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REACTIVE POPULISM AND PERCEIVED COLONIZATION: A CASE OF RIGHT-  
WING SECULARIZATION

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Anthony Albanese

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The thesis of Anthony Albanese was reviewed and approved by the following:

Roger Finke  
Distinguished Professor of Sociology  
Thesis Advisor

Alan Sica  
Professor of Sociology

Gary Adler  
Assistant Professor of Sociology

Eric Baumer  
Head, Department of Sociology and Criminology  
Professor of Sociology and Criminology

## Abstract

From 1949 to 1990, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was committed to the advancement of scientific materialism through atheist proselytizing. With the collapse of the GDR and subsequent deregulation of religion in the 1990s, East Germany saw a continued reduction in religious activity, which was accompanied by a rise in socialist sympathy. Some scholars have interpreted this resurfacing of GDR characteristics, namely secularity and socialism, as a contrarian reaction to the western-dominated reunification process. In more recent years, the relationship between secularism and political ideology has shown a dramatic change, with the right-wing now holding rates of secularism comparable to that of the left-wing. This analysis demonstrates that it is a fear of foreign domination which predicts this new right-wing secularity. I contend that these relationships revolve around two similar, though distinct reactions of eastern identification which surface in the face of a perceived “threat” to the East German identity.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	iv
List of Tables .....	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Religion, Materialism, and the GDR .....	2
Perceived Colonization and Scientific Socialism .....	6
Perceived Colonization and Right-Wing Secularization .....	11
Data and Methods .....	20
Results.....	24
Discussion.....	30
Conclusion .....	36
Appendix: Tables with Berlin Categorized as East Germany .....	38
References.....	40

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Participation in Religious Confirmation and the <i>Jugendweihe</i> in the GDR (%).....	4
Figure 2: Religiosity by Party Support in Germany (%) .....	17
Figure 3: Eastern Contrariness (1999) .....	17
Figure 4: Eastern Contrariness (2017) .....	18

## List of Tables

Table 1: Religious Change from 1990 to 1996 (%).....	7
Table 2: Religiosity by Political Ideology in 1999 .....	25
Table 3: Religious Change by Political Ideology from 1999 to 2017 (%) .....	27
Table 4: Religiosity by Political Ideology in 2017 .....	28
Table 5: Religiosity by Fear of Foreign Domination in 2018.....	29
Table 6: Religious Change by Political Ideology from 1999 to 2017 (%) .....	38
Table 7: Political Ideology by Religiosity in 2017 .....	39

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## Introduction

The sharp religious decline during the reign of the GDR is of no surprise given the State-initiated religious persecution which took place throughout the regime's existence. The GDR was committed to promoting a worldview which adhered to hard empiricism, and was willing to repress any opposition to the advancement of this objective. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a religious revival was observed among the vast majority of Eastern Bloc nations during the 1990s. Against theoretical expectation, however, the former GDR became increasingly secular. To better understand this anomaly and, in turn, improve upon current theory, I argue that this case should be viewed as a defense of the eastern secular identity among citizens who felt "colonized" by the abrupt, western-dominated unification process in Germany. The rise of socialist views during this time will also be understood as a defensive response of the East, one which is closely related to the intensification of the secular identity.

In more recent years, a form of this contrarian response has resurfaced in East Germany. Attitudinal data indicate that Germans have become concerned with the rise of migrant arrivals, particularly in terms of its impact on the German identity. Opposition to liberal immigration law is particularly prevalent among residents in the former GDR states, where we may again be witnessing a reaction of eastern identification (taking the form of secularity) in the face of "colonization." Previous research has not explored this period of right-wing secularization.

Both of these traditionalist, culturally defensive reactions take the form of secularity, as they are mediated by the overarching national history and secular character of East Germany. Analysis of such reactive rationalities, I contend, could improve upon current understandings of religious change, particularly among culturally "threatened" populations. Using European Values



Study (EVS) datasets from 1999 and 2017, I analyze how the relationship between political ideology and religiosity has changed over time. I also use the 2018 German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) to test the relationship between religiosity and xenophobic attitudes in East Germany and discuss the implications of this association.

Although it is not the effects of right-wing populist support, but more specifically of xenophobia and ideology which this research tests, the theoretical framework relies on previous research focused on right-wing populism. Many right-wing populist movements have only recently mobilized and thus, research within this subtopic is in its nascent stages. The present work is placed in conversation with other right-wing populism research, as it challenges some existing assumptions and emphasizes the frequently overlooked importance of analyzing these phenomena over time.

I then discuss the potential replication of this social logic in other contexts. The theoretical framework I provide is not limited to Germany nor the relationship between religiosity and xenophobic attitudes. Rather, it is the mechanisms of cultural vulnerability and, in turn, reactivity which could potentially pervade country and subject.

### **Religion, Materialism, and the GDR**

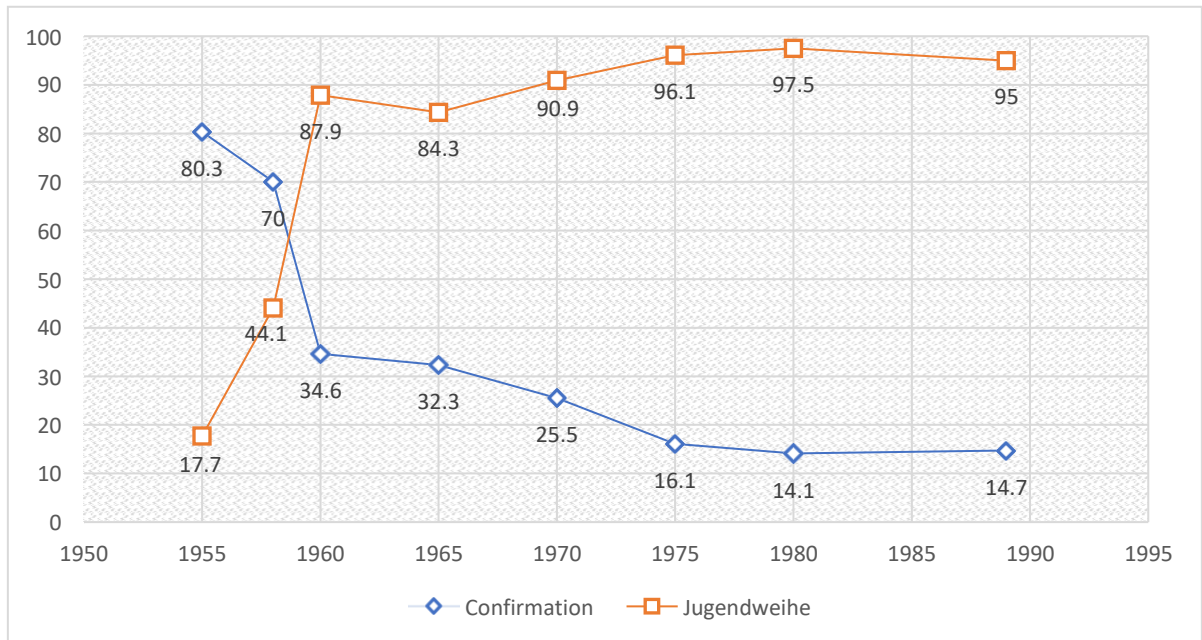
When the GDR was founded in 1949, over 90 percent of the population belonged to the church. By the time of its dissolution in 1990, this figure had decreased to just above 30 percent (Pollack 2000). The obvious source of this rapid decline in religiosity is the political repression of the GDR. In an effort to popularize the socialist personality, the communist regime attempted to expedite the “withering away” of religion through several means (e.g. citizens with open religious convictions faced occupational and educational discrimination; pastors and congregations were often harassed by state officials; historic churches were demolished;

religious instruction was removed from classrooms; religious organizations and charities were eradicated, etc.). Under the GDR, such persecution was justified by the belief that religion was inherently inimical to the advancement of socialist objectives and wholly incompatible with the *Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung* (scientific worldview), a term which was printed on nearly every GDR document.

The GDR's framing of an ideological juxtaposition between science and religion is, perhaps, best exemplified by the *Jugendweihe* (ceremony of youth). The *Jugendweihe* is a ceremony which originated in the mid-nineteenth-century, was abolished in 1950, and then reintroduced in November of 1954 (Besier 1999). Although it has taken on several meanings since its inception, the *Jugendweihe* was an overtly atheistic and socialist ceremony during GDR times. Participants were 14-year-olds, who pledged to support science and socialism as opposed to regressive, irrational modes of thought. Preparatory classes for the *Jugendweihe* involved activities and readings which emphasized pride in GDR culture and presented scientific explanations as superior to religious teaching. Participation in the ceremony was treated as a prerequisite for educational opportunities and coveted employment. Thus, it is no surprise that participation in the *Jugendweihe* skyrocketed shortly after its reintroduction. In 1955 only 17.7 percent of children participated, though just five years later, this number shot up to 87.8 percent. By the 1980s, 97.5 percent of GDR youth took part in the ceremony (Droit 2014). The *Jugendweihe* was meticulously organized to be in competition with religious ritual. Similar to the approach of Auguste Comte and his "disciples" to create a "Religion of Humanity," the structure of the *Jugendweihe* mirrored that of religious confirmation. Like confirmation, the *Jugendweihe* took place on Sunday mornings in spring. It included music, lectures of morality, and had participants swear an oath of loyalty to the socialist State and empiricism (in contrast to idealist thought) (Saunders 2002). It appears that the GDR was successful in their efforts of conversion,

as the sharp rise in *Jugendweihe* participation was accompanied by an equally staggering decline in religious confirmations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Participation in Religious Confirmation and the *Jugendweihe* in the GDR (%)



Source: Droit 2014.

