalized ideology. One distinct attribute of the people of Saxony, which has developed over the centuries into a cultural phenomenon of its own, is the so-called ‘Saxon pride’.⁴⁵

Böhme asserts that, even today, Saxons “revel” in a sense of grandeur when looking back at the monarchies that once ruled them.⁴⁶ He notes the presence of an

⁴⁴ Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

⁴⁵ Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

⁴⁶ Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

“attitude of superiority” that has persisted for centuries, despite the aforementioned monumental defeats, such as against the Prussians at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813. Significant hereby is the conception of a historical narrative based on historical trajectory which “continues to inform the Saxon attitude today”.⁴⁷ Unlike today’s German national narrative, which is largely rooted in collective guilt and sombre remembrance of the horrors of the Third Reich and the Shoah, Saxony proudly holds on to a regional narrative that positions its people as the ‘underdogs’ in greater conflict. The commemoration ceremonies of the bombing of Dresden in 1945, for instance, act as a source of collective political remembrance and as a source for unity and ambition. This may, in turn, lead to a greater readiness to break cultural and political taboos by abandoning the guilt associated with Germany’s national past.

Frank Richter’s book, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*, its title translating to “Does Saxony still belong to Germany?”, raises provocative questions. Richter explores this issue of regional narratives, beginning with the cultural and social positioning of Saxony, and drawing on his own experiences of socialization as a GDR, or ‘east German’, citizen. Richter deals with the question of whether the strong right-wing tendencies in Saxony are just the beginning, conveying his suspicions that they will continue to unfold into increasingly radical directions.⁴⁸ Richter sees in the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) of Saxony’s leadership a considerable share of responsibility for the flourishing of the new right, faulting the actors at large for not responding effectively to societal trends and behaviors. Richter’s book also investigates the various methods in which local leaders exploit the “Sachsenstolz”, i.e. ‘Saxon Pride’, to push for an ethno-centric agenda that ‘others’ outsiders.⁴⁹ He regards the consequences of the complicated and ‘shaky’ transformation process after reunification as the cause of the frustration, and overall feelings of powerlessness and political disenfranchisement, of many east Germans. Effectively, this process from the early 90s until today has led to deindustrialization, unemployment and a lack of prospects, and ultimately to

⁴⁷ Henrik Böhme, “Kommentar: Immer diese Sachsen!” *Deutsche Welle*, 31 August, 2018.

⁴⁸ Frank Richter, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*, Ullstein, 2019.

⁴⁹ Frank Richter, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*, Ullstein, 2019.

emigration in rural areas.⁵⁰ According to Richter, it was also the failure of the federal government, especially under CDU leadership, to counteract this trend; instead, the state accelerated this process by also withdrawing from these areas, likely under the impression of the statutory austerity obligation.⁵¹ As such, a vacuum emerged that triggered a feeling of neglect in many of those affected, and which contributed to the rise of political extremism.⁵² These conditions and many more are cited as possible reasons for Saxony's growing resentment towards Western leadership and for which Richter proposes solutions that could alleviate these sources of division in the future.

2.3 Hub for Industry and Democracy

Saxony was once a great hub for mechanical industry and is considered to be the 'birthplace of democracy' of modern Germany. In Christoph Wunnicke's *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, the author looks back at Saxony's most prosperous days. In this recently published book, Wunnicke offers a highly relevant perspective of the processes of democratization in the region of Saxony, highlighting the "surprising" background of Saxony as a historical cradle for democracy and political momentum.⁵³ To this day, the spirit of opposition is rooted in the 'Free State', for which the presence of the AfD today comes as a strong contrast. Wunnicke's story of Saxon democracy traces its history back to the 1848 revolution, in which Saxony played a pivotal role. The city of Leipzig, in particular, became the home of the bourgeois women's movement and the Saxon working class, a place of origin of social democracy. Although the Nazis would come to obstruct this path and the post-war GDR, or east-German autocracy, would construct another way entirely, the system of basic rights, as outlined in Germany's Basic Law of 1949, is explained to go all the way back to Georg Jellinek from Leipzig. Furthermore, the democratic opposition to the GDR dictatorship had its revolutionary

⁵¹ Frank Richter, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*, Ullstein, 2019.

⁵² Frank Richter, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*, Ullstein, 2019.

⁵³ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

capitals in Saxony in 1989.⁵⁴ Wunnicke's book offers a rather positive, yet constructive, analysis of Saxony's historical role in shaping political culture, an interesting perspective that rivals the pessimistic outlook of other scholars and experts in the field. According to Wunnicke, West German democracy would hardly be conceivable without Saxony, which today is considered more-so "the much-scolded one".⁵⁵

Saxons are also known for their inventiveness and diligence; according to Henrick Böhme, the notion and stereotype of the 'genius German engineer' was born in Saxony.⁵⁶ The Chemnitz University of Technology enjoys a worldwide reputation of excellence in mechanical engineering and Saxony has long prided itself as being the strongest industrial region in Germany, at least prior to the Second World War and the consequences of its large-scale destruction. Zwickau was the home of Germany's first car company, and Saxony as a whole has historically been a prime location for the textile industry and for mechanical and electrical engineering. As alluded to earlier, pro-democracy movements have long had their origins in Saxony and may serve as a legacy to live up to, for those who are politically active in a more radical capacity. Notably, in late 1989 when the Berlin wall fell and the end of the Cold War and repression in east German was marked, the peaceful revolution of the time "did not originate in Berlin, Brandenburg or Mecklenburg, but rather it found its beginnings in Saxony", where the cities of Leipzig, Plauen, and Dresden became famous for their active role in the resistance.⁵⁷ According to the region's narrative, Germany's unity is the direct outcome of Saxon courage; therefore, it can be concluded that the people of Saxony may seek inspiration in their history to advance a populist, anti-establishment political agenda. However, Germany's re-unification and the socio-economic disparities that continue to persist, and which are sometime exacerbated by the crises of the recent decades, are also cause for heightened political tensions in the region.

⁵⁴ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

⁵⁵ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

⁵⁶ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

⁵⁷ Christoph Wunnicke, *Kleine Geschichte der Demokratie in Sachsen: Vom Gottesgnadentum zum Grundgesetz*, 2021.

Chapter III – The Third Reich and Re-unification of Germany

In identifying the role of regional actors and institutions in their push-back against higher levels of governance, the position of the nation state plays a critical role. In the case of Germany, the significance of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, the Cold War, and the German re-unification process after 1990 in shaping the country's political culture today cannot be overstated. The national literature on the causes and consequences of these historical developments is vast and extensive, yet relatively little has been studied on the specific effects on individual regions. In respect to the thesis argument, it is therefore highly beneficial to consider the greater scope of path dependency through the lens of Saxony in this regard.

3.1 Saxony in Times of Nazism

In his book *Geschichte Sachsens*, German historian Frank-Lothar Kroll explicates the times of National Socialism (Nazism) in Saxony. According to Kroll, the first two years of Nazi rule in Saxony were marked by a bitter power struggle between the Dresden 'Sturmabteilung', SA, leadership led by the new Prime Minister Manfred von Killinger and the NSDAP 'Gau' leadership, based in Plauen and led by master embroiderer and lace manufacturer Martin Mutschmann.⁵⁸ The initially comparatively "moderate approach" of Killinger in the reorganization of the Saxon state administration ended after the appointment of his adversary Mutschmann. The rapid dismantling of the constitutionally guaranteed parliamentary order was accompanied by measures that all amounted to a centralized reorganization of the federal German state structure.⁵⁹ The law of March 1933, to bring the individual states into line with the Reich, the "Gleichschaltung", gave the state governments the power to dissolve the state parliaments and to re-establish them according to the results of the previous Reichstag elections, which, after the imprisonment of numerous opposition MPs, clearly favored the votes of the Nazi party.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁵⁹ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁶⁰ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

An enabling law, 'Ermächtigungsgesetz,' for the Free State of Saxony was passed by the state parliament in May 1933 and secured the state government of legislative powers and eliminated the state parliament; in October 1933 it was completely dissolved. The centralization process came to an end in January 1934 with the law on the reconstruction of the Reich. The states were thereby abolished as holders of state sovereignty and demoted to "local authorities with the right of self-government".⁶¹ From then on, the Saxon state government called itself "Gau-government", as the previous state authorities were in fact only organs for the implementation of imperial 'Reich' laws in all areas of internal administration. From the very beginning, the establishment of the Nazi unitary state went hand in hand with the uncompromising will to eliminate and destroy all political opponents of Hitler's regime. The German communist party, KPD, which was particularly strongly anchored in Saxony, fell victim to harassment and repression immediately after Hitler came to power. Similarly, the socialist leaning party, SPD, was banned in the Saxony at the end of June 1933. Prisons in Bautzen and Zwickau, as well as internment camps at Castle Colditz and Castle Hohenstein, were used to arrest and intimidate opposition forces, especially from the left-wing of the political spectrum. Only gradually did criticism and opposition sentiments grow stronger in protest of the dictatorial regime. For mayor of the city of Leipzig, Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, became one of the principal leaders and most prominent representative of the civil resistance movement in Saxony, although most initiatives in resistance to Hitler's leadership were immediately suppressed.⁶²

After the start of the war in 1939, the Saxon region had quickly developed into a center of German armaments production, as it had been previously a hub for manufacture and textile production. In the greater Leipzig area, extensive factory facilities for aircraft were built in a very short time, while the steel works in Lauchhammer, Gröditz and Riesa manufactured armor plates and other military equipment.⁶³ In the region around Chemnitz and Zwickau, the manufacture of motor vehicles and motorcycles was adapted to the needs of the war. In all of the

⁶¹ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁶² Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁶³ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

aforementioned sectors, the number of people employed skyrocketed, while in the textile industry, the traditional leading industry in Saxony, it reached its historic low by 1944. Since the opening of the Russian campaign in 1941, the proportion of forced laborers in almost all sectors of the economy had risen steadily; in the last year of the war, 1944, it was almost 20 percent of all employees who worked as forced laborers. The economy of the region experienced another brief boom in the wake of the relocation of armaments-related industries to Saxony from areas of the Reich threatened by air-warfare, as Saxony at the time was considered to be “bomb-proof”.⁶⁴ Of course, this proved not to be the case, with severe repercussions for Saxony’s economy in the future.

