Taking Root

How New Parties Build Organizations and Mobilize Voters

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Abstract

Local party elites play a vital role in emergence of new political parties, which face two central challenges: attracting voter support without an established brand and building durable local organizations. Local elites help overcome these obstacles by providing the resources that new parties often lack. Conceptualizing local elites as inputs to a party's production function of electoral and organizational outcomes, I argue that two attributes are central: high socioeconomic status (SES) and local rootedness. High-SES elites convey professionalism and competence, helping new parties appear credible. By contrast, locally rooted elites offer trust, familiarity, and embeddedness. They leverage community networks to mobilize voters and strengthen organizational capacity.

I empirically examine the cases of Germany's Green Party in the 1980s and the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party in the 2010s. Using a new dataset with information on over 400,000 local elites who ran in county-level elections during these periods, I examine how local elites influence electoral and organizational outcomes. My findings show that the impact of local elites on organizational and electoral outcomes varies strongly by context. Electorally speaking, high-SES elites helped both the Greens and the AfD. However, the AfD also benefited from locally rooted elites who mobilized their networks. These elites were particularly effective in rural areas and places with fewer competing elites. Focusing on organizational outcomes, I find that in places without a strong mainstream party presence, locally rooted elites generally help parties expand their organizational reach. The opposite is true for high-SES elites. Furthermore, I demonstrate that locally rooted elites are more

likely to establish new party branches in rural areas.

These findings have important implications for the study of new party emergence. They illustrate how different types of elites enable nascent parties to establish local branches and attract voters. Moreover, the analyses highlight that contextual factors—such as the rural–urban environment and the structure of political competition—condition the effectiveness of these elites, shaping when and where new parties can successfully take root.

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

14

1 Introduction

The study of new parties on the political left and right is heavily influenced by structural accounts that emphasize changing social cleavages (Hooghe and Marks, 2018), increasing partisan de-alignment and weakening mainstream parties (Flanagan and Dalton, 1990; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012), changing values, and the representation gap in the electorate (Inglehart, 1981; Van De Wardt and Otjes, 2022), and the role of institutions (Tavits, 2008). While these structural background conditions help explain cross-national variation, they stand in tension with influential scholarship, both classic and contemporary. This work highlights the enduring importance of interpersonal networks and face-to-face contact with voters for mobilizing electoral support (Green and McClellan, 2020; Pons, 2018; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1968; Scarrow, 1996), socializing, and sustaining a coherent supporter base (Loxbo, 2025), as well as disseminating political messages (Druckman, Levendusky and McLain, 2018; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1968; Scarrow, 1996). Given this evidence, winning the ground game—i.e., penetrating local communities to establish the party in societal life (see e.g. Berman, 1997)—is an important yet underexplored part of the emergence of new parties.

Interviews with local party organizers also emphasized the importance of establishing a local presence and the central role of local elites in forming party organizations. Although this emphasis may have been an attempt to elevate their own importance, my interviewees

did not paint a wholly positive picture of local party elites. Instead, they offered a more nuanced perspective. A district-level organizer from the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) summed it up succinctly:

> "It's always about the people [on the ground]. If there aren't two or three individuals—or at least one person—who takes charge, then nothing happens. There's another thing with these new parties. A lot of people show up thinking, "It must sound great to call myself a local chairperson." My father, an immigrant, always used to say: "Give the Germans uniforms and medals." And honestly, he had a point. But it doesn't help me if I have lots and lots of 'chiefs' [Häuptlinge]—people who proudly call themselves local chairpersons—and nothing actually gets done. These local chapters unfortunately function with varying success." *(Interview 1)*

These conversations sparked my interest in the role of local party elites—defined as those activists who are politically active in new parties beyond the scope of their local community and who publicly represent their parties by lending their names and faces as candidates in local or higher[1]-level elections. This focus raised several important research questions: How do local party elites influence the success of new parties? How do different types of local party elites foster a new party's ability to attract voters and build organizations in local communities? How does their impact vary across contexts? Guided by these questions, this thesis delves into the microfoundations of party-building processes in new parties. Based on the case of Germany, the thesis focuses on the local level and the ground game of new parties, as well as on key actors on the ground: local party elites. New parties are understood as those that are genuinely new, unlike mergers or rebrandings, and do not maintain continuity

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[1]Given my empirical focus on county-level candidates, I use 'local elites' and 'local candidates' in the context of this dissertation interchangeably to refer to those local party elites whose role I explore in this dissertation.

in leadership, organization, or ideology[2]—face significant structural disadvantages. They lack an established infrastructure (Poertner, 2023, p. 1518), brand recognition (Lupu, 2013; Fortunato, Silva and Williams, 2025), and a loyal voter base (Wuttke, 2020), making their path to political power especially difficult. They face two key challenges on this path: one electoral and the other organizational. They must devise strategies to attract voters and establish durable party organizations simultaneously. This dissertation examines how local party elites contribute to overcoming these challenges.

Analyzing the success of new political parties is important given that they have significantly reshaped European politics over the past two decades (Hug, 2001; Bolleyer, 2013; De Vries and Hobolt, 2020). As of early 2025, new political parties across the political spectrum hold leading government positions in countries such as Italy, France, and the Netherlands. And in Germany, the AfD emerged as the second strongest party in the February 2025 federal elections. This growing prominence reflects a broader trend observable across advanced democracies: previously stable party systems have become increasingly fragmented, and traditional catch-all parties have experienced a marked decline, struggling to attract voters across diverse economic and cultural constituencies. Figure 1.1 visualizes the dwindling vote share that parties established before the 1980s have garnered over time. One key driver of this transformation is the rising salience of new political issues that established parties either overlooked or strategically avoided (see Poguntke, 1992; Danieli et al., 2024). Often, these parties faced a dilemma: responding to emerging concerns risked alienating parts of their existing voter base. This led them to forgo adaptation even as their relevance eroded (see e.g. Chou et al., 2021; Poguntke, 1992).