The Church, of course, did not take kindly to the reintroduction of the *Jugendweihe* nor any of the State's attempts to eliminate the religious imagination. Consequently, Church-State relations became particularly fractious in the 1950s and 60s. Such tension was most overt in the GDR's approval of the demolition of historic churches, which were replaced by institutions believed to be of greater socialist practicality. When churches were not destroyed, the State harassed pastors and congregations, published defamatory articles of religious leaders, supervised the Church's regional papers (which required State approval prior to publication), and significantly reduced church subsidies (Ramet 1991). The GDR made it abundantly clear that religious thought, practice, and physical manifestations were to be met with repression and hostility in East German society.

This is not to suggest that the extremity of Church-State tension did not vary throughout the reign of the GDR. In 1971, for example, an indication of cooperation (albeit an ambiguous one) surfaced when Bishop Albrecht Schönherr famously voiced the aim to be “a church, not alongside, not against, but rather within socialism” (Fulbrook 1992). The quote was adequately vague to earn State toleration, though simultaneously avoided descension into an overt pledge of State loyalty. Churches provided the State with further assurance that they were not an opposition group with the 1978 Church in Socialism agreement, in which the Union of Protestant Churches (BEK) committed to political indifference in exchange for greater Church autonomy. This degree of independence granted dissidents a space for free expression and non-compliance, evidenced by the formation of about 100 independent peace groups, nearly all of which were sheltered by a church (Pfaff 2001). Open discussion and dissident organization, however, were nothing but vexations for the GDR, which banned church periodicals and physically interfered with protests.

This dissidence was quite pronounced in Dresden and Leipzig (though more notably Leipzig), Saxony’s two largest cities. The famous Monday demonstrations of 1989 occurred in both cities. Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of West Germany at the time, gave a speech in front of the ruins of Dresden’s *Frauenkirche*, the eighteenth-century Lutheran church which was bombed by the Allies in 1945. Kohl commemorated those who died in 1945, emphasized the importance of German unity, and finished his speech with the words “God bless our German fatherland,” to which the crowd erupted in cheers (Wicke 2015: 2). The demonstrations in Leipzig were arguably the most influential (certainly the most well-known) of protests which occurred during the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. *Nikolaikirche*, the twelfth-century church in Leipzig at which the sign *Keine Gewalt* (no violence) can be read, provided a space for dissidents to escape the reluctant conformity demanded of them in non-autonomous spaces. It is also worth noting that

the Monday demonstrations, at which hundreds of thousands of protestors famously chanted “*Wir sind das Volk*” (“we are the people”), took place right after Monday evening peace prayers.

As is well-known, the fall of the GDR shortly followed the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. The new elections in March of 1990 resulted in a coalition government led by Christian Democrat Lothar de Maiziere, who was dedicated to reunification which would eventually occur in October of the same year. Fourteen pastors served as members of the transitional parliament and de Maiziere’s cabinet consisted of four pastors. Several Holy Days became recognized as State holidays, and nearly all State pressures against the Church were removed (Ramet 1991). With democratization and reunification came a host of changes, including the massive deregulation of religion.

### **Perceived Colonization and Scientific Socialism**

While proponents of religious economy theory (RET) (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Finke 2000) may expect this distancing from GDR culture to be reflected in the change of religious demographics, the data are not cooperative with this postulate. In accordance with RET, religious deregulation has been shown to have a positive relationship with religious pluralism (and, in turn, levels of religiosity) in other post-communist societies shortly after democratization. Data on East Germany show the country to be anomalous<sup>1</sup> to this pattern,

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<sup>1</sup>Poland is the only other country which demonstrates religious decline between 1990 and 1996, though unlike East Germany, Poland was a religiously saturated country prior to the collapse of communism. For this reason, increased secularism in Poland could be reasonably understood as a pluralization of spiritual views and thus in accordance with RET.

however (see Table 1). Indeed, by various metrics of religiosity, East Germany became increasingly secular in the years following reunification (Pollack 2002; Müller 2011) and has become the least religious society in the world (Froese and Pfaff 2005; Smith 2012).

Table 1: Religious Change from 1990 to 1996 (%)

<b>Country</b>	<b>Percent Change in People Who Attend Church Weekly</b>	<b>Percent Change in People Who Believe in God</b>	<b>Percent Change in People Who Consider Themselves Religious</b>
Belarus	+3.0	+17.4	+25.2
Bulgaria	+1.7	+11.4	+19.4
EastGermany	-8.4	-10.3	-8.9
Estonia	NA	NA	+12.5
Hungary*	+9.4	+9.8	+13.5
Latvia	+1.6	+6.0	+8.8
Lithuania	NA	+23.1	NA
Poland	-9.1	NA	-4.4
Russia	+3.0	+2.8	+16.3
Slovenia	+0.6	+4.0	+1.6

\*Hungarian data shows percent change between 1981 and 1990

Source: Froese and Pfaff 2005.

Proponents of secularization theory (Bruce 1999; Norris and Inglehart 2004) can explain East Germany no better, for the steep drops in religiosity within merely six years certainly do not correspond to the extent of modernization which took place within the same timeframe. Furthermore, the theory is incongruous with the religious revival of the other post-communist countries, as well as for the combination of differences between East and West Germany, namely that the latter of which is more religious (Smith 2012; Evers 2015; Müller, Pollack, and Pickel 2016) and modernized (Grix 2000) than the former. Previous research has noted that East Germany is an exceptional case, for unlike other Eastern Bloc nations, it cannot be explained by

the prevailing theories of the sociology of religion. For this reason, focus must be directed toward the peculiarity of East German conditions.

The secularization which took place shortly after reunification revolves around a reaction of eastern contrariness. While other Eastern Bloc countries retained their national identity after the collapse of communism, citizens of East Germany were no longer citizens of the GDR (though, a sense of two national identities persisted). While over 90 percent of East Germans voted in favor of a reunified Germany (Howard 1995), the process of unification was abrupt, western-led, and perceived as a “colonization” of the eastern identity. A division within technical unity was palpable throughout all of Germany, particularly in the eastern regions. In a 1993 poll, 6 percent of East Germans and 14 percent of West Germans viewed East-West relations in a positive light, with 68 percent of East Germans blaming the West for said polarization. In 1997, 67 percent of East Germans claimed that they feel more East German than German, whereas only 34 percent of West Germans reported feeling more West German (Hogwood 2000).

Beyond subjective expression, it became more difficult for East Germans to find work, as many of their formerly legitimate qualifications were deemed obsolete. This was a particularly troubling development for East Germany, which had an unemployment rate that nearly doubled that of West Germany. In 1990, over 70 percent of East Germans had a positive opinion about the economy, though this percentage shrunk to slightly below 20 percent by 1996 (Grix 2000). In 1998, data show that East Germans were far less likely than their western counterparts to agree that equality of opportunity and a fair distribution of wealth had been realized in Germany. In 1995, nearly three-quarters of East Germans agreed that former GDR citizens are second-class citizens in unified Germany. Only 22 percent of West Germans agreed with the same statement (Howard 1995). This dissatisfaction became so prevalent and extreme that nearly half of East

German respondents in 1996 saw GDR times as “good times” where “everyone was equal and we were all in work” (Hogwood 2000).

In reaction to the sudden, western-led changes of the 1990s, the phenomena known as *Ostalgie* (the term’s compounds being *Ost* (east) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia)) surfaced in a variety of ways. Socialist ideology was one of the central facets of the GDR identity and *Ostalgie*. Between 1990 and 1998, sympathy toward socialist views more than tripled (Froese and Pfaff 2005) and the vast majority of support for The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), a descendant party of the GDR, came from the former East Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017a). As Jonathan Grix has noted, protest voting is more likely to occur when a subset of the population feels they lack an ability to channel their concerns through their representatives (Grix 2000).