In *Sachsen und der Nationalsozialismus*, Günther Heydemann, former Director of the Hannah-Arendt-Institute (HAIT) until 2016, further explores Saxony’s convoluted historical relationship with nationalism. Backed up by extensive research, he argues that Saxony was one of the most important regional centres of national socialism during Hitler’s Third Reich.⁶⁵ Heydemann not only investigates the forces active in society during this era but also closely examines “the social practices of persons who worked in the middle to lower tiers of the official hierarchy at both the regional and local levels,” demonstrates that there were numerous ways in which the Nazi regime was supported and in how people were contributing to its abnormally high success and popularity in the region.⁶⁶ The process is indicative of how narratives of nationalism are circulated in Saxony today.

3.2 The Lingering East-West Divide

According to Frank Richter, an invisible border splits Western- and Eastern Europe right in the middle of Germany.⁶⁷ In fact, very few people who have lived in or studied the country would deny that the divide is noticeable. Despite efforts by the federal government to align the two sides of the country with one another, scholars continue

⁶⁴ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁶⁵ Günther Heydemann, *Sachsen und der Nationalsozialismus*, 2019.

⁶⁶ Günther Heydemann, *Sachsen und der Nationalsozialismus*, 2019.

⁶⁷ Frank Richter, “Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie,” *Ullstein*, 2019.

to call attention to the growing gap in socio-economic development between the former GDR and the Western regions of the country. Richter offers several theories as to why this divide is so distinct, even after over 30 years of re-unification. According to Richter, one can only hope for an approximate understanding of the issue if one is able to recognize its complexity.⁶⁸ Therefore, it is necessary to consider the cumulative effect of many social, political, and economic forces that have shaped the current conditions of the former GDR.

Richter argues that one principal source of division is the lingering emotional connection of former GDR citizens with their history.⁶⁹ The political memory of many people in East Germany is a product of having been on the side of the losers and the deceived throughout their lives, and the generational trauma that has been sub-consciously passed on over decades and centuries. Many East Germans of the older generation also feel alienated by the capitalist and competitive modern society. They have entered this society much later than their West German counterparts and, consequently, face a disadvantage in navigating the system. Many even consider themselves as ‘second class citizens’ in a society designed for the West.⁷⁰ Consideration of the age demographic is essential for understanding the gaps between East and West; elderly people have a long past and little future, living a life that is increasingly isolated. As hundreds of thousands of young, well-educated GDR citizens, have fled to the West and to neighboring States during the after the country’s split, the average age in East Germany remains disproportionately high.⁷¹ In this regard, it is important to note that, in comparison to other EU countries, Germany’s population is amongst the oldest in terms of age distribution.⁷² In connection, issues related to ageing population are more pronounced in the state of Saxony than in most other German *Länder*. In addition to the societal ‘brain drain’, entire regions in the East

⁶⁸ Frank Richter, “Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie,” Ullstein, 2019.

⁶⁹ Frank Richter, “Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie,” Ullstein, 2019.

⁷⁰ Frank Richter, “Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie,” Ullstein, 2019.

⁷¹ Fanny Kle and Tobias Vogt, “The fiscal impact of population ageing in Germany: An unequal challenge for different levels of government,” OECD, 2019.

⁷² Fanny Kle and Tobias Vogt, “The fiscal impact of population ageing in Germany: An unequal challenge for different levels of government.”

remain deserted; a sobering reality for many, who had hoped that re-unification would bring about great prosperity. According to Frank Richter, the ageing population of the East is carefully assessing the pros and cons of the developments after re-unification. While the liberties gained in respect to travel, consumption, infrastructure, and more continue to be celebrated after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is the immaterial factors such as human connection, that elderly people tend to cherish the most that appear to have been lost to them.

Through recent crises such as the 2008 financial crisis, the Syrian refugee crisis, or the Covid-19 pandemic, these disparities between East and West have become only more apparent. In the case of the pandemic, the data suggests that the inclination of people to resist government measures is particularly prevalent in the former GDR states; particularly, Saxony. If the aforementioned argument is applied, that in a region with a high concentration of elderly people, the yearning for human connection and family ties is particularly pronounced, then it comes to no surprise that these regions are also more likely to resist social distancing, mask-wearing, and other isolation measures. “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmythen?”, translated to “Who (no longer) believes in Corona-Conspiracy myths?”, is the name of a study conducted by Dr. Tobias Spöri and Dr. Jan Eichhorn of the non-profit and non-partisan German Think Tank on Political Participation, D|PART, to determine which demographics in Germany are more likely to subscribe to conspiracy myths against the government’s response to the pandemic. The study’s findings show that the number of Covid-related conspiracy ideologies has decreased nationwide in Germany since 2020, with only one exception; in Saxony, conspiracy theories and myths surrounding the virus and the government’s response increased.⁷³ More than 2000 people participated in this study in the spring of 2020, and over 60% of these participants were asked again about their position in early 2021. The study finds that conspiracy theories are generally more widespread and persistent in East Germany than in West Germany, as approximately twice as many people in the East believe in Covid related myths and

⁷³ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmythen? Eine Analyse der Verbreitung derartiger Mythen in Deutschland 2020 – 2021,” Berlin: D|Part Think Tank, 2021.

‘fake news’ as they do in the West.⁷⁴ In 2021, a representative number of 16% of the population was estimated to support Covid related myths in the East, whereas only 8% of people in the West expressed the same.⁷⁵ In 2020, 19% of the population in the East and 13% in the Western states had supported these myths. In Saxony, the supporters of conspiracy theories notably increased in numbers from 23% in 2020 to 28% in 2021, and the second highest and above-average number of supporters for the conspiracies can be found in the neighbouring State of Sachsen-Anhalt, where 16% of the population is estimated to support the myths.⁷⁶

In November 2021, Dr. Spöri and Dr. Eichhorn published the final report on their analytical study regarding the circulation of Covid-19 related myths and conspiracy theories in Germany (2020-2021) through D|PART. The study looks at the early development of myths and conspiracy theories regarding the coronavirus and the measures taken to contain it, as well as the socio-demographic profile of supports (e.g. age, education, economic background), their political preferences and alignments (including fundamental values, e.g. to universalism or social conformity), as well as the overall (dis-)trust in public institutions.

This widespread phenomenon is a clear threat to German political unity and stability and may hinder efforts to contain the spread of the virus and protect the population. Thus, it is critical to identify the sources of such positioning and the segments of the population that exhibit a greater tendency to align themselves with such movements. This study is also unique in the sense that the same participants were questioned over the course of both 2020 and 2021, which is useful for evaluating how dynamic Covid conspiracy myths are in their spread across Germany, and which groups have since turned away, or turned to, supporting them. The first responses were collected in April and May 2020, the second response in February and March 2021, with a third questioning is planned for 2022.⁷⁷ In terms of the origins and perpetuation

⁷⁴ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmmythen?,” 2021.

⁷⁵ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmmythen?,” 2021.

⁷⁶ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmmythen?,” 2021.

⁷⁷ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmmythen?,” 2021.

of conspiracy myths, the study's findings link the supporters of these myths predominantly to people who also exhibit politically extreme, often right-wing extreme, tendencies. The study notes that the support for Covid related myths has overall decreased across Germany over the last year and a half, even though persistent supporters have become increasingly aggressive in their convictions. East Germany's numbers remain higher than those of the West, and the gap has even slightly widened. However, the study also notes that the 'simplistic distinction' between East- and West-Germany overshadows a key finding – that the state of Saxony, in particular, distinguishes itself significantly from the other *Bundesländer*.⁷⁸

The research conducted across these time periods overwhelmingly suggests that Saxony has, by far, the highest proportion of conspiracy theorists. The study identifies several categories of respondents; the 'Resistente' / 'Resistants' (who withstand the conspiracies), 'Ex-Anhänger:innen' / Former supporters, 'Neuüberzeugte' / Newly convinced, and the 'Harter Kern' / the 'hard core' of supporters who have not wavered in their conviction over the year. The differences in responses by East and West demonstrate a poignant divide in the country, which may be traced to their historical disparities in political, economic and cultural structures. However, even within the Eastern states, significant regional distinctions can be deduced from the data. The figure above shows the disproportionately high level of circulation conspiracy theories and myths enjoy in Saxony. In 2020, Thüringen had the highest proportion with 26% (Saxony: 23%, Saxony-Anhalt: 22%), but other than Saxony had a total drop in 2021, and the two other states are much closer to the national average. In Lower Saxony the percentage dropped from 16% to 6%. Baden-Württemberg and Saxony even observe opposite trends⁷⁹.