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[2]Some parties enter the political arena by simply rebranding, which involves changing their name while maintaining continuity in leadership, organization, and ideology. Others emerge through mergers, forming new alliances under different labels. These parties often retain access to pre-existing infrastructure, experienced personnel, and voter recognition, which facilitates smoother entry into parliament. Consequently, such parties are generally more likely to gain parliamentary representation (Wieringa and Meijers, 2022). In this dissertation, I adopt the definition proposed by Hug (2001), who defines genuinely new parties as those that "appoint, for the first time, candidates at a general election to the system's representative assembly" (Hug, 2001, p. 14), thus excluding mergers and rebrandings.
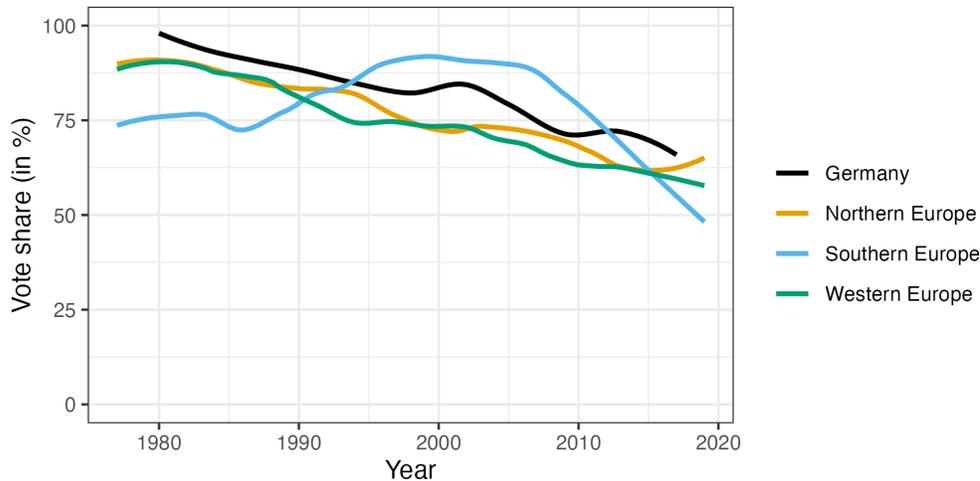
Figure 1.1: Electoral Performance of Established Parties Over Time

Note: The figure shows the vote share accumulated by European parties established before the 1980s based on the 'Varieties of Party Identity and Organization' (V-Party) (Lindberg et al., 2022).

Two of these issues, namely the environment and immigration have driven the emergence of new party families that promised voters to take these issues head on, Green and far-right parties (see e.g. Kitschelt, 1988; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Kriesi et al., 2008; Meguid, 2005). Beyond this focus on distinct single issues, these "niche parties" (Meguid, 2005) differ from other new parties since they have departed from the traditional class-based political conflict and rather focused on the second or cultural dimension of political competition (Meguid, 2005, p. 348). These niche parties on the 'new left' and 'new right' have transformed the political space with their success varying according to factors such as the response of established parties and the salience of their core issues (Meguid, 2005; Adams et al., 2006).

Examining this variation in new party success, one strand in the literature has also emphasized the role of party organizations (Bolleyer, 2013; Tavits, 2013; Bischof and Kurer, 2023). This research generally states that strong organizations not only help parties to attract voters in the short-term but also increase the probability of party survival in the long-term. Of course, this also raises the questions where and how party organizations develop organizational strength. To tackle this question, research has focused on actors

within party organizations, namely party elites (Art, 2011; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016). More specifically, this research has linked party elites with high socio-economic status (SES)—to electoral success, arguing that high-SES elites in new parties attract voters, and contribute to building stronger party organizations (Art, 2011; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016) providing a blueprint for new party success that depends on the recruitment of high SES elites. At the same time, elites with high SES are also attracted by successful parties as Valentim (2024) argues based on the case of European far-right parties. Taken together, previous research suggests that elite recruitment and its quality can reinforce new party's success.

However, empirical work has predominantly focused on national elites (Valentim, 2024; Art, 2011) while studies on local elites have not systematically examined new political parties (Loxbo and Bolin, 2016; Gulzar et al., 2025; Goyal, 2025). One reason for this is the scarcity and difficulty of collecting data on political elites, especially local ones. At the heart of this thesis is a data collection effort that enables me, first and foremost, to analyze how parties navigate electoral and organizational challenges. More specifically, I study new parties in Germany, focusing on the Green Party in the 1980s and the AfD in the 2010s. Figure 1.2 shows descriptive patterns in the data that demonstrate how the composition of local elites in these parties diverges over time. While both parties have been successful in entering the national parliament, the Green Party in the 1980s increasingly managed to attract local elites with high SES, while the reverse is true for the AfD in the 2010s. These aggregate patterns are at odds with theories predicting that parties' success should coincide with rising SES in their elites. These patterns demonstrate that findings on national elites may not easily translate to local party elites and that there is no single blueprint for successfully organizing political parties.