*Ostalgie* and the related *Trotzidentität* (identity of contrariness) also emerged in cultural ways. As is commonly known, East Germans were (and, to an extent, still are) often the recipients of informal and cultural teasing (e.g. attacks made against their level of intelligence, accents, etc.). Eastern forms of defensiveness were not limited to economic assessments and political leanings, but also operated in symbolic domains. For example, research on consumer trends in the former GDR show that old products of eastern origin became increasingly popular in the mid-to-late 1990s (Blum 2000). This was not a mere fad, as 45 percent of East Germans claimed they buy eastern products as often as possible (Howard 1995). The post-reunification revival of the *Jugendweihe* is another example of this reaction of eastern contrariness. Although participation in the *Jugendweihe* dipped immediately after the fall of the GDR, it rose after a few years of experience in unified Germany, as over 60 percent of East Germans participated in the ceremony in 1999 (Saunders 2002).<sup>2</sup>



As indicated by the revitalization of the *Jugendweihe*, secularism is included in this reactive connection with the GDR identity. In the face of western “colonization,” central facets of this identity, such as the *Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung*, were expressed in a voluntary manner, free of State pressure. It is in the light of *Ostalgie* and *Trotzidentität* which the secularization of the 1990s should be understood. This is not to suggest other factors did not contribute to this religious decline. For example, many citizens left the church during this time because of the introduction of church taxes (Monshipouri and Arnold 1996; Froese and Pfaff 2005). However, as can be seen in Table 1, this secularization is not limited to church attendance. While the introduction of church taxes may lower church attendance, there is no reason to conclude that it would bring about such an abrupt disbelief in God and dip in self-identification.

The previously documented religious decline in the 1990s will be analyzed in light of a reactive identification with eastern identity. For the purposes of this research, political ideology and religiosity will be the GDR characteristics under examination. In this period of eastern nostalgia and contrariness, both a rise in socialist sympathy and a decline of religiosity can be observed. These rises in addition to the revival of the *Jugendweihe*, which historically supports both scientism and socialism, indicate that there is not a generalizable selectivity of GDR traits in motion. For these reasons, I expect the following hypothesis to be verified.

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<sup>2</sup>It is important to note that the *Jugendweihe* abandoned its overt political and atheistic tones and participation is now, of course, voluntary. However, it still bears a strong connection to East German heritage, as it was reintroduced not by the Soviets, but by the GDR. Furthermore, participation is extremely rare in West Germany (Saunders 2002).

**H1:** 1999 East German respondents who identify as politically left-wing are significantly less likely to attend church, believe in God, and identify as religious than are respondents who identify as either political centrists or politically right-wing.

The testing of this hypothesis may lead to intuitive results, though its inclusion in the analysis provides necessary contextualization for hypotheses pertaining to a similar, though distinct form of eastern reactivity which has recently materialized.

### **Perceived Colonization and Right-Wing Secularization**

In recent years, emphasis on eastern identity has resurfaced from a new cultural interaction. An increase in migrant arrivals has brought immigration and asylum seeking to the center of political discussion in Germany. Since the introduction of new immigration law, sharp division within Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has manifested itself. Between Merkel's 2005 victory and the 2017 federal election, 14,534,644 immigrants and asylum seekers have arrived to Germany, resulting in a migrant surplus of 3,887,599. In 2015 alone, 2,136,954 immigrants and refugees (migrant surplus of 1,139,402) arrived to the country (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019a). Out of all first-time asylum applicants in European Union (EU) Member States, 61 percent registered in Germany in the first quarter of 2016 (Juran and Broer 2017). Over 20 million residents; that being approximately one-fourth of the German population, reported having a migrant background in 2018 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2019b). These rapid changes have created a great deal of political tension and controversy throughout Germany.

Similar to the speed and extent of the country's demographic changes, citizen opinion on immigration, particularly Muslim immigration, has changed dramatically. In 2016, 41.4 percent of German respondents rather or entirely agreed that entry of Muslims into Germany should be prohibited, a percentage which has nearly doubled since the 2011 edition of the survey was

conducted. Within the same timeframe, 50 percent of Germans reported that they sometimes feel like a foreigner in their own country; a number which has increased by 19.8 percent in just 5 years (Decker et al. 2016). Out of all religious groups, Germans view Muslims the most negatively, with anti-Muslim sentiment most prevalent in the eastern regions of the country (Pickel and Yendell 2014). Despite there being far fewer Muslims in the East than in the West, the majority of East Germans perceive Islam as a threat to Germany and just over 10 percent agree that Islam is compatible with German society (Pickel 2018). According to all measurements, anti-Islamic views are on the rise in Germany, and are particularly strong in the East.

Perhaps the most notable manifestation of this reaction to migrant arrivals is the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) or “Alternative for Germany,” a right-wing populist party founded in 2013. Some of the section headings in the party’s manifesto include “German as Predominant Culture Instead of Multiculturalism,” “Islam and its Tense Relationship with our Value System,” “Islam does not belong to Germany,” “Tolerate Criticism of Islam,” “No Public Body Status for Islamic Organizations,” and “No Full-Body Veiling in Public Spaces” (AfD 2017). Of the political issues facing Germany, limiting the arrival of immigrants (especially those who adhere to Islam) is unquestionably the chief concern of the AfD. This is not merely subjective observation. In one study, for example, each major German political party’s Facebook posts were analyzed in 2017. Nine of the ten topics with the highest populism rating were found to show a clear connection to immigration and asylum seeking (Stier et al. 2017). Refugee policy was the most frequently mentioned reason supporters had for voting for the AfD in Saxony (Pickel 2018), where AfD support is greater than in any other state (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017b). Prohibition of Muslim immigration is supported by 82.4 percent of Saxon AfD supporters, a figure which more than doubles the percentage of the next highest constituency

(Yendell and Pickel 2019).

Ideological prioritizing of this kind is also characteristic of PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident)), a movement which, like the AfD, advocates for the limiting of Muslim influence in Germany. Research has noted that PEGIDA members tend to support the AfD more than any other party (Dostal 2015; Salzborn 2016; Kocyba 2016) and, likewise, the AfD tends to support PEGIDA protests (Decker 2016; Stier et al. 2017). The two groups have a large membership overlap. Supporters of PEGIDA have been found to consistently reference immigration control, nationalism, and Islam among their top reasons for joining the movement. Furthermore, over 80 percent of them fear the loss of their national identity and culture (Daphi et al. 2015). The research shows, and few would argue, that the limiting of Muslims into Germany lies at the core of the AfD/PEGIDA ideology.

In the 2017 federal election, just four years after their founding, the AfD became the third largest political party in Germany. While the AfD nearly tripled their support since the 2013 federal election, more established parties, such as the CDU and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), saw drops of 8.6 and 5.2 percent, respectively (Lees 2018). The rise of the AfD appears it could be, in part, attributed to its opportune shift in emphasis on immigration, an issue which was not originally central to the party's narrative. The AfD voice on immigration surfaced at a time when confidence in the CDU plummeted with Merkel's commitment to liberal immigration law. This shift in focus toward (Muslim) immigration, it has been posited, was essential for right-wing populist mobilization in Europe.

. . . The relationship between religion and right-wing populism is punctuated by the right-wing populist focus on Islam as a negative reference point. Without the refugee

movements of 2015 (and its close association to Muslim immigration) the current success of right-wing populism in Europe would not have been possible. Skeptical positions opposing Muslims, who are culturally foreign to many Europeans, in connection with the image of worldwide Islamic terrorism, generated the scenario where a massive incoming threat is felt among a substantial part of the German population. .... This scenario of cultural infiltration has an impact on citizens to mobilize behind right-wing populist arguments and parties. ...A lack of contact with members of the foreign group, who have been identified as “enemies,” promotes existing fears and invigorates already existing skeptical attitudes toward the given foreign group. Thereby we find regional differences, such as a stronger dissociation of the population from migrants and Muslims in East Germany (Pickel 2018: 306, my translation).

In 2017, 21 percent of AfD support came from citizens who had voted for the CDU in 2013 and 10 percent from former supporters of the SPD (Lees 2018). The previously detailed change in public opinion on immigration, in combination with the growing disappointment in positions taken by more established parties, has assisted the AfD in normalizing *Völkisch* (nativist) ideology. Such normalization allows the party’s non-radical self-representation to be legitimated by a considerable subset of the population.