In particular, the situation in Saxony doesn't appear as dynamic as in other states. There is less change in alignment, with only 3% former supporters and 5% of newly convinced supporters of the myths. The 'hard core', or 'persistent centre', of the believers, appears strong. Saxony is thereby the only federal state which showcased

⁷⁸ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, "Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmythen? Eine Analyse der Verbreitung derartiger Mythen in Deutschland 2020 – 2021," Berlin: D|Part Think Tank, 2021.

⁷⁹ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, "Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmythen?"

more people believing in Covid-related conspiracies in 2021 than in the year prior. Despite the volatility of the situation that has sometimes been observed, Covid-19 conspiracies remain a general social problem that can be found in all parts of the population across Germany. However, the supporters of these conspiracy myths differ in some key aspects from the rest of the population. Followers of such myths are more likely to be found in younger age groups, particularly in the group under 35.⁸⁰ The aforementioned data demonstrates that among the federal states, Saxony has not only a significantly higher proportion of supporters of conspiracy myths than any other, but that the support in Saxony is also more stubborn than elsewhere. Likely as a direct result, at around 58.1% vaccinated, Saxony also has the lowest vaccination record out of all German federal states.⁸¹ In an interview with ZDF, Dr. Spöri explained that Saxony has ‘become a hot-spot’ for conspiracy theorists and opponents of the coronavirus restrictions.⁸²

Saxony and its surrounding region has not only become a hot-spot for criticism of public health measures, but also garnered attention for spikes in hate speech, racially-motivated discrimination, and right-wing extremist attitudes that challenge Germany’s position in the European Union. For many citizens in the region, the EU is considered an additional source of division in Germany and an elitist institution that exemplifies Germany’s increasing loss of self-determination. Frank Richter reasons that the loss of Statehood after re-unification is at fault for much of the resentment toward the leadership of the modern nation state today. Unlike other former Soviet satellite states, East Germany did not experience the same type of ‘liberation’ that is enjoyed and celebrated elsewhere.⁸³ Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic and Slovakia after the peaceful partition at the turn of the year 1992/93), Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia were liberated from the Soviet communist dictatorship and consequently regained their national sovereignty at the end of the Cold War; it was only the GDR that was entirely dissolved and simply

⁸⁰ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmythen? Eine Analyse der Verbreitung derartiger Mythen in Deutschland 2020 – 2021,” Berlin: D|Part Think Tank, 2021.

⁸¹ Tobias Spöri and Jan Eichhorn, “Wer glaubt (nicht mehr) an Corona-Verschwörungsmythen?”

⁸² Dominik Rzepka, “Studie zu Verschwörungsmythen: Anzahl von Corona-Leugnern kleiner geworden,” ZDF Exclusive, November 29, 2021.

⁸³ Frank Richter, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*, Ullstein, 2019.

‘absorbed’ by an existing sovereign state, West Germany.⁸⁴ This has unique implications for the political memory tied to their former citizens, and for the relative levels of human and economic development in the Eastern regions. The West German ‘constitution’, the Basic Law, would become the legal foundation of unified Germany, which to this day people in the East identify as a symbol for unequal access to the institutional foundations of the state. A lost sense of belonging may often translate to a fear of being neglected, or even discriminated against, by the authorities and institutions that lead the country. Thus, cosmopolitanism is likely to be rejected by those that feel as though their wants and needs are disregarded in favor of accommodating foreigners.

3.3 Remnants of Communism

Following the end of the Second World War, the departure of the Americans left Saxony to the devices of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) at the beginning of July 1945. A newly formed state administration under the Social Democrat Rudolf Friedrichs was exposed to the claims to leadership of the communist KPD “Initiative Group”, which had returned from Moscow.⁸⁵ Their leaders, above all Hermann Matern, as first secretary of the KPD district leadership in Saxony and Kurt Fischer, as Saxony’s interior and people’s education minister, operated a ruthless and brutal policy of clientelism, occupying important administrative positions with their own followers. Under the protection of the Soviet occupying power, these schemes severely inhibited the functioning of the Saxon state administration.

From the summer of 1947 onwards, the rigorous expansion of communist bastions of power was openly aimed at establishing a one-party dictatorship in eastern Germany. After the sudden death of then-Prime Minister Friedrichs, who was trying to find conservative allies, it was not the relatively popular left-wing democrat and former incumbent Erich Zeigner who was appointed as his successor, but rather Max Seydewitz, under the pressure of the Moscow-leaning faction within the Socialist

⁸⁴ Frank Richter, *Gehört Sachsen noch zu Deutschland? Meine Erfahrungen in einer fragilen Demokratie*.

⁸⁵ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

Unity Party of Germany, the SED.⁸⁶ As a veteran and loyal party soldier, he not only supported the rapidly progressing “Stalinization” of the SED by “eliminating the social democratic element” of the government, but also approved it the targeted ousting of his middle-class ministerial colleagues from the cabinet.⁸⁷ As a result, several Saxon politicians sought refuge in the West. In addition, “purges” of personnel from the non-socialist parties increasingly advanced the pro-communist trajectory of Saxony at the time, eradicating any sense of democratic institutionalism in the government.⁸⁸ Since Saxony was, at the time, the most developed and prosperous region within the Soviet Occupation Zone, it was also the most vulnerable to the ‘reparations’ policies of the Soviet leadership. Entire branches of industry were completely dismantled and sent to the Soviet Union. After dramatic production slumps, almost half a million employees lost their jobs in a short space of time and Saxony faced devastating supply shortages due to transportation issues.⁸⁹ Even decades after the fall of the GDR, Saxony never recovered its prosperity and continues to suffer from economic hardship and striking wealth disparities amongst its population.

The re-unification of Germany in 1990 was welcomed by most, albeit not all, citizens of the East, but the changes were also accompanied by new challenges. Following the dissolution of the GDR, the political and economic order of the West was suddenly introduced to people who had spent decades living with the constraints, and predictability, of a planned economy. The abrupt adjustment to free market capitalism, with much of the industry and personnel sent from the West, was not easy to acclimate to for many, in particular as it was accompanied by significant demographic shifts and a tide of emigration to the Western states. Today, left-wing populist groups and movements continue to consolidate in Saxony, voicing similar criticisms of Germany’s policies as those on the opposite end of the political spectrum. In his 1955 dissertation entitled “1923. Die gescheiterte Deutsche Oktoberrevolution”, Otto Wenzel first discussed the failed German communist revolution of October 1923, and updated the historical accounts in 2004 once additional source material emerged.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

⁸⁷ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁸⁸ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

⁸⁹ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

⁹⁰ Otto Wenzel, *1923. Die gescheiterte Deutsche Oktoberrevolution*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004.

In resistance to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP in the 1920s, the German communist party, KPD, had gained much public support in Eastern Germany.⁹¹ In addition to efforts to win over right-wing nationalists, the so-called "united front" of communists and socialists played an important role in internal party discussions. The long-term goal of the KPD, like that of the Soviet leadership, was the separation of the Social Democratic party members from their leadership, a goal that was mostly kept secret from the public. The fact that there was a brief coalition government of communists and social democrats in Thuringia and Saxony in 1923 was what the planners of the German October Revolution wanted to use to procure weapons for worker battalions.⁹² The Prime Minister of Saxony, the Social Democrat Erich Zeigner, was just as unwilling to do this as his Thuringian colleague.⁹³ Eventually, the Saxon government was deposed through direct intervention by the Reich government and the country was provisionally placed under Reich administration.⁹⁴ The KPD, as a result of its poorly armed worker battalions, was no match for the Reichswehr marching into Saxony. As such, the communist movement in Saxony was largely moved to the underground, and would not re-emerge properly until the Soviet take-over after the Second World War. The legacy of the Soviet occupation zone and the following establishment of the GDR and its socialist governance is of much significance for understanding the culture and mentality of citizens in Saxony, as well as other Eastern states, today.⁹⁵ As one of the regions most affected by economic downturn and so-called 'brain-drain' of its population, Saxony remains vulnerable to populist movements targeting economic reform.

⁹¹ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*, CH Beck Verlag, 2014.

⁹² Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

⁹³ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

⁹⁴ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

⁹⁵ Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Geschichte Sachsens*.

Chapter IV – The European Integration Project

To understand the European integration project, one must consider the historical origins of the process in Europe to secure peace and prosperity. EU policy aims to bolster regional powers, yet this comes with the sacrifice of national sovereignty. In a sense, supranationalism and regionalism exhibit a ‘converging relationship’, i.e. sovereign member states give up a certain amount of control and independence to contribute to the common leadership; this in turn, is likely to provoke a regional reaction in favour of reclaiming lost power.⁹⁶ In some sense, European integration can be understood as a process of ‘taming’, while also indirectly spurring, nationalism and the sacrifice of sovereignty for greater regional integration.⁹⁷ Integral to the thesis argument is also the idea of path dependency and democratic backsliding in political processes, as well as the role of the nation state in Germany, such as through the treatment of national victimization narratives (e.g. ‘guilt for patriotism’) propagated by right-wing nationalist figures.