While the divergent patterns in Figure 1.2 partly reflect the AfD's transformation—from a national-conservative, market-liberal party led by euro-skeptic economics professors into a nativist far-right organization (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021)—this evolution alone cannot explain the substantial local variation observed. Take, for instance, the East German
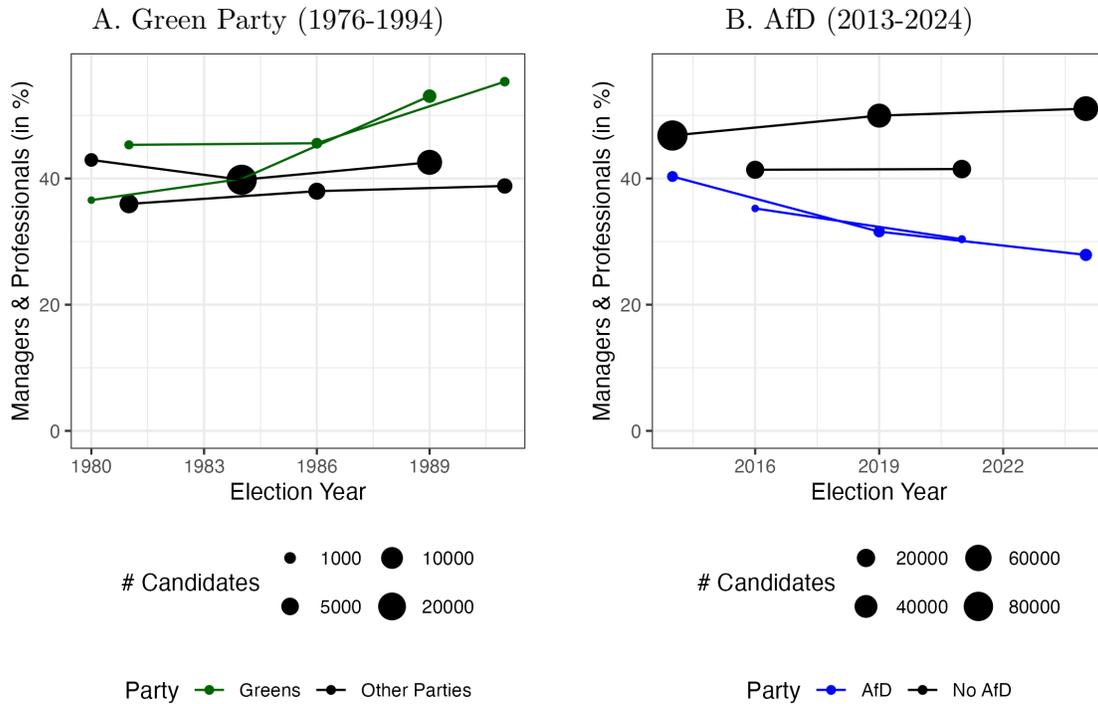
Figure 1.2: Share of High-SES Elites After Party Foundation

Note: The figure visualizes the share of high-SES local party elites—defined as candidates in occupations classified under ISCO categories 1 or 2 (following Art (2011))—who ran in county elections. The underlying candidate data are original and described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

county of Dahme-Spreewald: while the AfD county branch more than doubled the number of candidates from 23 to 53 between 2019 and 2024, the share of high-SES elites fell from 42% to only 12%. The county of Bautzen (also in East Germany), however, showed the reverse trends. Figure 1.3 visualizes the trajectory of four counties in East and West Germany who differ in the growth of their local branch and the recruitment of high SES elites. Taken together, these patterns point to important questions: if parties like the AfD can sustain electoral and organizational despite a weakened recruitment of high SES elites, how do elites contribute to party-building processes in the first place? And if elites do matter, how do variations in the composition and development of local branches shape electoral performance and organizational consolidation locally?
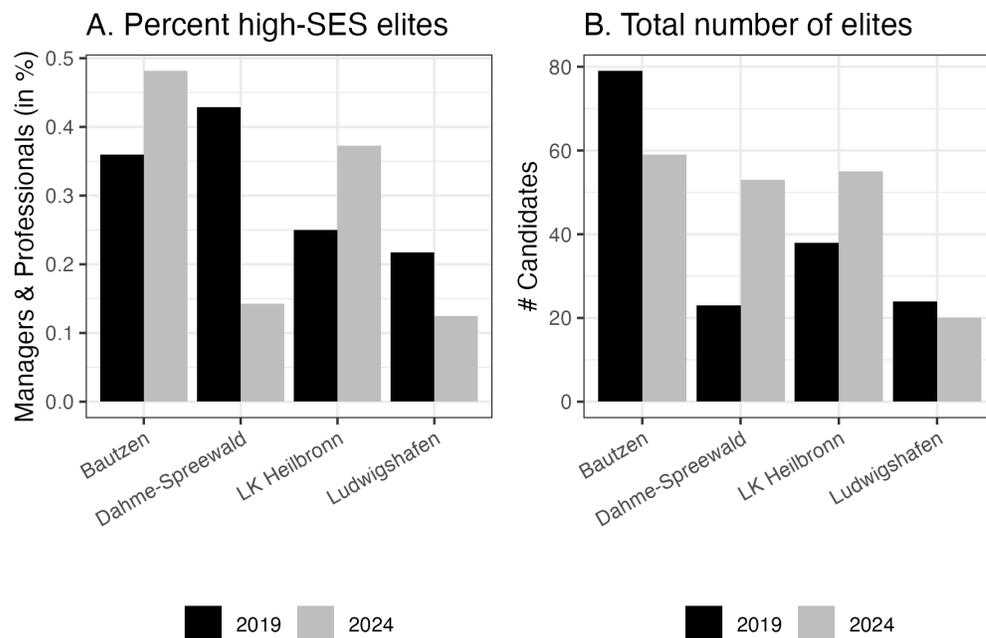
Figure 1.3: Trajectory of Local AfD Branches Between 2019 and 2024

Note: The figure visualizes the share of high-SES local party elites—defined as candidates in occupations classified under ISCO categories 1 or 2 (following Art (2011))—in four local branches in the local elections 2019 and 2024. The underlying candidate data are original and described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Argument in Brief

In this dissertation, I explore how local elites can shape the trajectory of new parties on the ground. How are such elites linked to electoral and organizational outcomes on the local level and where do they benefit new parties? Addressing these questions, I argue that new parties need front-stage elites, helping them to attract voters, and institution builders, that help them grow organizational roots in local communities. High-SES and locally rooted elites provide important resources to new parties to assume these roles. High-SES elites can signal competence and credibility to voters helping new parties to overcome their lacking party brand. High-SES elites can also beneficial for expanding new party organizations on the ground. They have not only often cognitive abilities enabling them to learn what it takes to run a local party chapters. They also can often build on prior leadership experience in the private economy and or civic associations. However, new parties cannot only benefit from

high-SES elites but also from locally rooted ones. These elites can signal commitment to the interests of local communities and can leverage their personal networks to mobilize voters and bring new members into the party.