This nativism has been no more pronounced than in the former East Germany (particularly in Saxony), as evidenced by the regional distribution of AfD and PEGIDA support. Saxony has long been a symbol of pride in German heritage and, as has been touched upon, was home to some of the most notable demonstrations of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. In recent years, however, *Wir sind das Volk* has taken on a jingoist meaning, as it is now often found on the signs held at anti-immigrant demonstrations. Within just six months after their founding,

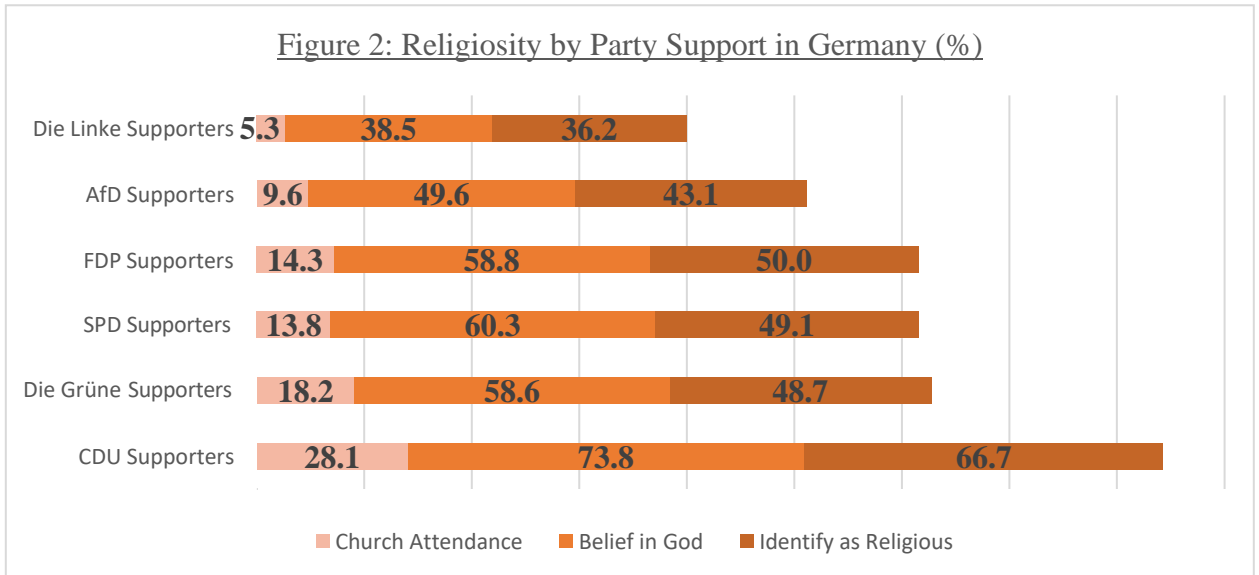
PEGIDA held 252 rallies, with protestors totaling to approximately 240,000. Of these some 240,000 protestors, 80 percent of them protested in Saxony (Virchow 2016). Like PEGIDA support, AfD support is primarily concentrated in the eastern regions of the country (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017b). Between the 2013 and 2017 federal elections, the highest upsurges in Germany occurred in the East German states of Saxony (20.2% increase), Thuringia (16.5% increase), Saxony-Anhalt (15.4% increase), Brandenburg (14.2% increase), and Mecklenburg-Western (13.0% increase) (Lees 2018). The AfD/PEGIDA message has not gained much traction in the western regions of Germany, though it has considerably resonated with East German sensibilities.

Not unlike the eastern secularism which surfaced shortly after the western-dominated process of reunification, a considerable number of East Germans are now responding to what they perceive as a new cultural “infiltration” brought about by the recent spike in migrant arrivals. Perhaps this more recent cultural contrariness among the right-wing is paradoxically associated with the intensification of the GDR personality, namely secularism. Many among the eastern right-wing perceive the arrival of immigrants as a threat to their identity and thus it may be the case that yet another culturally defensive reaction (mediated by the overarching East German secular history) of secularism is emerging among them. While other research has noted that both secularism and socialism were included in the *Ostalgie* of the 1990s, little research has explored the secularization of the political right.

High rates of secularism among the political right may appear to be an unlikely association to some readers. This may especially be the case considering that the AfD’s manifesto references Christian civilization as being central to German identity (AfD 2017); the party is often given a platform from Christian media outlets; they have formed a “Christians in the AfD” activist group

(Althoff 2018), and other research has observed repeated use of Christian-laced language by right-wing populist groups (Coury 2016; Murariu 2017). However, the AfD narrative which emphasizes the importance of Christian values is likely a strategy (and, perhaps, a successful one) for attracting disappointed CDU voters, rather than a reflection of their constituency's religious demographics.

In Figure 2, for example, supporters of the AfD are shown to consistently report the second highest rates of secularity among Germany's party constituencies. This is the case for every metric of religiosity. Supporters of *Die Linke* ("The Left"), a party which was founded by the merging of the PDS and the "Labor and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative" (WASG) are the most secular no matter the metric chosen. *Die Linke* is a descendant party of the GDR (because of the inclusion of PDS in the aforementioned merger) and thus it is no surprise that it represents the least religious constituency. Although on opposite sides of the political spectrum, both the AfD and *Die Linke* are populist, anti-establishment parties with eastern residing constituencies (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017b). It is possible that religion is perceived as the antithesis of the East German identity; and religious practice as an indication of conforming to or complying with the western-favoring establishment. The "establishment" CDU, for example, has the most religious constituency by every measurement. CDU supporters report attendance rates which more than quintuple church attendance of *Die Linke* and nearly triple that of the AfD. These statistics on the AfD may challenge common presumption, though it is important to keep in mind that many right-wing populist movements are rather new and research is still in its nascent stages.



Source: EVS 2017.

**Figure 3: Eastern Contrariness (1999)**

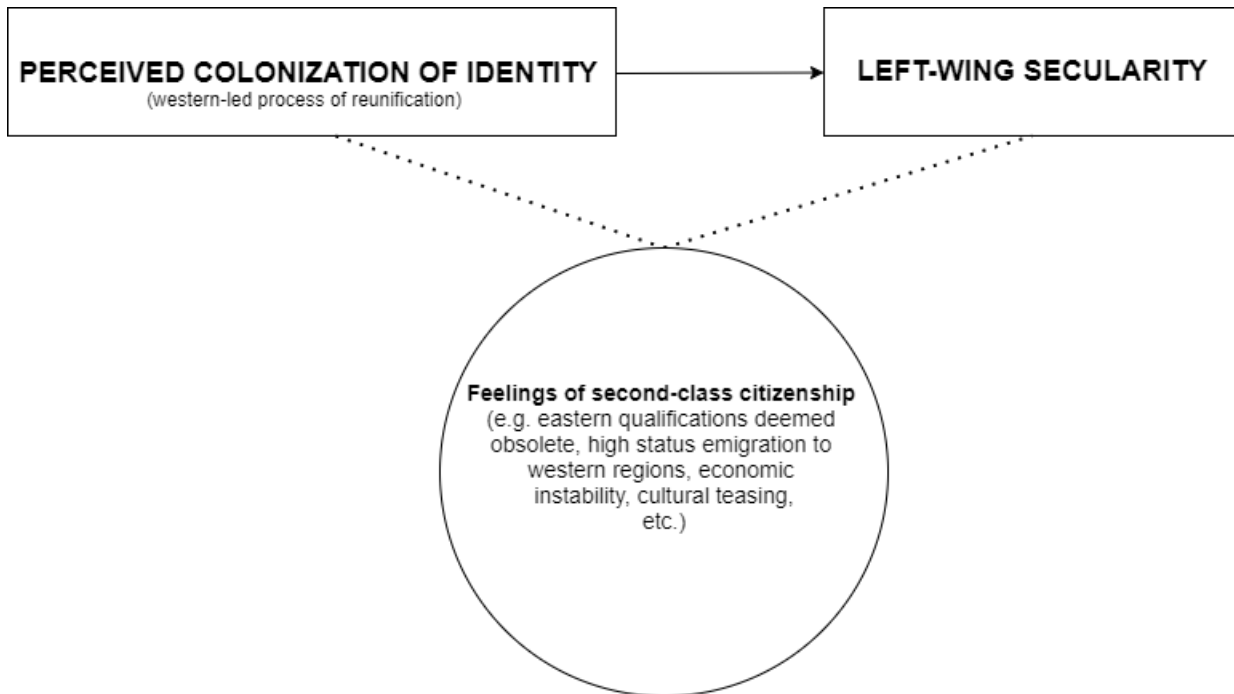
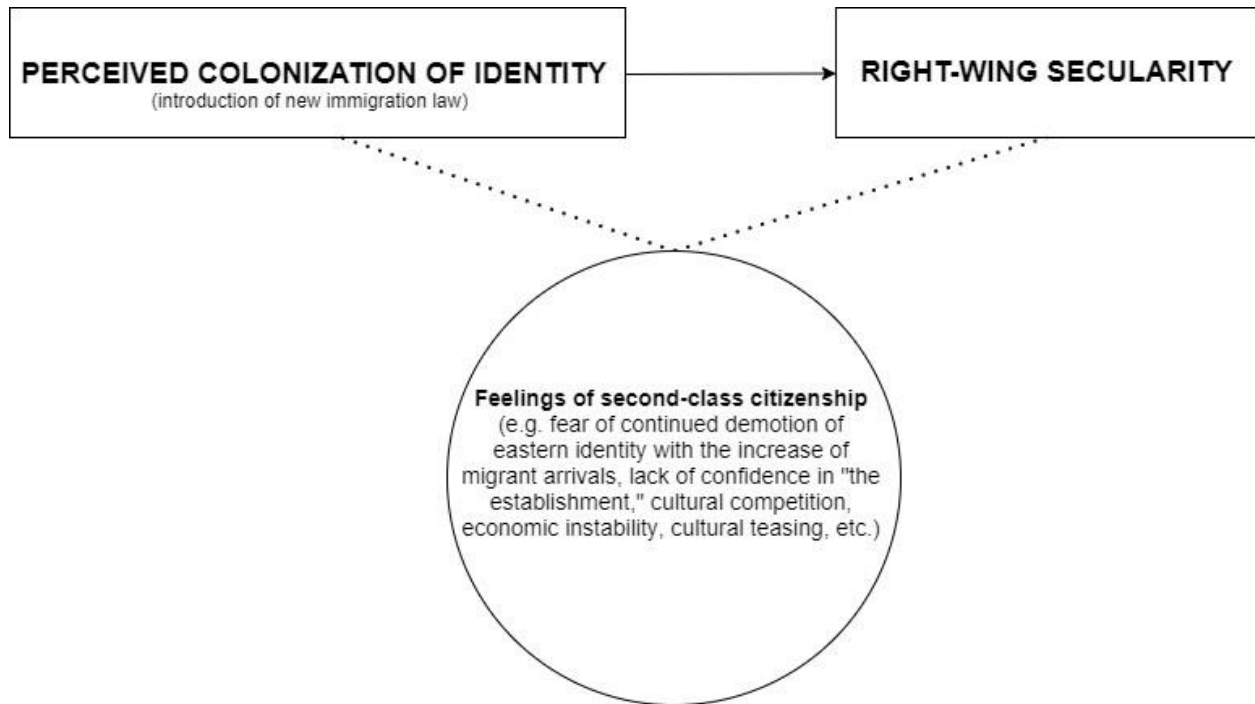