4.1 The Journey of European Union

For the EU, regional identities are fundamental to its political mission and much funding is devoted to regional development. Within the EU’s supranational system, nation states who are members of the Union sacrifice a share of their national sovereignty to the common governance, which, to some extent, diminishes the capacities and authority of the states themselves. In turn, this sense of ‘losing power’ may trigger feelings of political disenfranchisement or a sort of indenture to a higher authority.⁹⁸ As the federal level of governance diminishes slightly in its capacities, the regional / territorial level gains in relative power. A tension ensues between greater regional integration across the European continent and nationalistic sentiment, which can be observed in the overwhelmingly Eurosceptic nature of most emerging far-right nationalist movements and parties in Europe.⁹⁹ Decentralisation also leads to greater

⁹⁶ Björn Hettne, et. al. *Globalism and the New Regionalism*. 2009.

⁹⁷ Björn Hettne, et. al. *Globalism and the New Regionalism*. 2009.

⁹⁸ Frederik Söderbaum, *Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field*, 2015.

⁹⁹ Michael Bayerlein, “Chasing the Other ‘Populist Zeitgeist’? Mainstream Parties and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism,” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift (PVS)*, February 2021.

regional autonomy on the local and municipal levels, where political actors attempt to reclaim their agency from the bottom up. In the fields of political science and international relations, regionalism is generally understood as “the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose combined with the creation and implementation of institutions that express a particular identity and shape collective action within a geographical region”.¹⁰⁰ The 1950s and 1960s set up the foundations for the first coherent regional initiatives; however, solely in Western Europe with the establishment of the European Community (EC) did they appear to be truly fruitful.¹⁰¹ These initiatives – referred to by scholars as “old regionalism” – were replaced in the late 1980s with new measures of regional integration, also referred to as “new regionalism”, which still continue to take shape today.¹⁰²

4.2 Supranationalism in Times of Crisis

In the book “Supranationalism in the New World Order”, Paul and Emiko Close discuss the impact of supranationalism on nationalistic sentiment by analysing the EU’s style of governance. They argue that the, essentially, the decision-making bodies of the EU, such as the European Parliament, do not mimic the responsibilities and competencies that are relinquished on the level of the equivalent nation-state bodies, courts, and political institutions.¹⁰³ The authors explain that, within the supranational system, the decision-making powers have been transferred from the nation-state level, including the respective national parliaments, to the Union level, but have also been largely re-distributed to supranational institutions which are not directly, electorally, accountable in the same way as they would be on a national level of governance. The authors reason that the EU, as a result of the specific means through which it has re-distributed its acquired and accumulated supranational decision-making powers among its institutions, therefore continues to participate in the process of governance, or ‘geo-political management’ of a larger integrated region, in a far more “top-down”

¹⁰⁰ Frederik Söderbaum, *Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field*, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Frederik Söderbaum, *Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field*, 2015.

¹⁰² Frederik Söderbaum, *Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field*, 2015.

¹⁰³ Paul and Emiko Close, *Supranationalism in the New World Order* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

manner than has traditionally been the case among its current Member States.¹⁰⁴ As such, this adds pressure to the dynamic relationship observed between regional, national, and supranational entities. Therefore, it may be deduced that through the loss of an element of accountability of these decision-making bodies, regional actors in states like Saxony are more likely feel disenfranchised and powerless with respect to EU policy-making. As the EU progresses as a supranational organisation and asserts its institutional influence, it would need to alter its managerial style so as to far more closely resemble the approach to governance which has traditionally characterised and distinguished western liberal democracies as fair and transparent. Otherwise, according to Close, this so-called democratic deficit will continue to grow and spark resistance from local and regional actors, breeding Eurosceptic attitudes and leaving the EU vulnerable to accusations of being a 'dictatorship'. In this regard, the research conducted in this investigation supports the thesis that structural issues of supranational leadership promote the erosion of trust in authority and the pillars that support it.

4.3 The Phenomenon of Euroscepticism

Despite the European Union's principal objective to promote unity, cooperation, and peace within the European continent, its mission for integration has faced a multitude of socio-economic challenges, compounding to prompt a rise in not only Euroscepticism but also populist and nationalistic attitudes, as evoked by the AfD and its counterparts in other European nation states.¹⁰⁵ These issues have emerged as the EU's liberal stance coincides with the processes of globalisation, conflicting with the intensifying nationalist sentiment present in many regions of EU member countries, such as Saxony in eastern Germany or Veneto in north-eastern Italy.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the EU has continued to showcase its resilience, both through expansion of membership and in taking on additional powers, manifesting its stronghold on power structures in Europe through deeper regional integration.

¹⁰⁴ Paul and Emiko Close, *Supranationalism in the New World Order* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ Robert Grimm, "The Rise of the German Eurosceptic Party Alternative Fur Deutschland, between Ordoliberal Critique and Popular Anxiety." *International Political Science Review*, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Hans-Georg Betz, "Exclusionary Populism in Austria, Italy, and Switzerland," *Sage International Journal* 56, no. 3 (2001).

Theories on populism elaborate the mechanisms that cause left-wing, right-wing, and even centrist groups and movements across the political spectrum to challenge established parties and the governing 'elite'.¹⁰⁷ From a more broad perspective, constructivism claims that critical aspects of international relations as a whole are largely shaped by ideational – rather than material – factors, which are historically and socially constructed.¹⁰⁸ For the European Union, the norms, values, behaviours, and ideologies of its member states represent a significant element of European region building, and are thus worthy of further study.

¹⁰⁷ Rosa Balfour, "Europe's Troublemakers: The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy," *European Policy Centre*, February 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

Chapter V – Levels of Governance

The final chapter of this thesis is focused on the various levels of governance which dictate policymaking and shape political culture. As referenced in earlier sections, multi-level governance is a way of describing the way power is divided vertically across several levels of government and horizontally between multiple sub-national and non-governmental actors and organizations across the political realm. Germany is one of many countries which has multiple levels of government including local, regional, state, national or federal – and in the case of the EU – supranational layers; each layer of authority comes with its own interests in policy making outcomes, yet is also subject to differing competencies.

5.1 Regions as Political Agents

Figure 11 (Annex) illustrates typical governing dynamics for EU member states. On top, multi-scalar governance indicates that the EU is impacted by a diverse network of actors across socio-spatial spheres, with many different interest groups and institutions at work. From this supranational level, pressures are exerted upon, and in consideration of, nation states. These nation states, typically hold the administrative, i.e. federal, or centralized, authority to govern their own sovereign territory. Within this national territory, regional leadership plays an important role in shaping policy. It is worthy to highlight that the pressures exerted by national leadership can be returned by the regional governments, as illustrated by the arrows directed both ways. Often regions within one nation state differ significantly in terms of their social or demographic, economic, political, and geographic circumstances, which greatly impacts their respective policy options. The same dynamic can be observed even on the local/municipal level, which has a public administration that operates within its own sphere of competence and seeks to build upon its own territorial assets.

European integration efforts, accelerated by the greater regional integration amongst EU member states, are thereby often responsible for the political changes on a national, or sub-national level. For instance, in *Supranationalism in the New World Order*, Paul and Emiko Close discuss the impact of supranationalism on nationalistic

sentiment by analysing the EU's style of governance. The book argues that as a result of the distribution of global power and the subsequent configuration of global actors after the Cold War, the European Union is only one of a growing number of regional regimes that are assuming leading roles in the process of global governance, to some extent by exploiting differentiated geo-political management zones.¹⁰⁹ According to Close at the time of publishing, the EU could be considered the "most advanced and influential example of a regional regime" by reason of having the novel European Community (EC) at its core, which is uniquely built around supranational institutions, international laws, and decision-making processes.¹¹⁰ The competitive advantages of supranational regional regimes, in conjunction with the typically 'realist' approach realism employed by most global players, appear to also be consistent with the neo-functional perspective on the progress of the EU. Nevertheless, the past decades since 1999 have demonstrated significant shifts in the international order and the relative power of states. To understand the EU as a coherent regional regime today, it is important to consider the political currents that threaten such progress.

In "Europe, Regions, and European Regionalism", Roger Scully takes a closer look at Europe's regions, many of which he claims have an "obvious, confident sense of their own identity" and a sense of unique importance that sets them apart from mere "localities", even if they are not trapped in sovereign statehood.¹¹¹ Scully refers to the regions of Catalonia and Scotland, two regions whose capital cities he claims exude a sense of status "that far surpasses that cramped and slighting designation of 'provincial' sometimes bestowed upon them by their respective metropolitan centres".¹¹² The article explores the deep roots and ancient traditions of Europe, which is argued to exist perhaps above all, of "*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*", or bourgeois society.¹¹³ Europe in this context is described as largely stable and dependable, and as a power that can pride itself in real and lasting civic achievement. Scully identifies enterprise and economic power as a key bourgeois feature and connects European regionalism to similar dynamics, identifying and investigating four of the most

¹⁰⁹ Paul and Emiko Close, *Supranationalism in the New World Order* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Paul and Emiko Close, *Supranationalism in the New World Order* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

¹¹¹ Roger Scully, *Europe, Regions, and European Regionalism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

¹¹² Roger Scully, *Europe, Regions, and European Regionalism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

¹¹³ Roger Scully, *Europe, Regions, and European Regionalism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

successful regions in Europe: Baden-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes, Lombardy, as well as Catalonia.¹¹⁴ In a chapter by Carolyn Moore titled “‘Fit for Europe’? The German Länder, German Federalism, and the EU”, federalism and the role of German states are discussed in ways that align closely with the thesis claims on the perception on European policy in east German regions while also offering a new perspective on the role of the national government. For instance, Moore argues that securing participation rights and protecting the *Länder*’s autonomy from encroachments of both the German federal government and the European Union should be a priority.¹¹⁵ This shift in approach can be understood as advocating for the engagement of the *Länder* in both European reform debates and within the domestic arena to pro-actively assert their own political culture within a larger context.