New parties' ability to substitute high-SES elites with locally rooted ones, however, is constrained by their electorate: locally rooted elites matter more for far-right parties whose voters express stronger levels of local attachment (Fitzgerald, 2018), while the same logic applies to high-SES elites in Green Parties who build on support of a higher educated base (Simon and Turnbull-Dugarte, 2025).

Local context, such as the rural-urban environment or the structure of local political competition, further conditions the effectiveness of local elites in realizing electoral and organizational outcomes. In other words, not only the type of elites matters but also where parties can recruit these types. In rural areas, locally rooted elites serve as indispensable 'door openers' for new parties. In these contexts, such elites can provide access to otherwise impenetrable local networks. This helps new parties not only in elections but also when trying to expand their organizational reach. In contrast, high-SES elites cannot provide the same access and may sometimes be even considered outsiders in rural communities.

New party elites do not emerge in a political vacuum but must face existing political competition. The structure of this competition is important because this determines the extent to which new party elites can translate their attributes into electoral and organizational success. On the the other hand, locally rooted elites are likely to be most effective when rival parties lack similarly rooted candidates. This is because their comparative advantage lies in the mobilization of networks. In areas with more locally rooted elites, this advantage might be diluted. High-SES elites, by contrast, depend more on the signals they convey to voters. In areas where rival parties also field high-SES candidates, voters may be more attuned to such cues and value them more highly.

Taken together, I argue that high-SES and locally rooted elites can provide important

resources to new parties. To what extent these types can, however, realize electoral and organizational outcomes depends on the party family, the rural-urban environment, and existing political competition in local communities. Therefore, I contend that elites' impact in new party emergence is conditional and that there is no single blueprint for new parties to overcome the electoral and organizational challenges.

1.1 Prior Research & Contribution

The arguments advanced in this thesis are closely related to work on the sub-national presence of party organizations. One strand of this research focuses on the presence and durability of local party branches and their influence on political attitudes at the community level (Loxbo, 2025; Ellinas, 2020; Dinas et al., 2016; Bischof and Kurer, 2023). These studies underscore the significance of grassroots organizational structures, yet they leave open the critical question of where and why parties manage to establish these roots in the first place. Another line of closely related inquiry consists of work on the link between party elites and local organizations (see e.g. Doherty, Dowling and Miller, 2022; Sells, 2020, 2022; Goyal and Sells, 2024; Poertner, 2023; Gulzar et al., 2025). This work has demonstrated that party elites on the local level can influence the composition of a party's supporter base (Gulzar et al., 2025; Goyal and Sells, 2024; Sells, 2022). Randomizing recruitment messages, Gulzar et al. (2025) demonstrate that party elites can influence the composition of political recruits with respect to diversity and skill. Similarly, Sells (2022) leverages data on social networks and neighbor-level data to show that new parties profit tremendously from the social networks of founding elites. Yet, it remains unclear which types of elites exercise this influence and under what conditions. Another line of existing work has explored party-building through the lens of office-holding, demonstrating how access to political office can facilitate organizational development (Poertner, 2023; Sells, 2020). While these accounts persuasively argue that holding office can strengthen party institutions, they do not address

the antecedent conditions—namely, how and where new parties become electorally viable enough to compete for such offices.

This thesis advances this research by investigating the causes and consequences of local elite recruitment in new parties and building on a novel database on local party elites in new parties. Exploiting this data allows me to overcome challenges commonly encountered in the study of party organizations and new parties: first, existing research is often based on national elites (Art, 2011; Valentim, 2024). While many party-building processes happen at the national level, a focus on national elites obscures the pivotal role of local party branches and elites for mobilizing voters (Green and McClellan, 2020; Pons, 2018), socializing and sustaining a coherent supporter base (Loxbo, 2025), and disseminating political messages (Druckman, Levendusky and McLain, 2018; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1968; Scarrow, 1996). Second, concentrating on a set of local elites within a single locality allows me to examine differential electoral appeals in a shared context, thereby extending studies that focus primarily on mayoral candidates or national elites in a given context. Furthermore, previous work has sometimes fallen short of directly linking elite characteristics to the mechanisms of electoral success or the concrete processes of party-building they aim to explain (see e.g. Loxbo and Bolin, 2016). Finally, the dataset with information on over 400,000 candidates profiles allows me to study the microfoundations of new party emergence. In particular, it enables me to examine the local political contexts of new party emergence, since the data cover all candidates competing within each locality.

Investigating the consequences of local elite recruitment in new parties also contributes to the broader literature by deepening our understanding of party-building processes and the role of elites within them. Prior research has emphasized various dimensions, including leadership, issue emphasis, political communication, and structural factors such as institutional constraints and the configuration of voter demand. While each of these approaches has offered valuable insights, they also leave important gaps in explaining the emergence and development of new parties.

Leadership-focused accounts, for example, underscore the agency of party leaders in shaping their organizations (Tavits, 2013; Bolleyer, 2013). Leaders may choose to build strong institutions and invest in party infrastructure, even at the expense of their personal dominance, either as a strategic choice or as a response to internal party dynamics and constraints. However, party performance is a rather remote outcome of party leaders' actions. In practise, it is difficult to disentangle from e.g. media coverage effects. At the same time, leaders are constrained by other actors often within their own parties. This is particularly true for new parties without established hierarchies. To what extent leaders' actions with regard to party-building are caused by their preference or by external constraint is difficult to trace (for a similar critique for the case of CEOs and firm performance, see NeelyJr. et al., 2020, p. 1034f.).