Figure 4: Eastern Contrariness (2017)



This is not to suggest that important, related strides have not been made. Some (though, not much) research concerning *secularism* and right-wing populist support has surfaced in recent years, but the change in the relationship (namely, *secularization*) over time has been repeatedly overlooked. Thus, the current theoretical backgrounds are severely limited, leaving changes in the given political landscape(s) unconsidered. While many right-wing populist parties have just recently emerged, examining the changes among those of a particular political ideology over time can provide researchers with direction for lines of inquiry, regardless of whether or not they concern themselves with religion.

Moreover, it would be an overstatement to claim that scholarly consensus has been achieved. Inglehart and Norris recently found a positive association between religiosity and right-wing populist support (Inglehart and Norris 2016), others have found religiosity to discourage radical right voting (Arzheimer and Carter 2009; Montgomery and Winter 2015;

Huber and Yendell 2019; Siegers and Jedinger 2020), while other research claims the relationship is further complicated when religious orthodoxy is brought into the scope of analysis (Immerzeel, Jaspers, and Lubbers 2013). To advance toward more lucid determinations, future inquiry should be cognizant of the potentially catalytic contextual factors pertinent to their research, how these factors have changed over time, and in turn, affected the given relationship(s) under examination.

In the context of East Germany, antipathetic attitudes toward immigrants and foreigners (in light of the East's culturally contrarian history) appears to be an appropriate point of focus. Given the previously described changes in attitudinal data on immigration and asylum policy (in combination with the rapid emergence of groups, such as the AfD and PEGIDA), the newest source of "colonization" and eastern contrariness appears to be the rise in migrant arrivals. Although right-wing populist support is a related phenomenon which provides indications of relevant social logics, it does not entirely tap into and encompass the perceived colonization argument. The cultural defensiveness which materializes with the detection of an identity "threat," is not only a political, but also an emotional (perhaps subconscious<sup>3</sup>) reaction which may operate within, but also outside of AfD voting. With the populist emotionality of *Trotzidentität* in mind, it may be that such a reaction is more a matter of downright dislike and/or fear of immigrants and foreigners (the representatives of cultural "infiltration") than it is a matter of party support or policy position. This work seeks to determine if the right-wing have become significantly less religious after the newest form of "colonization," but more specifically, if the

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<sup>3</sup> For a theoretical discussion on the nondeclarative facets of the dual process framework and their latent movements, see Lizardo et al. 2016.

cultural reactivity (or, more pointedly, xenophobia) at hand is linked to irreligiousness. If a reaction of eastern identification is again occurring, as I hypothesize it did on the other side of the political spectrum in the 1990s, then the following hypotheses pertaining to secularity will be verified.

**H2a:** In East Germany, church attendance, belief in God, and self-assessment of religiosity have significantly decreased between 1999 and 2017 among those who identify as politically right-wing.

**H2b:** 2018 East German respondents, who believe Germany is dominated by resident foreigners to a dangerous degree, are significantly less likely to attend church, believe in God, and identify as religious than are respondents who do not hold said views.

### Data and Methods

Every hypothesis was constructed with the intention of explaining phenomena in East Germany, however, they will also be tested in the context of West Germany to determine whether the findings are particular to the eastern regions of the country. In East Germany, both secularity and anti-immigrant attitudes are more prevalent than they are in West Germany. Thus, the two regions are analyzed separately to address any potential issues pertaining to a regional confounder. This comparison will also assist in conjecturing if these relationships are, indeed, connected to an overarching GDR history or, alternatively, if they exist throughout all of Germany. I do not expect the hypothesized associations to exist in the West to the same degree as the East, for the West does not have an atheistic, but rather a Christian national history. If a significant association is found in the West, it could even run in the opposite direction of the hypothesized associations for the East. It is possible that these relationships will not be significant (in either direction) in the West, however, for secularity was far more central to the

character of the GDR than religion was to that of the Bonn Republic (the former West Germany).

This research relies on three social surveys: EVS 1999, EVS 2017, and ALLBUS 2018. EVS 2017 does not divide Berlin into its former East and West territories in the way EVS 1999 and ALLBUS 2018 do. To assure accurate geographical representation is achieved, the hypothesis using EVS 2017 data (H2A) will be tested twice. Berlin respondents are classified as “West German” in one test, and “East German” in the other for each hypothesis. The classification of Berlin respondents is not expected to change the results in a meaningful way, though to be confident in this expectation, the results for both categorizations will be provided. Outputs concerning East German respondents (excluding Berlin) are in the results section, whereas outputs concerning West German respondents (for both categorizations of Berlin) and East German respondents (including Berlin) can be found in the appendix.

There are 2,036 German respondents (1,037 West Germans and 999 East Germans) represented in EVS 1999; 5,407 German respondents in EVS 2017 (4,482 West German cases and 925 East German cases when Berlin is categorized as “West Germany,” whereas an “East Germany” categorization of Berlin results in sample sizes of 4,259 and 1,148 for West and East Germany, respectively), and 3,477 in ALLBUS 2018 (2,387 West Germans and 1,090 East Germans). It should be noted that measurements of belief in God and self-assessment of religiosity are contained in the International Social Survey Programme module (n = 1,724 (1,198 West Germans and 526 East Germans)) of the ALLBUS data set.

I estimate logistic regression models for every hypothesis. In the case of H2A, the regression output is accompanied by a cross-tabulation which compare the 1999 and 2017 data to provide an image of how the relationship between religiosity and political ideology has changed over time.

*Dependent Variable:* The measurement of religiosity in this research encompasses religious practice, belief, and self-identification. This understanding of religiosity is accomplished with the inclusion of church attendance, belief in God, and the extent of the respondent's religiosity as determined by self-assessment. Each metric of religiosity is coded as a binary variable. Respondents who are coded as those who attend church reported attending either "more than once a week," "once a week," or "once a month."<sup>4</sup> This is not the case for responses which indicate less frequent attendance. No recategorization was required for belief in God in either EVS data set, for "yes" or "no" were the options for a response.<sup>5</sup> As for self-assessment of religiosity, respondents could choose if they were "a religious person," "not a religious person," or "a convinced atheist."<sup>6</sup> Convinced atheists were collapsed into the "not a religious person" category because the extent of a respondent's irreligiousness is irrelevant to the hypotheses tested.

*Independent Variables:* Political ideology of respondents is determined by self-identification on a scale ranging from 1 to 10, with 1 representing the farthest left, and 10 the farthest right. Respondents who place themselves between 1 and 4 are coded as politically left-

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<sup>4</sup> "Between one and three times a month" is the exact response in ALLBUS 2018. Other affirmative responses are identical between the data sets.

<sup>5</sup> In ALLBUS 2018, respondents were considered to demonstrate belief in God if they reported either "I believe in God now and I always have" or "I believe in God now, but I didn't used to." Disbelief in God was demonstrated by the following responses: "I don't believe in God now and I never have" and "I don't believe in God now, but I used to."

<sup>6</sup> In ALLBUS 2018, respondents were considered religious if they described themselves as "extremely religious," "very religious," or "somewhat religious." They were not considered to be religious people if they described themselves as "neither religious nor non-religious," "somewhat non-religious," "very non-religious," or "extremely non-religious."

wing; 5 as political centrists, and between 6 and 10 as politically right-wing.<sup>7</sup> To be clear, this categorization does not underrepresent political centrists. The “5” point on the scale is by far the most popular response in all three datasets. Respondents tend to shy away from points “9” and “10,” the two least common responses. In fact, among 2017 and 2018 respondents, there are more cases of “5” than there are cases of 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 combined. This tripartite ideological classification is applied in the assessment of political ideology in both 1999 and 2017.