5.2 The Power of National Narrative

Nation states remain the most significant containers for political memory. It is mostly national narratives that shape the perception and ideologies of its citizens. For instance, Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities” is a defining and fundamental reference for understanding the origins of nationalism, forging a new field of study and cited as one of the most significant contributions to the subject. Anderson depiction of a nation state is as that of an unnatural entity, one which people have culturally constructed and assume hold intangible value, each nation state with its own particular history rooted in the fall of monarchies and empires, as well as specific advancements in literacy, technology, and capitalism.¹¹⁶ To better understand the defining features of nations like Germany and the power that they appear to hold over their citizens, Anderson notes the various continuities among different nations that formed in various time periods and various regions, many of which he argues result from countries simply imitating each another.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Roger Scully, *Europe, Regions, and European Regionalism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Carolyn Moore, “Fit for Europe? The German Länder, German Federalism, and the EU” in *Europe, Regions, and European Regionalism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” *Verso*, 2006.

The text also considers poignant differences between nations, both in the periods during which they were formed and today, indicating their historical path dependency and demonstrating how many of the “structures, tendencies, and inequalities” inherent to the forms of social and political organization are preserved.¹¹⁸ Anderson begins with a case study on Indochina, but many of the concepts explained and supported in this work can be applied to the cultural study of Germany and other places where nationalism is of great importance in understanding the historical context. Anderson shows that nationalism is different from other political -isms, and that despite its inherent ambiguity, nationalism represents an idea that people are willing to sacrifice themselves for, legitimized by the sense of being part of a political community. Taking on an anthropological perspective, *Imagined Communities* elaborates on the psyche of people, such as the intrinsic demand for control and a sense of belonging, transformed through processes of ‘national consciousness’.¹¹⁹

Likewise, Ernst Gellner’s “Nations and Nationalism” is one of the most influential works on the emergence and origins of nationalism, and as such a vital body of work for understanding concepts related to identity and collective memory. It also considers the economic dimension when investigating nationalism, drawing references to the impacts of the industrial revolution on the way that modern nation states function. Gellner claims that “a society’s affluence and economic growth depends on innovation, occupational mobility, the effectiveness of the mass media, universal literacy, and an all-embracing educational system based on a shared, standard idiom”.¹²⁰ When considered in relation to one another, these factors ultimately determine the relationship between culture and the state. Political actors that are not attuned to the principle of “one state, one culture” are thus more likely to feel pressured to participate in nationalistic activity. As discussed in prior chapters, the economic growth rates and opportunities for social and occupational mobility in Saxony do not match those of other parts of the country, particularly the newly industrialized regions in western Germany.

¹¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” Verso, 2006.

¹¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” Verso, 2006.

¹²⁰ Ernst Gellner, “Nations and Nationalism,” Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

5.3 Saxony's Push Against the Current

“Is Saxony diverse? How young people, democratic initiatives, and networks of citizens view their home,” is the title of a political analysis report by Rebecca Sawicki, who perceives the representation of Saxony in the media and popular scholarship as problematic. According to Sawicki, the representation is largely one-sided and misrepresents the, admittedly concerning, political situation in Saxony by failing to acknowledge the counter-narrative and counter-movements to the radicalised developments discussed at large.¹²¹ In many ways, Saxony and its citizens are pushing back against many of these developments. Sawicki acknowledges the current political challenges in Saxony and its ‘known problem’ with right-wing extremism. The issue is underscored by the number and nature of demonstrations and protests, the emerging political parties and support for right-wing opposition parties like the AfD, and in the day-to-day exchange between citizens. Moreover, an increasing proportion of the population denying the Covid-19 pandemic and rampant opposition to the vaccine have exacerbated a clear threat to the political coherence and unity in Saxony. However, Sawicki also wishes to highlight the counter movement, and a more ‘colorful’ picture of the state.¹²² According to her, Saxony has a very strong and resilient civil society and a long history of support for liberal democracy. Residents, particularly those from cities and localities that are dependent on its culture and tourist attractions, express concern that the negative depiction of Saxony in media could harm the local economy; in response, movements are taking shape to reframe the narrative.¹²³

Some examples of progressive civilian networks recently emerging in Saxony includes the social-cultural network “Rabryka” in Görlitz, a commune near the Polish border.¹²⁴ This network is exemplary for its purpose of initiating political discourse, especially amongst the younger segments of the population. Hans Vorländer had identified Görlitz as one of the localities in Saxony that was most opposed to Covid-19 related measures and restrictions; established by the ‘Second Attempt’ society,

¹²¹ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt? Wie junge Menschen, demokratische Initiativen und Bürgernetzwerke auf ihre Heimat blicken,” *Watson*, January 20, 2022.

¹²² Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹²³ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹²⁴ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

Rabryka is a place for young people to socialize and organizes themselves to debate and engage with local politics.¹²⁵ In weekly plenary sessions, they are able to express their concerns and worries about political developments in their region. A 20 year old named Jason claims he is aware of “what Saxony can be like” as the squares in Görlitz and the city of Bautzen are full of Covid-19 deniers on Mondays, and that entire streets are taken up in Dresden or Freiberg during protest marches. According to Jason, “it would be nice if the contrast that also exists here was reported on.”¹²⁶

In the city of Freiberg, a civil initiative called “Freiberg für alle” / “Freiberg for all”, which was founded in 2019, seeks to encourage change in the Saxon attitudes and improve the image of the city, state, and greater region both across Germany and internationally. Claudia Kallmeier, a local in this University town, expressed that like many others, she feel frustrated “that Saxony is often exactly as it is portrayed in the media.” According to Kallmeier, more initiative is needed to give the ‘silent majority’ in Saxony a voice.¹²⁷ Eric Heffenträger of another civilian initiative by the name “Agenda Alternativ” to counter the trend toward political extremism, claims that the CDU leadership of Saxony is largely responsible for the developments, due to its long-term downplaying of the rise and threats of right-wing extremism in Saxony. In principle, “Agenda Alternativ” is about making a difference in political education work and offering events that do not otherwise exist in the region. Heffenträger explains that the initiative organizes “eyewitness talks, readings, cinema evenings, educational trips and the ‘Stains in the sun’ festival”.¹²⁸ Moreover, it is also about reflecting together on what trigger mechanisms exist for anti-Semitism, homophobia or racism. In order to make the Erzgebirge and Saxony as a whole more ‘cosmopolitan’, the underlying socio-political barriers must be understood and overcome.

From the “Jugend mit Wirkung” [“Youth with Impact”] movement in small-town Zwönitz to the “Aufstehen gegen Rassismus (AGR)” [“Stand up to Racism”] in the large city of Chemnitz, where in 2018 infamously mass protests and violence against immigration were ignited by far-right groups, many Saxons feel increasingly

¹²⁵ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹²⁶ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹²⁷ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹²⁸ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

compelled to resist the ‘wave’ toward right-wing populism and reactionary movements. Chemnitz, for instance, was named Karl-Marx city when it was part of East Germany.¹²⁹ In 2017, however, almost a quarter of the city's residents voted in elections in favour of the AfD. Gabi Engelhardt from the AGR explains that the networks in Chemnitz work with parties such as die Grünen, the SPD and die Linke. Additionally, action is taken alongside trade unions or Muslim communities, and even alongside the Jewish community.¹³⁰

Engelhardt calls the situation in her city an “asymmetric struggle.”¹³¹ On the one hand there is the vast majority of citizens who show solidarity and stick to the Covid relevant measures, including many who held vigils in groups of ten due to the lockdown in force until recently. However, this majority of citizens in Saxony is also ‘largely mute’, not voicing their beliefs as openly as those with more radical views. On the other side are those who doubt the pandemic and show greater skepticism toward the government and institutions. This reflects the segment of the population which criticizes the measures and simultaneously does not hesitate to protest together with neo-Nazis. Engelhardt believes that “there is a great danger that there is no distancing to the right and that people from the so-called ‘political center’ are joining [extremists on the street]”.¹³² She is certain that it is about destroying democratic institutions and to shake the system and the establishment. Thus, Engelhardt wishes to “set up a round table where there is space for people's concerns and criticism of the Corona measures, but no space for right-wing agitation, where solidarity solutions are discussed.”¹³³ Although there is indeed room for criticism of the Covid-related policies and management procedures in Saxony, there must emerge more moderate and peaceful avenues for expressing this criticism. Engelhardt speculates that the right is as strong as it is because the social left was too weak when it came to criticizing the measures. The pandemic has exacerbated with enormous force the problems that already existed within society on a surface level; the AGR is now one of many movements trying to carve a path for the moderate majority in Saxony.

¹²⁹ “Chemnitz feiert Karl Marx: Wahrzeichen wird 50,” *Kurier*, October 7, 2021.

¹³⁰ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹³¹ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹³² Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

¹³³ Rebecca Sawicki, “Ist Sachsen bunt?”