Moreover, scholars have highlighted the importance of demand-side gaps and institutional structures in the success of new parties (Van De Wardt and Otjes, 2022; Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006, 2008). While institutional explanations fall short in accounting for variation within political contexts, unmet voter demands have been proposed as a reason for uneven success across regions. However, as Wuttke (2020) cautions, ideological proximity alone does not guarantee voter support for new parties. Existing party loyalties may prevent shifts in support, and even voters ideologically distant from new parties might back them as a means of voicing anti-establishment sentiment.

Analyses centered on issue positioning and communication strategies (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020) shed light on how new parties engage voters, but often overlook the significance of local-level representation. On the one hand, local-level representatives act as party ambassadors in communities and play a vital role in building legitimacy and the communication of party messages (Favero and Zulianello, 2023). On the other hand, local-level activism can also gradually shape issue preferences (see Loxbo, 2025), highlighting the urgent need to better understand the local presence and activities of new parties.

1.2 Context and Case

To advance the literature on party-building, I focus on two new parties in Germany: the Greens in the 1980s and the AfD in the 2010s. Both represent niche parties that mirror broader international trends: from the 1980s onward, Green parties began reshaping West European party systems and far-right parties gained increasing political representation across advanced democracies (see e.g. Kriesi et al., 2008; Meguid, 2005). Although Germany's electoral rules are arguably more permeable than those of first-past-the-post systems, such as those in the US or UK, new parties face strong local party organizations that are funded by state subsidies intended to bolster robust democratic institutions. By law, parties must also feature democratic internal processes, meaning new parties must build organizational capacity to comply. This also means that they face well-organized opponents in local political arenas, which incentivizes them to build deep organizational foundations. The resulting party-building processes provide a useful lens through which to trace new parties' organizational trajectories. My empirical approach is based on three main components. First, I draw on an original, comprehensive dataset of over 400,000 local party elites who ran in German county-level elections between 1976 and 1994 and between 2008 and 2024 as candidates. While the dataset includes candidates from all parties, it provides an unprecedentedly detailed view of emerging parties, encompassing approximately 10,000 Green Party and 15,000 AfD candidates during the respective formative periods of both parties. The dataset includes the elites' names, occupations, places of residence, birth years, and, in some cases, birthplaces. This enables me to assess their SES (via occupational information) and proxy their local embeddedness based on birthplace and local last names. Second, I link this individual-level data to candidates' electoral performance and contextual information on the presence and recruitment activity of new parties within local communities. Third, I complement the quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews with party organizers to offer insight into internal organizational processes and strategic decision-making.

There are three key reasons why the county level in Germany is particularly well-suited for this investigation. First, new parties in Germany often develop local roots at the county level. State-level party organizations in many federal states are too distant from local communities to effectively manage a growing grassroots base, and municipal organizations are too geographically fragmented to sustain a meaningful organizational presence. Consequently, new parties have frequently modeled their structures after established ones, designating county organizations as the lowest tier with financial and organizational autonomy (see Salten, 2022). Second, counties offer a realistic political arena for new parties to compete. While these parties often struggle to field full slates of candidates in municipal council elections due to limited personnel, counties — ranging in population from 30,000 to over two million — provide a broader recruitment pool. This makes it more feasible for new parties to assemble candidate lists and meaningfully contest elections at this level. Third, from the perspective of political elites, county-level offices and candidacies are significant stepping stones. They often serve as an entry point into politics and a pathway to higher-level positions, including state and federal candidacies. Thus, engagement at the county level holds strategic importance for career development within party structures. The combination of these career opportunities, the feasibility of entering politics at the county level, and the financial and organizational autonomy from other party units makes county-level organizations attractive subjects for study. Focusing on the local level is therefore not only empirically advantageous — due to a larger and more diverse sample — but also theoretically meaningful. To understand how parties establish themselves and succeed or fail in recruiting specific types of candidates, it is sensible to examine the beginning of their growing political elite pipeline. The county level represents the first concrete stage of party building and provides a clearer window into early organizational development and elite recruitment.

1.3 Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured as follows.

In Chapter 2, I develop my theoretical framework and outline how local party elites shape organizational and electoral outcomes in new parties. I discuss not only how different elite attributes may influence these outcomes but also how their effects may vary across party families, the rural–urban environment, and the level and nature of local political competition. Finally, I situate my argument within the existing literature, contrasting it with previous approaches to new party emergence and highlighting my contribution to the field.

In Chapter 3, I present the comprehensive data collection of over 400,000 candidates in German county elections spanning four decades of elections. I explain how this data was collected, digitized, and made machine-readable. After outlining the coding of candidate attributes, I show descriptive statistics on the distribution of these attributes across emerging and established parties.

In Chapter 4, I situate this data within the broader context of party development and trace how the Greens in the 1980s and the AfD in the 2010s were founded and eventually integrated into the German party system. Drawing on candidate data, membership records, and information on local election contestation, I map the two parties' trajectories from their emergence to their consolidation.

In Chapter 5, I examine the relevance of local party organizations. I argue that even in a digital age, local organizations are indispensable and cannot be simply substituted by online campaigns. This is because local party organizations work as crucial intermediaries that link national party organizations to local communities. In a second step, I evaluate to what extent local party branches are correlated with electoral outcomes (on the party- and branch-level) and predict the visibility of political campaigns.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the effects of candidate attributes on electoral outcomes. Using

open-list elections, I link candidate attributes directly to candidates' personalized vote results. Re-analyzing existing conjoint data, I show that left-leaning individuals are responsive to higher educated candidates and right-leaning ones more open to support locally rooted candidates when choosing outparty candidates. In a third step, I explore candidate effects across contexts, focusing on the rural-urban environment as well as the candidate supply of other parties.