Fear of foreign influence is coded as a binary variable. Respondents are determined to feel threatened by the influence of foreigners if they rather or entirely agree with the following statement: “because of its many resident foreigners, Germany is dominated by foreign influences to a dangerous degree.” Those who rather or entirely disagree with the statement are not considered to fear foreign domination. Rather than a stance on a particular policy, I use a more sensational attitudinal metric to tap into the reactionary and emotional nature of the social activity I posit is occurring. Measurements of policy positions may provide interesting insights for other relevant research, though unlike the metric I have chosen, they do not quite tap into the fear of foreign domination or “colonization.” When placed in comparison to the results concerning political ideology, H2B will help determine if statistical significance is particular to fear of foreigners or, alternatively, if such significance is simply confounded by right-wing ideology more generally.

*Control Variables:* Control variables include age, sex, education, income, and population of town/city. Age and sex are relevant to right-wing populist support (and, perhaps by extension,

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<sup>7</sup> Political ideology is also on a 10-point scale in ALLBUS 2018, though each point is represented by a letter (F (farthest left), A, M, O, G, Z, E, Y, I, P (farthest right)), rather than a number. Respondents who place themselves between F and O are coded as politically left-wing; G as political centrists, and between Z and P as politically right-wing.

xenophobic attitudes) (Kroh and Fetz 2016) and religious identification (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder; Smith 2012) in the context in question. I control for income and education because populists in Germany are more likely to have a low income and low level of education in comparison to supporters of more traditional parties (Yendell et al. 2018). These controls can also help compare the role of economic worry to cultural worry in the process of reactive secularism. The respondent's population of town/city is included to account for the potential variation between metropolitan and rural sensibilities, as well as to further compensate for possible (though, unlikely) complications brought about by the classification of Berlin.

## Results

The first point of interest concerns the relationship between religiosity and political ideology during the first of the two cultural interactions, namely that between the former West and East Germany in the years following reunification. East Germany, right-wing respondents are more likely to attend church, believe in God, and identify as religious than are left-wing respondents ( $p < .001$ ). This is not a surprise. Political moderates in the East are more likely to exhibit religious belief ( $p < .05$ ) and self-identify as religious ( $p < .01$ ) than are politically left-wing respondents (see Table 2). Statistical significance is lost, however, between church attendance and a politically moderate orientation. West Germany presents a somewhat different case. In West Germany, no metric of religiosity holds a statistically significant relationship with a politically moderate identification. Right-wing respondents are, however, significantly more likely to believe in God ( $p < .001$ ) and identify as religious ( $p < .05$ ) than are left-wing respondents. The relationship between right-wing ideology and church attendance, on the other hand, is not significant in the West. These relationships are stronger and more significant in the East than they are in the West. Unlike West Germans, East Germans were stripped of their national

identity with reunification and the phenomena of *Ostalgie* manifested itself. These findings are in accordance with the previously documented reaction of eastern identification.

Table 2: Religiosity by Political Ideology in 1999

	Church Attendance (East Germany)	Church Attendance (West Germany)	Belief in God (East Germany)	Belief in God (West Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (East Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (West Germany)
<b>Political ideology</b>						
Moderate	0.664 (0.341)	0.386 (0.259)	0.674* (0.262)	0.142 (0.272)	0.739** (0.272)	0.177 (0.245)
Right-wing	1.163*** (0.293)	0.247 (0.228)	1.256*** (0.225)	0.865*** (0.256)	1.361*** (0.234)	0.516* (0.218)
<b>Age</b>	0.022* (0.009)	0.048*** (0.007)	0.039*** (0.007)	0.038*** (0.007)	0.043*** (0.007)	0.038*** (0.006)
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	-0.960*** (0.268)	-0.858*** (0.186)	-0.564** (0.197)	-0.919*** (0.216)	-0.621** (0.206)	-0.727*** (0.180)
<b>Level of education</b>						
Upper secondary	-0.634 (0.340)	0.160 (0.222)	-0.200 (0.260)	-0.061 (0.252)	-0.201 (0.267)	0.298 (0.215)
Higher education	-0.327 (0.426)	0.408 (0.392)	-0.435 (0.338)	0.425 (0.470)	-0.234 (0.336)	0.747 (0.404)
<b>Monthly income</b>						
3,000-4,999 German Marks	0.318 (0.272)	0.210 (0.218)	0.091 (0.211)	0.700** (0.251)	0.155 (0.220)	0.456* (0.212)
Over 4,999 German Marks	0.596 (0.433)	0.416 (0.269)	0.194 (0.353)	0.513 (0.297)	0.124 (0.368)	0.297 (0.254)
<b>Population of town/city</b>						
100,000 or more	-0.078 (0.241)	-0.671*** (0.186)	-0.449* (0.192)	-0.506* (0.229)	-0.279 (0.198)	-0.229 (0.186)
Constant	-3.156*** (0.668)	-2.831*** (0.479)	-2.878*** (0.524)	-0.607 (0.499)	-3.373*** (0.548)	-1.598*** (0.431)
Observations	646	646	628	590	612	613

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Source: EVS 1999.



In 2017, however, the political right has become virtually identical to the political left by every measure of religiosity (see Table 3). Political ideology is no longer a predictor of religiosity in the way that it was in 1999, as its association is not significant by any metric (see Table 4).<sup>8</sup> The results indicate that this phenomenon is particular to the East. Political ideology can still predict religiosity in 2017 West Germany, as the politically moderate and right-wing are significantly more likely to be religious than is the political left by all metrics. In the former GDR states, on the other hand, the right-wing have experienced sharp drops in all forms of religiosity, whereas the politically moderate and left-wing have not varied much (demonstrating slight decreases and increases in religiosity, respectively). In fact, the right-wing reports the lowest church attendance rates among the three ideological categories. No other research has taken note of this right-wing secularization. In the years following increases in migrant arrivals, the GDR character has surfaced in the form of a secular identity among the political right. This phenomenon is particular to the right-wing, as respondents of the other political orientations do not at all mirror this degree of secularization.

While the drops in religiosity among the right-wing in East Germany are of interest, this research aims to specify the source of this secular contrariness. While political ideology alone cannot predict religiosity in the East, it is important to note that negative views of immigrants are not entirely constrained to the political right. It is thus important to examine not only right-wing

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<sup>8</sup> There is one exception to this statement. With the recategorization of Berlin (see Table 7 in the appendix), belief in God becomes significantly associated with right-wing ideology ( $p < .01$ ). This is not the case for the other two metrics of religiosity, which are not significant and vary in direction. The relationship between religiosity and politically moderate ideology is not significant no matter the metric chosen for both categorizations of Berlin. Overall, these results provide, at best, very weak support for the ability of political ideology to predict religiosity in 2017 East Germany.

ideology, but more particularly, fear of foreign domination in order to understand the reaction of cultural identification occurring in the East.

Table 3: Religious Change by Political Ideology from 1999 to 2017 (%)

	Church Attendance			Belief in God			Self-Assessment of Religiosity		
	1999	2017	Difference	1999	2017	Difference	1999	2017	Difference
<b>East Germany</b>									
Left-wing	9.6	9.7	<b>+0.1</b>	22.5	25.9	<b>+3.4</b>	19.6	25.2	<b>+5.6</b>
Moderate	13.1	7.5	<b>-5.6</b>	29.6	27.6	<b>-2.0</b>	29.6	24.7	<b>-4.9</b>
Right-wing	18.5	6.9	<b>-11.6</b>	44.2	30.6	<b>-13.6</b>	40.8	25.5	<b>-15.3</b>

Sources: EVS 1999 and EVS 2017.

In East Germany, a fear of foreign domination has a strong inverse relationship to church attendance ( $p < .001$ ), belief in God ( $p < .01$ ), and self-assessment of religiosity ( $p < .01$ ) (see Table 5). It is clear that this relationship is more palpable in the East. In the West, church attendance and self-assessment of religiosity do not achieve significance and vary in direction. Belief in God, however, holds a positive relationship with fear of foreign domination at statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). The association between secularity and fear of foreign domination is thus not occurring among the culturally defensive Germans, who reside outside of former GDR territory. Indeed, the only relationship which reaches significance in the West runs in the opposite direction of the relationships found in the East. Not unlike the nationalistic contrariness realized among the political left after German reunification, the eastern identity appears to be surfacing on the political right in reaction to a new cultural interaction brought about by the rise in migrant arrivals. When this defense is examined in light of religious identity and the history of the GDR, a traditionalist reaction of secularity among those who fear foreign domination can be observed.