It is important to note that the city of Leipzig has a reputation of being a particularly colorful city, a political anomaly even within its own regional space. A cosmopolitan population with a strong leftist scene, it is considered an island of democracy and solidarity by many. However, Saxony's areas for improvement do not go unnoticed by the city either; there are numerous right-wing groups based in Leipzig alone, including 'Querdenker' and pandemic deniers. Here too, citizens are taking to the streets each week, often illegally and without regard for the applicable regulations.¹³⁴ The "Leipzig nimmt Platz" ["Leipzig takes place"] protest network has existed here already since 2009. Since then, the participants have opposed right-wing marches. Irena Rudolph-Kokot, spokeswoman for the network, says that "here in Leipzig, we took to the streets every week for two years against *Legida*, the Leipzig offshoot of Pegida."¹³⁵ Like other activists and members of civil rights movements in the region, Rudolph-Kokot believes that uncomfortable or unpopular opinions must be endured, such as criticism of the pandemic measures. For her, the principal is one of communication and application of the criticism; like many others, she does not want Saxony to be "exploited" by those who follow a more radical political ideation.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Rebecca Sawicki, "Ist Sachsen bunt?"

¹³⁵ "Proteste in Leipzig: Anhänger und Gegner von „Legida“ auf den Straßen," *Deutschlandfunk*, January 11, 2016.

¹³⁶ Rebecca Sawicki, "Ist Sachsen bunt?"

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of regions and their historical backdrop is critical for understanding political culture today. As Member States become increasingly integrated with the institutions of the EU, and the frameworks it encompasses, other actors on the spectrum of multi-level governance experience a sense of disenfranchisement and, subsequently, disenchantment with the political elite. As such, multi-level governance may act as a catalyst for the regional rise of political extremism and greater distrust in government leadership, as a result of this perceived loss of autonomy. In the case of Saxony, analysis of the socio-economic and political circumstances of the region demonstrates that the issues of political polarization and radicalization faced by Germany, and the European Union as a whole, often stem from the sub-national level in response to a complex set of factors that influence the political thought of the local population. Understanding the origins of the forces that shape political culture today allows leaders to anticipate and more effectively combat challenges that could threaten democratic institutions and the integrity of the European Union.

This thesis does not intend to claim that one German history, e.g. that of Saxony, is more significant in its character than all other German histories, or even that of other regions and localities in the world, each with their own unique stories, narratives, and path forward. While Saxony is certainly not the only German region which deserves to be studied in depth, it is the comprehensive idea of the ‘region’ itself, rather than the history or political condition of any one territory on its own, providing the conceptual matrix upon which power, identity, solidarity, and other relevant concepts and ideas may be projected. In this investigation of Saxony, the historical contingency of its present path towards political polarization and radicalization, the aim is to prompt a re-assessment of the conceptual basis that has already been explored by scholars, and to introduce the issues of regionalism to a broader audience, as much of the existing literature is confined to non-English language work. Saxony provides a clear territorial focus and a solid foundation for scholars to extrapolate finds of trends and developments to other regions, such as those regions in Europe which face similar issues of increasing Euroscepticism and right-

wing extremism. While for practical purposes some regions appear more suitable than others as a vehicle to reconsider larger societal issues and challenges, these considerations underscore the relevance of regionalism as a focus of study.

It is important to not only recognize the challenges of multi-level governance in an increasingly integrated Europe, but also to better understand its underlying causes to evaluate short- and long term implications for the continent's political structures. Widespread political divisions and growing distrust in the authorities, institutions and policies of the federal government and of the EU are of great concern, as they pose a direct risk for democratic backsliding, thereby provoking movements that are inherently antithetical to the values of not only the EU, but to the essence of post-war Germany. Historically significant for its drive toward social justice and democratisation, the German region of Saxony has notoriously become a hub for radical movements and extremist organisations on both ends of the political spectrum. Thus, it is critical to continue to study these issues as rising tensions in regions like Saxony threaten the stability and cohesion within the EU and within the framework of the global political realm.

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Appendices



Figure 1: Dead Country Stamps and Banknote: The Kingdom of Saxony (1806-1871)



Figure 2: Territorial Changes in Saxony between 1815 and 1990; Wikipedia: Geschichte Sachsens



Figure 3: Dreamstime.com: Cities and Districts of Saxony Today



Figure 4: Wiki Voyage: Regions of Saxony

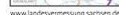


Figure 5: Sachsen.de: Administrative Sectors in Saxony

Abbildung 9

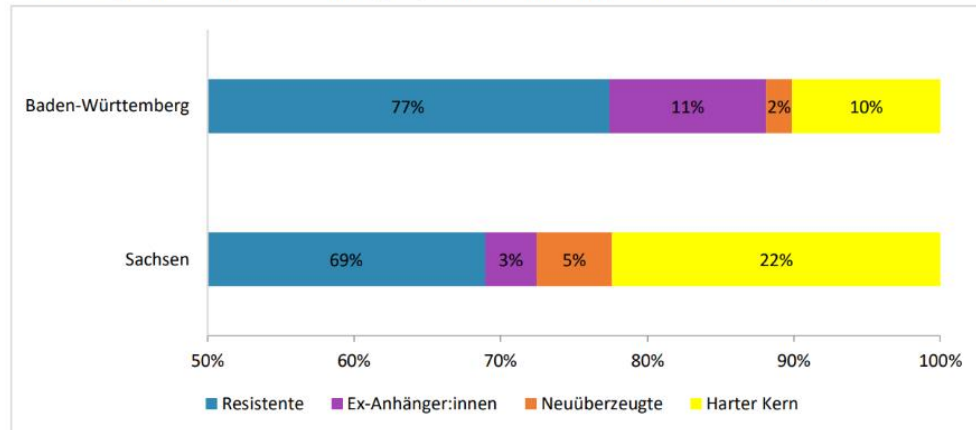
Karte der Bundesländer nach Verbreitung von Corona-Verschwörungsmychen¹³

n = 1.220 Befragte

Figure 6: D|PART.org: Map of German states by prevalence of Coronavirus conspiracy myths

Abbildung 10

Entwicklung von Corona-Verschwörungsmythen in Sachsen und Baden-Württemberg¹⁵

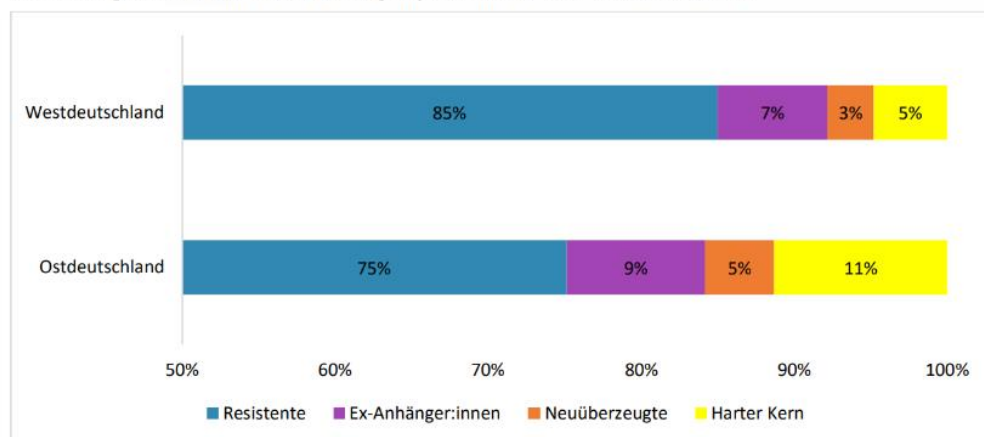


n = 226 Befragte

Figure 7: D|PART.org: Comparative evolution of Coronavirus conspiracy theories and myths

Abbildung 8

Verbreitung von Corona-Verschwörungsmythen in Ost- und Westdeutschland



n = 1.220 Befragte

Figure 8: D|PART.org: Distribution of Coronavirus conspiracy myths between East and West Germany

Abb. 1: Erhebungsregionen in Sachsen

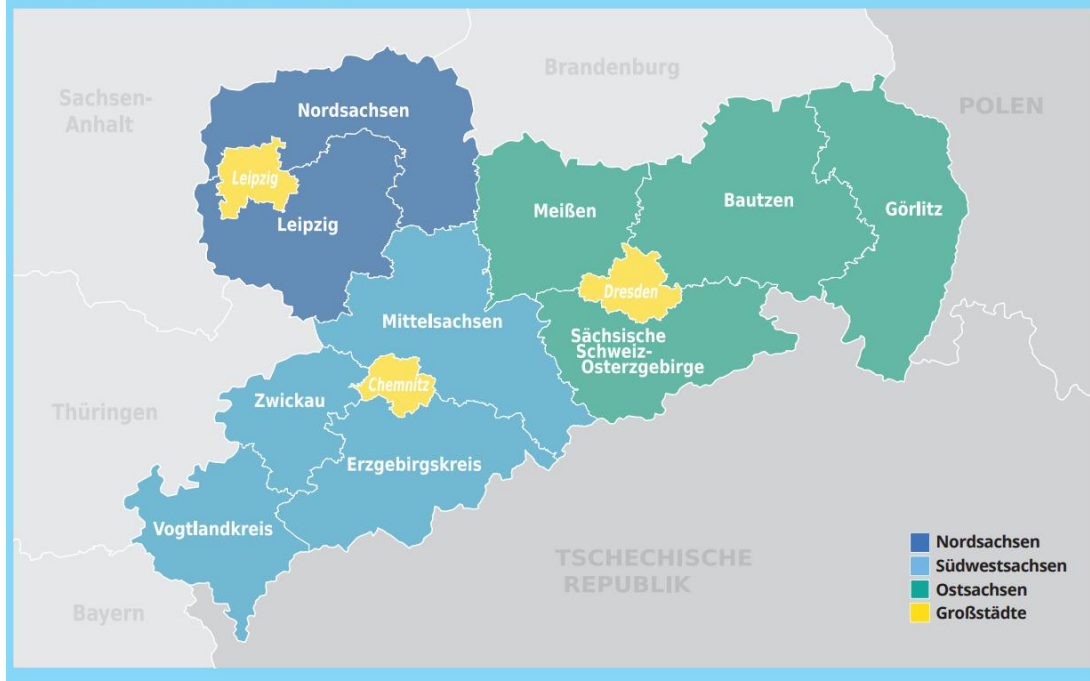


Figure 9: Mercator Forum for Migration and Democracy (MIDEM - Prof. Dr. Vorländer): Survey Regions in Saxony