In Chapter 7, I examine the organizational consequences of local party elites. In the first step, I analyze how structural factors and elites influence organizational growth. Then, I focus on the role of elites specifically and assess how they contribute to their parties' organizational expansion. Finally, I explore how these processes depend on contextual factors, particularly local political competition and the rural–urban environment. Chapter 8 concludes by highlighting main findings and their implications.

2 Political Elites & Grassroots Party-Building

In this chapter, I first present the theoretical framework of this thesis, which links local party elites to local party-building processes. I begin by outlining the two central challenges that new parties face—one electoral, the other organizational. I then introduce the two key types of local party elites in my argument: those with strong local roots and those with high socioeconomic status (SES). By combining these challenges with different elite types, I specify the conditions under which the resources provided by locally rooted or high-SES elites benefit new parties. I give particular attention to the role of party families and their electorates, as well as to the characteristics of the local communities from which these elites emerge. Drawing on Strom (1990, p. 575) and borrowing the language of economics, I conceptualize local party elites as factor inputs in the production function of political parties, whose efficiency depends on their allocation. In the second part of the chapter, I situate my argument within the broader literature on party organization and the study of new parties.

2.1 The Two Central Challenges of New Parties

When new political parties first enter the political arena, they encounter a set of challenges that make it harder for voters to rely on the usual shortcuts when deciding whom to support. Unlike established competitors, new parties lack a recognizable party brand that signals identity and reliability to voters (Lupu, 2013). They also cannot point to governing experience

or past achievements that might reassure citizens of their competence (Fiorina, 1978). Finally, while new parties may be clear-cut on specific issue, they might be more ambiguous on other issues due to intense intra-party conflict (see e.g. Poguntke 1992, p. 341f.; Heinze and Weisskircher 2021) or strategic consideration (Bräuninger and Giger, 2018, p. 545), leaving voters with greater uncertainty about what the party stands for. Building on this, new parties face two central challenges in which local party elites play a crucial role[1]: first, they must overcome their lack of a recognizable party brand and their absence of a proven track record to appeal to voters. Local party elites can help address this *electoral challenge* by providing cues or signals of competence and by mobilizing personal networks. On the one hand, voters may favor certain candidates if they perceive them as particularly competent or generally more electable. When new parties succeed in recruiting and nominating such well-regarded candidates, they can benefit from the positive perceptions these candidates generate. On the other hand, local elites often possess extensive personal networks that they can activate during campaigns. New parties can thus directly benefit from candidates who bring larger and more engaged local networks into the political process. The electoral challenge extends beyond mobilizing core supporters who care deeply about the issues championed by new parties. It also addresses more marginal voters who are weakly attached to established parties and open to alternatives.

Beyond electoral concerns, infant political parties face also the organizational challenge of building durable local structures since strong local organizations are vital for party survival and success (Bolleyer, 2013). Local elites can play a key role in this process by mobilizing supporters, recruiting new members, and transforming ideological sympathizers into active participants within emerging party organizations. Their effectiveness depends largely on their social embeddedness—parties benefit most from elites with extensive personal net-

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[1]While local intermediaries are particularly important for new parties, they are also relevant for established parties: local party elites and offline interpersonal networks are still relevant to spread their message (Loxbo, 2025; Druckman, Levendusky and McLain, 2018; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1986) and recruit supporters for voluntary party work (Geser, 1999; Fisher et al., 2018).

works and strong roots in local communities. Parties can also benefit from individuals with leadership experience in other sectors, given that such backgrounds often provide organizational skills, strategic capacity, and established networks that can be transferred into political activity.

But which types of elites matter for new parties to overcome these challenges? Previous research on national-level elites has highlighted the role of high SES for the organizational success of far-right parties (Art, 2011) but to what extent this matters also beyond far-right parties and on the local level remains unclear. Furthermore, I argue that the local context conditions the effectiveness of local party elites in helping new parties to overcome the electoral and organizational challenge. In what follows, I first elaborate on the types of elites before turning to the contexts in which they prove effective to build parties and attract voters.

2.2   Front-Stage Elites & Institution Builders

How do different types of elites help infant parties to overcome the electoral and the organizational challenge? I argue that parties require two ideal types of elites to address these distinct challenges. Front-stage elites help attract voters through their public image and personal reputation, whereas institution builders focus less on voter outreach and more on strengthening the party's organizational foundations. This distinction closely parallels the argument developed by Tavits (2013, Chapter 6) regarding national party leaders. Specifically, Tavits differentiates between charismatic and pragmatic leaders. In her framework, charismatic leaders correspond to what I term front-stage elites: individuals who prioritize voter outreach and excel at cultivating relationships and attracting electoral support. Pragmatic leaders, by contrast, play the long game, investing time and resources in organizational development to ensure their parties' long-term survival.

Investigating this dynamic at the local level is important to understand how parties grow roots on the ground. While party leaders' power may be especially important to structure the parties' central party office and might also be able to incentivize actions on the ground, it cannot substitute for or directly control local-level action. However, local-level roots can have important upstream consequences (see Chapter 5). The focus on the local level allows also for a systematic analysis of who builds parties and attracts voters in new parties and under which circumstances. To address these questions, I focus on two attributes of local party elites, namely their socioeconomic status (SES) and their local roots[2]. While previous research has emphasized the importance of these attributes especially in the electoral context (see Gagnon, McElwain and Ikeda, 2025), I contend that locally rooted and high-SES elites provide key resources enabling new parties to develop organizationally and electorally. That is to say that these two attributes do not map neatly onto the ideal types of front-stage elites and institution builders. Instead, this role is more nuanced.