Table 4: Religiosity by Political Ideology in 2017

	Church Attendance (East Germany)	Church Attendance (West Germany)	Belief in God (East Germany)	Belief in God (West Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (East Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (West Germany)
<b>Political ideology</b>						
Moderate	-0.114 (0.324)	0.345** (0.116)	0.169 (0.253)	0.454*** (0.115)	0.074 (0.252)	0.548*** (0.108)
Right-wing	-0.189 (0.349)	0.580*** (0.112)	0.447 (0.258)	0.809*** (0.117)	0.230 (0.260)	0.670*** (0.107)
<b>Age</b>	0.020* (0.009)	0.020*** (0.003)	0.010 (0.007)	0.011*** (0.003)	0.012 (0.007)	0.020*** (0.003)
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	-0.342 (0.277)	-0.495*** (0.092)	-0.441* (0.210)	-0.771*** (0.099)	-0.558** (0.212)	-0.751*** (0.090)
<b>Level of education</b>						
Upper secondary	-0.131 (0.419)	-0.138 (0.140)	-0.079 (0.319)	-0.574** (0.175)	-0.219 (0.327)	-0.289 (0.149)
Higher education	0.427 (0.424)	0.015 (0.148)	0.159 (0.341)	-0.660*** (0.180)	0.079 (0.342)	-0.234 (0.156)
<b>Monthly income</b>						
2,201-4,250 Euro	-0.448 (0.312)	0.023 (0.106)	-0.130 (0.233)	-0.111 (0.113)	0.024 (0.231)	-0.055 (0.103)
Over 4,250 Euro	-0.606 (0.535)	0.119 (0.131)	0.362 (0.359)	-0.157 (0.136)	0.346 (0.365)	-0.127 (0.125)
<b>Population of town/city</b>						
100,000 or more	-0.038 (0.307)	-0.325** (0.099)	-0.231 (0.238)	-0.258** (0.100)	-0.319 (0.240)	-0.260** (0.093)
Constant	-3.196*** (0.700)	-2.463*** (0.219)	-1.389** (0.520)	0.912*** (0.235)	-1.383** (0.536)	-0.375 (0.211)
Observations	732	3,462	480	2,208	496	2,366

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Source: EVS 2017.

Table 5: Religiosity by Fear of Foreign Domination in 2018

	Church Attendance (East Germany)	Church Attendance (West Germany)	Belief in God (East Germany)	Belief in God (West Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (East Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (West Germany)
<b>Fear of foreign domination</b>	-1.108*** (0.327)	-0.135 (0.145)	-0.697** (0.260)	0.329* (0.161)	-0.911** (0.325)	0.043 (0.148)
<b>Age</b>	0.012 (0.009)	0.021*** (0.004)	0.008 (0.007)	0.017*** (0.004)	0.017 (0.009)	0.025*** (0.004)
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	-0.402 (0.286)	-0.284* (0.136)	-0.382 (0.245)	-0.482** (0.147)	-0.595 (0.304)	-0.352* (0.137)
<b>Level of education</b>						
Upper secondary	0.142 (0.402)	0.366 (0.246)	-0.405 (0.348)	-0.121 (0.257)	-0.216 (0.438)	-0.092 (0.235)
Higher education	-0.359 (0.433)	0.070 (0.263)	-0.332 (0.355)	-0.164 (0.270)	-0.009 (0.440)	-0.001 (0.248)
<b>Monthly income</b>						
2,250-3,999 Euro <sup>9</sup>	-0.508 (0.357)	0.101 (0.169)	-0.323 (0.285)	-0.004 (0.181)	-0.475 (0.366)	0.069 (0.168)
Over 3,999 Euro	0.502 (0.356)	0.161 (0.178)	-0.129 (0.346)	0.016 (0.187)	0.396 (0.384)	-0.038 (0.178)
<b>Population of town/city</b>						
100,000 or more	-0.168 (0.340)	-0.168 (0.158)	-0.579 (0.325)	-0.388* (0.163)	-0.441 (0.373)	-0.212 (0.156)
Constant	-2.685*** (0.704)	-3.050*** (0.363)	-0.614 (0.581)	-0.048 (0.354)	-2.039** (0.735)	-1.391*** (0.339)
Observations	908	1,853	406	823	444	935

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \*p<0.05

Source: ALLBUS 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the EVS 2017 and ALLBUS 2018 datasets provide slightly different income brackets.

While it is a cultural rather than socioeconomic “threat” with which this research is concerned, it is important not to overlook the role of variables related to deprivation. Anti-immigrant sentiment and right-wing populist support are both more prevalent in the economically unstable and less educated regions of the country (i.e. the East). It could be that economic (in addition to cultural) concerns, help drive this secular identification. In what was a Marxist land, a reader may anticipate that the very opposite of religion acting as “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world” may be at play.

On the contrary, education and income do not once reach significance in any output concerning East Germany. This is the case for 1999, 2017, and 2018 data. There is no evidence to suggest that socio-economic variables bear any connection to the reactions of secular contrariness in either period of time. Conditional variables play no role in this process of secular identification on both the political left (1999) and right (2017/18). This finding suggests that this phenomenon is more likely a matter of cultural, rather than of economic competition.

## Discussion

The analysis of the relationship between political ideology and religiosity in the years following reunification demonstrates that right-wing respondents are significantly more likely to be religious than are left-wing respondents in East Germany. Political moderates are significantly more likely to believe in God and self-identify as religious than are left-wing respondents. These relationships are relatively different outside of the former GDR. In West Germany, political moderates are not significantly likely to be more religious than the political left by any metric of religiosity. Right-wing respondents in the West are not significantly more likely to attend church than are left-wing respondents, though they are significantly more likely to believe in God and identify as religious. These contrasts are, however, stronger and more significant in the East. In

light of this period of *Ostalgie*, the sharp religious divide across the political aisle in East Germany suggests that characteristics of the GDR, such as socialist sympathy and secularism, were in close association in the years following reunification. Given the atheist proselytization which took place during the reign of the GDR, a perceived incompatibility between religious thought and left-wing ideology is likely not uncommon among East Germans. This perception of mutual-exclusivity is, perhaps, not as pronounced in the West. While associations between left-wing ideology and secularism can surely be found in other contexts, the extent of its strength in the East is worth noting in order to illustrate the reaction of eastern identification during this period.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, a similar form of cultural reactivity appears to have emerged in reaction to a more recent form of “colonization,” namely the growing size of Germany’s migrant population. Since 1999, sharp drops in religiosity have occurred among the political right in East Germany. In the East, such drops are particular to the right-wing, as the politically moderate and left have not demonstrated similar decreases. Right-wing ideology is thus no longer a predictor of religious practice, belief, or identification in the way that it was in 1999, for religiosity rates among the political right and left are now effectively equal. This is the first research to produce a finding on right-wing secularization in any context.

While this period of secularization among the political right is important, political ideology alone cannot predict religiosity in 2017. It is thus essential to move past general right-wing ideology and toward a specification of (one of) the driving force(s) of right-wing secularity. The political tension revolving around new immigration policy along with the increasingly prevalent equating of migrant arrivals to a cultural “infiltration,” warrants study of the role of anti-immigrant views in *Trotzidentität* processes.

Indeed, there is a convincing association between secularism and fear of foreign domination in the East, whereas the associations are not particularly noteworthy in the West. Part of the reason this phenomenon is particular to the East could be connected to the eastern tendency of defending against potential sources of continued cultural demotion. Indeed, the eastern characteristic of irreligiousness appears to perpetually emerge among those who express the perception of cultural “threats,” such as reunification and new immigration law. Fear of foreign domination holds a statistically significant relationship with all three metrics of religiosity in the East, though with only belief in God in the West. Of these significant relationships, religiosity and fear of foreign domination hold a strong inverse relationship in the historically atheistic East Germany and, for one metric, hold a moderate positive relationship in the more religious West. These differences between the East and the West could be understood in light of their respective overarching religious histories. Secularity, for example, was inextricable to the GDR character in a way that Christianity was not to that of the Bonn Republic.

The development of the secular contrariness in the East does not appear to be a matter of economic concern. Neither level of education nor income, at any point, reach a statistically significant relationship with secularity in 1999, 2017, and 2018. Indeed, level of income and education are inconsistent in direction and do not achieve statistical significance with any metric of religiosity. This result should not be conflated with the contention that variables related to deprivation are unrelated to xenophobic attitudes and/or right-wing populist support, as these are not the associations with which this work is concerned.<sup>10</sup> This finding may indicate, however,

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<sup>10</sup> On this matter, findings have been mixed. Some research has contended that objective economic deprivation has little to do with right-wing populist support in comparison to subjective disadvantages and xenophobia (Niedermayer and Hofrichter 2016; Mols and Jetten 2016; Lengfeld 2017; Schwander and Manow 2017; Hansen

that it is not a concern of economic vulnerability, but rather of cultural denigration which plays a role in the materialization of *Trotzidentität* (as it relates to secularity) for both 1999 and 2017/18.