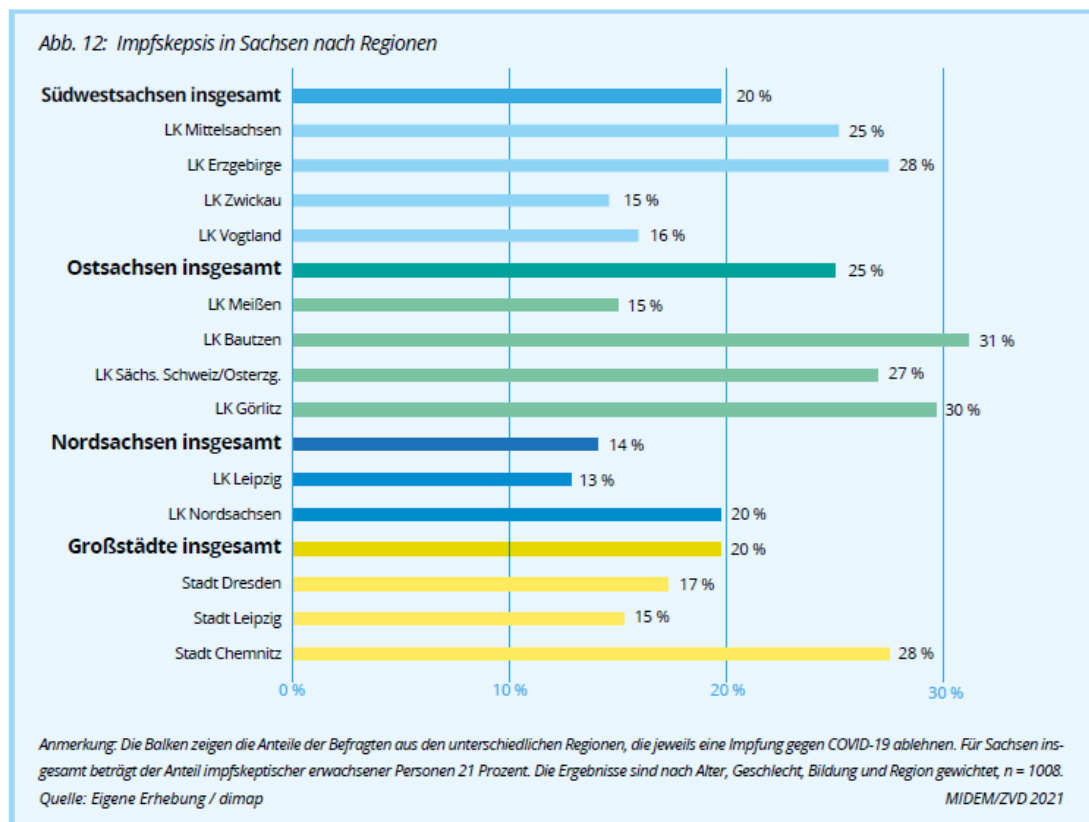


Figure 10: Mercator Forum for Migration and Democracy (MIDEM – Prof. Dr. Vorländer): Levels of anti-vaccine sentiment by regions within Saxony

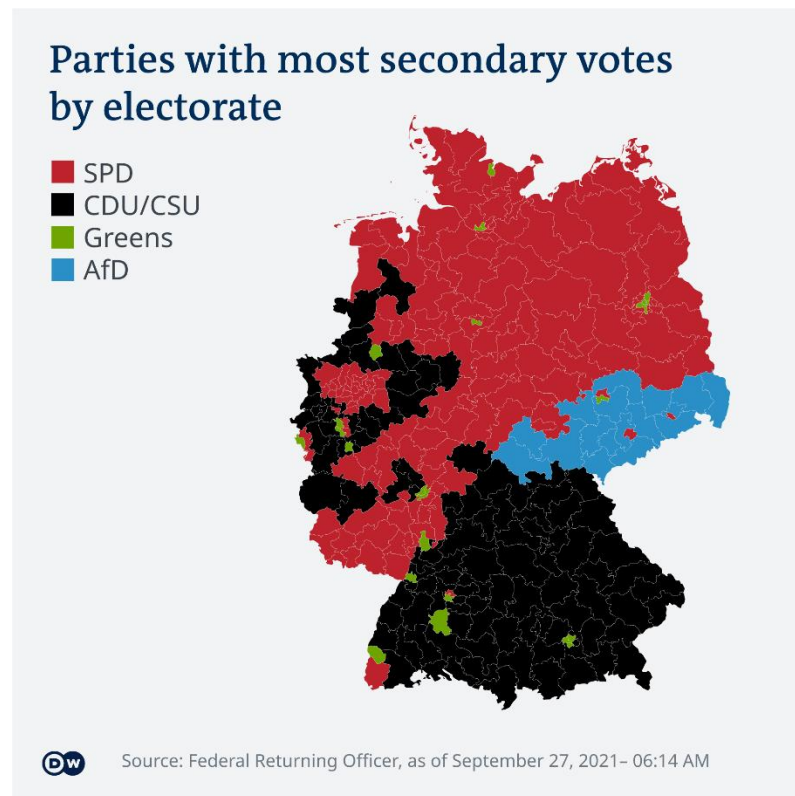


Figure 11: Deutsche Welle: Electoral win for AfD in Saxon regions (2021)

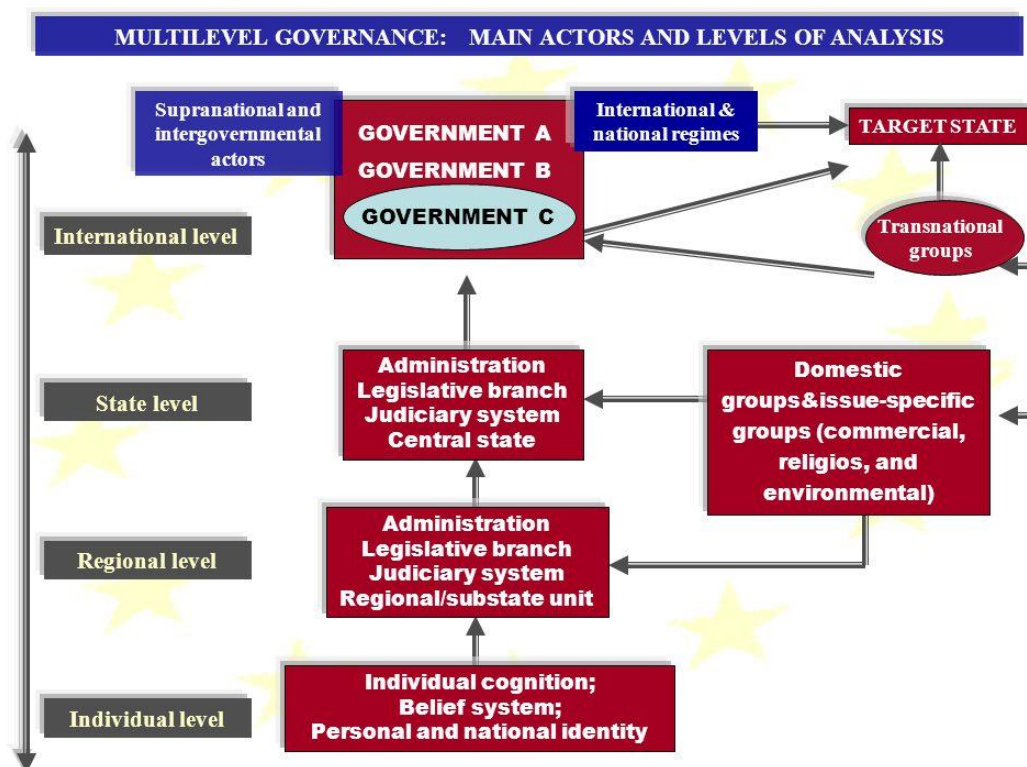


Figure 12: Prof. Dr. Woyke: Multi-level Governance / the dialectic of Supranationalism – the EU as a dominant international actor