Front-Stage Elites

First, high-SES and locally rooted elites can both function as front-stage elites who help nascent parties to overcome the electoral challenge. Front-stage elites face the challenge of appealing beyond their party's core supporters, reaching undecided or less committed voters who might not otherwise back a new party. Especially, local elites with high-socioeconomic status may be particularly effective in doing so. While Art (2011) argues that higher competence levels of high-SES party elites are linked to higher electoral success, other researchers

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[2]Beyond SES and local roots, scholars have identified additional attributes, such as political experience, that may, in theory, help new parties to overcome their initial challenges. For example, politically experienced elites in new parties may leverage their experience to project competence. Understandably, such characteristics tend to be generally valued by both parties and voters (Cirone, Cox and Fiva, 2021; Kirkland and Coppock, 2018). However, in the context of genuinely new parties, these attributes should hold less significance. Few politicians in new parties possess prior political experience from other parties (see also Section 4.2), and even among those who do, it remains uncertain whether their experience is appreciated by voters or new party organizations. While these individuals may contribute valuable knowledge, questions may arise about their loyalty, and their organizational expertise—though potentially beneficial—can also be viewed with suspicion, as it might signal ambitions to consolidate power using insider insights.

have contested that high-SES is associated with the performance of politicians (Carnes and Lupu, 2016*b*). The evidence is more conclusive once we consider the perception of high-SES elites: voters may use high SES as indicator of competence and use them to infer a candidate's future effectiveness and change of success (Devine, Turnbull-Dugarte and Ryan, 2025). This logic extends then even to policy-oriented voters, who may prioritize candidates they perceive as most capable of advancing their preferred policies. There is, however, strong evidence that different groups of voters perceive high-SES candidates differently: voters may prefer candidates from their own social group, such as university graduates or working-class candidates, because they expect these candidates to understand and pursue the issues that matter to them. In this vein, Horne (2022) finds heterogeneous effects, showing that working-class voters prefer working-class candidates over middle-class ones, while middle-class voters prefer middle-class candidates. This is consistent with other empirical evidence; Devine, Turnbull-Dugarte and Ryan (2025) show that British voters, especially those with high incomes, expect working-class candidates to be less successful which reduces their support for these candidates. Furthermore, Simon and Turnbull-Dugarte (2025) show based on a meta-analysis of twenty conjoint experiment in advanced democracies that it is especially university graduates who put a premium on education when choosing candidates.

Locally rooted elites[3], on the other hand, can also convey signals to which voters are attentive. One reason for this are place-based identities that work as social identities dividing the world in in- and out-groups based on geographic terms (Munis, 2022; Leininger and Swalve, 2025). These place-based identities can shape political behavior and preferences (Munis, 2021) and lead to stronger preferences for locally rooted candidates. Observational and experimental evidence has supported this idea: Leininger and Swalve (2025) show that candidates with a distinctively local names running for national parliament in Germany

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[3]I use the terms "localness," "locally rooted," and "locally embedded" interchangeably to describe individuals with a distinctive connection to specific places. These ties extend beyond mere residence and may stem from being born in a given place or family connections. For details on the empirical operationalization of my localness measure, see Section 3.2.

receive more votes than otherwise similar candidates. In a conjoint, Leininger and Swalve (2025) also show that this local name advantage is more pervasive among locally attached voters. Similarly, Campbell et al. (2019) find evidence for this mechanism in a conjoint experiment fielded in the UK. Randomly providing additional explicit information on the representation of local interests weakened the effect of candidates' local roots. However, Campbell et al. (2019) also find that effects of local roots still persist hinting to additional drivers. They argue that locally rooted candidates might be perceived as more relatable and trustworthy (Campbell et al. 2019; see also Munis 2021; Leininger and Swalve 2025).

Beyond those localness signals, locally rooted elites may simply more effective in mobilizing their longstanding personal networks in the area. Consistent with this thought, studies have consistently shown that candidates receive more votes in areas where they live or have lived (Key, 1949; Arzheimer and Evans, 2012; Frendreis and Tatalovich, 2021; Hunt, 2022; Rice and Macht, 1987; Velimsky et al., 2023). While some elements of this "hometown advantage" may theoretically arise from localness cues, it is unlikely that these cues are perceived differently across neighboring communities. Furthermore, even in larger municipalities, social networks can remain highly influential. Voters may be indirectly connected to candidates through shared acquaintances or family ties. Locally rooted elites are particularly well positioned to leverage these networks, which often rest on long-standing ties of friendship and family and extend beyond immediate personal contacts.

Thus, while high-SES elites can draw on their projection of competence, locally rooted elites offer voters heuristic cues that help inform their decisions. In addition, locally rooted elites may be more effective in leveraging their personal networks to mobilize voters.

Institution Builders

Institution builders are critical to reach new parties' organizational reach by laying the groundwork and establishing e.g. new local branches. To do so, institution builders only need

to gain support by few committed supporters in their community to build new branches and contest municipal races. Local party elites with high socioeconomic status may help organize new parties because they are more familiar with organizational procedures and understand the necessary steps and protocols involved (see also Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 2013, p. 19). Furthermore, high-SES elites may be conducive for building local party chapters if they come with prior leadership experience in civic organizations or the private economy. This is because as experienced leaders, these elites may better better able to set up new branches, motivate and recruit party members, and effectively organize local chapters. However, one interviewed local AfD organizer cautioned that private sector leadership experience would not always translate well into the context of organizing political parties and motivating party supporters for voluntary work:

> "We did have entrepreneurs [who joined the party]. But you don't run a local branch [...] like a company. We do have some people who think that you could run a local or city association like a company, like, 'I'm a member, we'll put up posters tomorrow, we'll meet at six and then, ready to go.' No, it doesn't work like that." *(Interview 2)*

As this quote highlights, managers or entrepreneurs who are used to hierarchical structure within firms have to adapt to the voluntary nature of party work. Thus, their leadership skills do not necessarily apply to party organizations. Thus, the general organizational impact of high-SES party elites in new parties appears ambiguous.