This work is not without its limitations. First, the measurements I employ fall short of fully encompassing some of the conceptual mechanisms of my argument. Indeed, a more direct measurement of eastern nationalism would benefit the claims of this research. In presenting indications of cultural contrariness, however, I have attempted to compensate for this limitation in several ways.

For example the eastern characteristic of secularism is associated with anti-immigrant attitudes, though both secularism and anti-immigrant attitudes are prevalent in the East. To address this regional confounder, I isolate East Germany in the analysis. This research also tests the hypotheses in West Germany and takes both categorizations of Berlin into account. These measures indicate that right-wing secularization, as well as the relationship between fear of foreign dominance and secularity, are both particular to the East, as such phenomena cannot be detected in the West.

I also eliminate alternative explanations pertaining to socioeconomic factors. Having a low income and low level of education, for example, is more characteristic of East Germany than it is of West Germany. This research demonstrates that such variables have no role in the forms of reactive secularity (in both 1999 and 2017/18) with which this work is concerned. This contrariness is thus more likely a response of cultural concern and defensiveness than it is one of economic intimidation.

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and Olsen 2019). Other research, however, has found the association between deprivation and right-wing populist support to be significant (Lux 2018; Patana 2018; Rippl and Seippel 2018).



In addition to analyzing anti-immigrant attitudes, I provide the more general variable of right-wing ideology as a point of comparison. This comparison demonstrates that it is not a confounding right-wing ideology in general, but more specifically fear of foreign domination, which consistently predicts a secular identity. With each of these intricacies taken into account, the results remain in accordance with the theoretical background.

Although the methodology addresses this limitation through several means, the inclusion of a more direct measurement of eastern nationalism could provide the assertions with additional confidence. Current sources to measure such contrarian nationalism in combination with religiosity are limited, however. Survey metrics pertaining to German identity are often too vague and general, as they tend not to focus on *East* German identity. This is a problem, as past polls have found that about two-thirds of eastern residing citizens feel more East German than German (Hogwood 2000). More recent data sampling citizens of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia show that approximately the same proportion still agree that East Germans are second-class citizens (Weisskircher 2020). More extensive and region-specific identity metrics, such as questions pertaining to East German identity, could benefit future inquiry.

Although it is nationalistic nostalgia and contrariness which guide the theoretical framework of this research, the sources of the secularities analyzed are not completely reducible to such manifestations. Other regional changes after reunification, such as fertility rates, church taxes, and emigration from the East to the West, have been left unaccounted for in this research. Neither the present work nor any of the regional changes mentioned provide an all-encompassing elucidation.

One omission from this analysis which I believe could be of critical importance, however, is level of ethnic homogeneity by region. Ethnic homogeneity has been found to be

associated with right-wing populist voting (Patana 2018) as well as with anti-Muslim sentiment (Pickel and Öztürk 2018). Pickel and Öztürk, for example, find that anti-Muslim sentiment is not as common in Western Europe as it is in Eastern Europe, despite the latter having fewer Muslim communities than the former. Similarly, Mudde notes that xenophobic attitudes are more common in Central and Eastern European countries than in Western Europe (Mudde 2005). Considering the high rates of secularism in some of the former Eastern Bloc countries, additional confidence in my core argument could be realized with its comparison to the effects of residing in an ethnically homogeneous community. Extracting the neighborhood effects of the latter part of this comparison would require an approach which captures greater ecological granularity.

Continuing on the scope of this work, I anticipate one critique to note its regional specificity and therefore lack of ability to extend to other societies. To be clear, I do not find the scope of this analysis to be a problem. Sociologists too often overlook the importance of thorough historical, political, and cultural investigation of a specific context. In-depth analyses of certain conditions, particularly when they deviate from prevailing theory and expectation (as East Germany does), can inform our theoretical development by identifying catalytic factors, which would go undetected with broader (though, more cursory) analyses.

Furthermore, there is little reason to believe that the logic of these findings could not be found in other contexts. Territorial shifts, immigration policy, and religiosity are certainly not the only factors which could be tested within the theoretical framework I provide. When a certain population perceives a threat to their identity (and that threat could, though need not be foreign influence), a traditionalist response (the form of which is mediated by the characteristics of the given national history) may emerge. Religious changes (and, perhaps, other changes of sociological interest) among the respective population could be understood in light of their

relation to, and the unraveling of, the relevant historical, cultural, and political background. Future research could identify a context in which a nativist or culturally defensive population exists, select an aspect of the population's national character, and observe how this trait changes before and after exposure to the suspected "threat" to the given identity. The variables analyzed could, though need not be the same, for it is a focus on cultural contrariness, I posit, which provides potential avenues for replication.

### Conclusion

Discussions concerning identity and ideology often overlook the importance of religious identity. This research demonstrates its persistent importance and changing role between 1999 and 2017/18 in East Germany. Although this analysis is concerned with one country, this particularization should not be perceived as a shortcoming. In fact, the specificity of this approach invites the opportunity to explore historical idiosyncrasies as well as changes in cultural and political landscapes to a degree other research often does not achieve. This approach has assisted in finding a period of right-wing secularization, one which has not been produced by any of the previous research, in addition to the left-wing secularity of the 1990s and the significant relationship between xenophobic views and secularity. It is important for detailed examination of this kind to be in conversation with broader comparative approaches, for such collaboration can help inform future criteria used in the process of selecting which variables to examine. These findings may also complicate our incipient understanding of newly emerging right-wing populist movements. As the results indicate, neither a religious constituency nor the significance of deprivation should be assumed. To better understand these movements, researchers should focus on the respective historical backdrops in order to identify the variables worthy of further study as well as to capture their changes over time. Historicization of this kind

can assist in analyzing important changes in light of traditionalist reactions which are, by necessity, filtered by the overarching national character of the given context. Little imagination is demanded of the researcher interested in extending this social logic beyond xenophobic attitudes and religiosity rates in East Germany.

## APPENDIX:

### TABLES WITH BERLIN CATEGORIZED AS EAST GERMANY

Table 6: Religious Change by Political Ideology from 1999 to 2017 (Berlin Categorized as East Germany) (%)

	Church Attendance			Belief in God			Self-Assessment of Religiosity		
	1999	2017	Difference	1999	2017	Difference	1999	2017	Difference
<b>East Germany</b>									
Left-wing	9.6	10.0	<b>+0.4</b>	22.5	28.5	<b>+6.0</b>	19.6	27.3	<b>+7.7</b>
Moderate	13.1	7.9	<b>-5.2</b>	29.6	29.9	<b>+0.3</b>	29.6	26.3	<b>-3.3</b>
Right-wing	18.5	9.0	<b>-9.5</b>	44.2	35.6	<b>-8.6</b>	40.8	29.4	<b>-11.4</b>

Sources: EVS 1999 and EVS 2017

Table 7: Political Ideology by Religiosity in 2017 (Berlin Categorized as East Germany)

	Church Attendance (East Germany)	Church Attendance (West Germany)	Belief in God (East Germany)	Belief in God (West Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (East Germany)	Self-Assessment of Religiosity (West Germany)
<b>Political ideology</b>						
Moderate	-0.168 (0.291)	0.368** (0.118)	0.148 (0.223)	0.443*** (0.119)	0.030 (0.224)	0.549*** (0.111)
Right-wing	-0.028 (0.297)	0.580*** (0.114)	0.626** (0.227)	0.745*** (0.121)	0.351 (0.225)	0.638*** (0.110)
<b>Age</b>	0.023** (0.008)	0.019*** (0.003)	0.010 (0.006)	0.011*** (0.003)	0.010 (0.006)	0.021*** (0.003)
<b>Sex</b>				-		
Male	-0.399 (0.244)	-0.485*** (0.094)	-0.492** (0.186)	0.799*** (0.102)	-0.616*** (0.187)	-0.752*** (0.092)
<b>Level of education</b>				-		
Upper secondary	0.064 (0.404)	-0.156 (0.141)	0.081 (0.298)	0.608*** (0.179)	-0.073 (0.307)	-0.317* (0.151)
Higher education	0.481 (0.408)	0.004 (0.149)	0.146 (0.315)	0.642*** (0.185)	0.222 (0.318)	-0.255 (0.159)
<b>Monthly income</b>						
2,201-4,250 Euro	-0.300 (0.276)	-0.002 (0.108)	-0.283 (0.208)	-0.080 (0.118)	-0.124 (0.204)	-0.036 (0.107)
Over 4,250 Euro	-0.021 (0.380)	0.073 (0.134)	0.130 (0.287)	-0.126 (0.141)	-0.101 (0.297)	-0.068 (0.130)
<b>Population of town/city</b>						
100,000 or more	0.095 (0.246)	-0.271** (0.103)	0.191 (0.193)	-0.115 (0.107)	0.052 (0.192)	-0.164 (0.098)
Constant	-3.558*** (0.629)	-2.431*** (0.221)	-1.419** (0.457)	0.932*** (0.241)	-1.282** (0.470)	-0.404 (0.215)
Observations	910	3,284	593	2,095	616	2,246

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Source: EVS 2017.

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