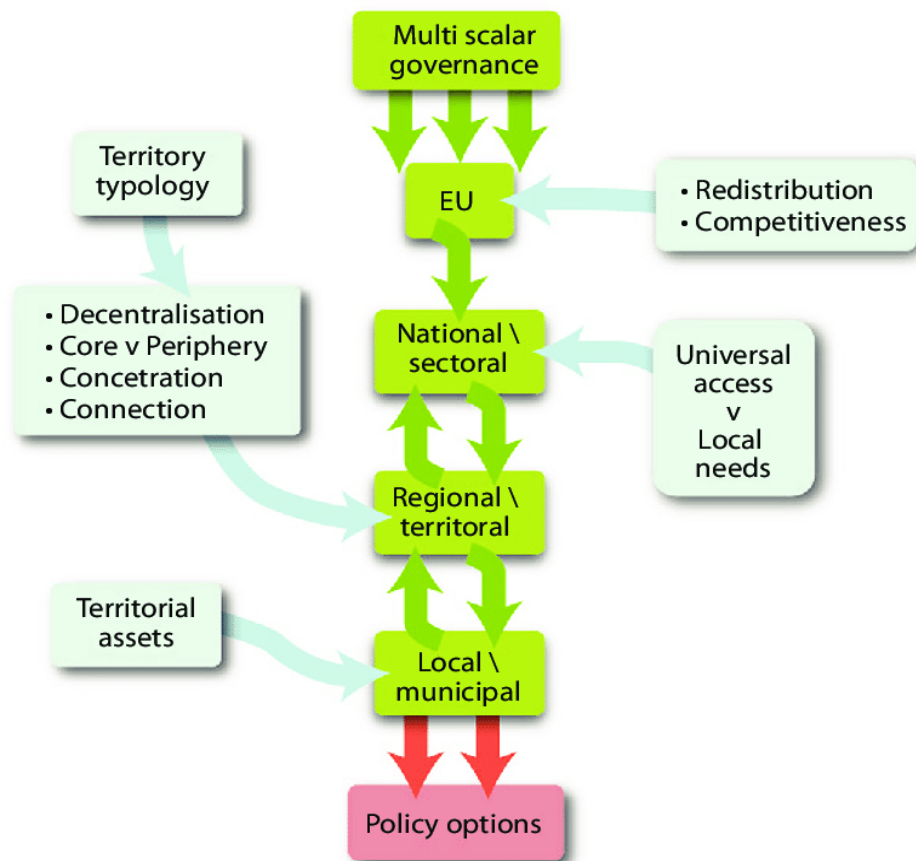


Figure 13: Research Gate (Daniel Rauhut): Multi-level Governance – Reciprocal Forces

Terms and Abbreviations

AfD: Alternative for Germany [right-wing conservative political party]
CSU: Christian Social Union of Germany [Bavarian, more conservative than CDU]
Die Grünen: The Green Party
Die Linke: The Leftist Party
EC: European Community
EU: European Union
FDP: Free Democratic Party
FRG: Federal Republic of Germany; West Germany
GDR: German Democratic Republic; East Germany
KPD: Communist Party of Germany
MS: Member States
NPD: National Democratic Party of Germany
NSDAP: National Socialist German Workers' Party
NSU: National Socialist Underground [neo-Nazi terrorist group]
LEGIDA: Leipzig-branch of PEGIDA
PEGIDA: Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident [anti-Islam, far-right political movement]
CDU: Christian Democratic Union of Germany
SBZ: Soviet Occupation Zone
SED: Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SPD: Social Democratic Party of Germany

Chronology

Timeline	Particulars
1517	Martin Luther posts his 95 Theses at the castle church of Wittenberg sparking the Protestant Reformation
1618 -1648	Thirty Years War – Peace of Westphalia
1756	Saxony joins the coalition of Austria, France and Russia against Prussia and is invaded by Frederick II of Prussia
1756-1763	Seven Years War – Saxony defeated and Saxon army incorporated into Prussian army; Saxon units deserted
1763	Saxony regains its independence
1806	War between Napoleon I's French Empire and Prussia; Saxony first allied with Prussia then switched sides
1806	The Electorate of Saxony joins the Confederation of the Rhine and the College of Kings, Elector Frederick Augustus III becoming King Frederick Augustus I
1814-1815	The Congress of Vienna takes from the Kingdom of Saxony much of its land and grants it to Prussia (ca. 7,800 square miles with ca. 850,000 inhabitants; the ceded territory includes the former Duchy of Saxe-Wittenberg). The Province of Saxony is formed in Prussia.
1815	The Kingdom of Saxony joins the German Confederation
1848	Saxony is a centre of the Revolutions of 1848
1871	The Kingdom of Saxony becomes part of the German Empire; the third highest state in population and fifth in area
1905	Saxony is a hub for manufacturing, becoming the most densely populated state of the German Empire and all of Europe as a result of large-scale immigration due to its economic development
1914	World War I begins
1918	End of World War I and the founding of the Weimar Republic as the German Empire's post-war government; King Frederick Augustus III abdicates
1919	The Free State of Saxony is proclaimed, loss of military sovereignty
1920	Saxony establishes a democratic constitution
1921	Fritz Tittman, born in Leipzig, founds the first NSDAP group outside of Bavaria
1922	NSDAP is banned in Saxony
1923	A state of emergency is declared throughout the German empire in response to strikes and various violent revolts due to rising inflation. Saxony is occupied by the Empire through 'Reichsexekution' (imperial intervention). The minority government under Erich Zeigner is dissolved to prevent a communist revolutionary uprising; Gustav Stresemann's overthrow of the KPD/SPD led government. Rudolf Heinze is appointed imperial commissioner for Saxony.
1932	The last king of Saxony, Frederick Augustus III, dies in Silesia.
1933-1935	Economic crises and rise of the NSDAP. In June 1933, the unemployment rate in Saxony was 39.6 percent, far above the national average. Economic resignation drove especially

	the middle class into the arms of the extreme right-wing factions, which propagated the Führer state as a remedy and “Judaism” as the scapegoat. The Nazi Regime / Third Reich is founded under Adolf Hitler, engulfing Saxony. Manfred von Killinger is appointed as imperial commissioner for Saxony.
1934	Law on the Rebuilding of the Empire: the Saxon state parliament is dissolved. The Free State of Saxony ceases to exist under constitutional law.
1939-1945	Second World War; immense destruction and loss of life due to Allied powers bombing
1949	Saxony becomes a ‘Land’ under the newly founded GDR (DDR)
1952	The state parliament decides to dissolve Saxony. It is divided into the districts of Leipzig, Dresden and Chemnitz.
1989	Fall of the Berlin Wall and end of the Cold War
1990	German re-unification under the Basic Law / ‘Grundgesetz’. Free and fair elections are held and the Free State of Saxony is reinstated, as a part of the Federal Republic of Germany, and – by extension – the European Community. The divided districts are rejoined with new territorial dimensions.
1992	The new Saxon constitution comes into force
1993	The Maastricht Treaty establishes the European Union
1999	The CDU builds the absolute majority government in Saxony under Kurt Biedenkopf
2002	Kurt Biedenkopf hands over the office of Prime Minister of Saxony to his fellow CDU politician Georg Milbradt.
2004	During State elections, Bündnis 90/The Greens, FDP and radical right-wing NPD manage to enter Parliament. CDU loses its majority and builds a coalition with the SPD, which only gained 0.6% more votes than the NPD.
2008	Georg Milbradt hands over the office of Saxon Prime Minister in 2008 to fellow CDU politician Stanislaw Tillich. A District Reorganization Law (Kreisgebietsneugliederungsgesetz) is passed to account for demographic shifts – due to emigration – in Saxony. Saxony has 10 districts and three ‘free’ cities: Leipzig, Dresden, and Chemnitz.
2009	After the State elections, Tillich forms a coalition with the FDP; financial crisis hits Saxon economy. Rise of Euroscepticism.
2013	The right-wing AfD party is founded in protest to the European bailout policies post-financial crisis
2014	The AfD enters the Saxon parliament
2017	The AfD enters the German federal parliament and solidifies itself as strongest party in Saxony with 27% of votes
2019	The AfD enters the European parliament with a representative from Saxony, Maximilian Krah
2021	The AfD in Saxony is monitored by the constitutional court for possible violations

Source: *historisches-sachsen.net: Zeittafel Sachsen*

Pledge of Honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Melina Schmidt

Vita

I, Melina Schmidt, was born on the 4th of October, 1998, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. As of the age of four, I was a student at the International School Frankfurt (ISF), from which I graduated with a High School Diploma with Distinction and a bilingual International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma in June of 2016. In 2020, I graduated from the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies of the University of Washington in Seattle, USA, with a Bachelor's degree in International Studies and a minor in European Studies. During my undergraduate studies, I had the opportunity to work on-campus as an Orientation Leader, Tour Guide, Student Coordinator, and International Admissions Representative, as well as to complete an internship at the World Affairs Council in Seattle. Likewise, I had the chance to travel and volunteer in Central America and study abroad in Rome, Italy, for my capstone Task Force project entitled "European Defence: Strategic Choices for 2030" under the supervision of former U.S. Ambassador John Koenig. Since September 2020, I have been a candidate for the Master of Advanced International Studies degree at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna, Austria. I am currently employed as Assistant to Multilateral Affairs at the Embassy and Permanent Mission of the Philippines in Vienna. I look forward to learning more about international affairs and diplomacy, and wish to pursue an enriching career in the foreign service in the future. I am grateful to all of my professors and mentors for their continued guidance in this field.