Local embeddedness can, however, can be important drivers for establishing local roots in new parties because they possess thick social ties in their local communities allowing them to better identify potential supporters and recruit them for party work. Identifying like-minded individuals and motivating them to participate in party-building efforts is a particularly valuable resource, as recruiting members is often difficult, even for well-established local parties (Alizade et al., 2025, p. 2110). Locally rooted party elites may also benefit from the

strong connections to their local community because they do not have to fear to lose access to their social networks. While newcomers who become active for stigmatized parties can be avoided and excluded, this becomes more complicated for people with whom community members have a long history of shared experiences. Furthermore, locally embedded party elites are also more likely to have family ties within local communities from which they can only be cut off at extremely high costs. Thus, becoming active and organize locally becomes less costly for locally embedded party elites and gives them a comparative advantage vis-a-vis their non-rooted counterparts.

2.3   Variation across Context

The effectiveness of local new party elites in realizing organizational and electoral benefits depends on the context in which they are active. More specifically, I argue that the party family, but also the local context in which local party elites are active determines to what extent elites can realize organizational and electoral benefits. In particular, I propose that the appeal of high-SES and locally rooted party elites varies depending on the population density and the supply of other parties. This means that party elite characteristics can produce different electoral and organizational benefits both across and within parties. I address each of these three points in turn.

Party Families

How do party families condition the effectiveness of local party elites in affecting electoral and organizational outcomes? Both, front-stage elites and institution builders, have to rely at least partially on their networks to realize electoral and organizational benefits. These networks, however, may be more or less pervasive for them depending on the party they run for and the networks they are embedded. One the one hand, Green Parties have built from

the start on a more educated and, on average, younger base than other parties (Poguntke see 1992, p. 343; Müller-Rommel 1990) and still continue to do so (see Dennison, 2017). At the same time, Green Party voters tend to hold more cosmopolitan views (for Germany, see Wurthmann, 2022, p. 264f.). On the other hand, far-right voters present in many ways the reverse image of Green Party supporters. They express, on average, a stronger attachment to the places they live (Fitzgerald, 2018). Furthermore, scholars have linked peripheral places with stronger local identities to higher levels of far-right support (Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof, 2024). They are also, on average, less educated than other parties' supporters (Gidron and Hall, 2017; Allen, 2017).

If social networks are at least to some extent sorted by socioeconomic characteristics as research even in the 1980s suggests (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001, p. 426f.), high-SES elites might, for instance, be limited in the way they can leverage their personal contacts for party work. In this vein, research has found that high-SES far-right party members feel, on average, more stigmatized (Ammassari, 2023) and that higher levels of stigmatization appear to deter rather than stimulate political participation (Ammassari, 2024). Thus, I expect that while high-SES elites in far-right parties may still be effective in projecting competence, they are less effective in using their networks to mobilize voters and expand far-right parties' organizational reach. Of course, this stands in contrast to high-SES elites in Green Parties whose networks may be more likely to feature Green Party sympathizers. A similar logic applies to locally rooted elites whom I expect to be effective in wielding their personal networks for far-right parties for the same reasons.

Differences in party electorates may influence not only how effectively elites can leverage their networks but also how much voters value the cues those elites provide. This is because locally attached voters prefer locally rooted candidates (Leininger and Swalve, 2025) and higher educated voters prefer higher educated party elites (Simon and Turnbull-Dugarte, 2025). However, elites may also offset the disadvantages among typical party supporters by winning over voters that normally do not support their party.

Taken together, I expect that local high-SES party elites are more likely to realize electoral and organizational benefits when running for Green Parties, while the same is true for locally rooted in far-right parties.

The Rural-Urban Environment

The rural–urban context shapes how effectively elites can generate electoral and organizational outcomes. In larger cities, elites must rely more on perceived competence and the signals they project, whereas in smaller towns, personal networks play a greater role. Smaller communities are characterized by denser social ties, where voters are more likely to know candidates personally or be connected to them through acquaintances. In such settings, voters depend less on cognitive shortcuts because they have access to additional information through their social networks. In this context, locally rooted party elites may be particular useful as key door openers for emerging parties appealing to voters because of their longstanding reputation and existing ties to the community.

To what extent high-SES elites can have a similar impact in rural communities is more uncertain. On the one hand, their higher education levels may make them stand out positively. More educated individuals tend to be better informed about political affairs and more capable of processing political information. Their greater political knowledge may also position them as opinion leaders within communities that include less informed individuals (Goubin et al., 2025; Wei and Hindman, 2011; Druckman, Levendusky and McLain, 2018). At the same time, opinion leader is not necessarily based on greater knowledge about politics (see Strömbäck et al., 2024) questioning to what extent high-SES elites actually have an advantage. Furthermore, high-SES occupations can also mark high-SES elites as outsiders in rural communities. While some high-SES occupations—such as teachers, priests, or local entrepreneurs— may have sway in their local communities, other high-SES occupations that require high-SES elites to commute to larger cities may limit their connection to village life

and the influence they wield within smaller communities.

Taken together, I expect that locally rooted elites are more and high-SES elites are less likely to be associated with electoral and organizational benefits in more rural communities.

The Structure of Political Competition

Finally, new emerging parties do not enter the political arena in a vacuum, neither on the national nor on the local level. This means that new party elites face varying configurations which can limit their appeal via cues and also their ability to mobilize local networks (see Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017, p. 811).

In elections, the presence of candidates from other parties with similar traits may strongly influence how effectively locally rooted and high-SES elites attract voters. More specifically, I expect high-SES elites who rely mainly on their perception to perform better in environments with more high-SES candidates in other competing parties. This is because in such settings, high-SES new party elites resemble the typical candidate of other parties, amplifying the signal of competence and legitimacy sent by the nomination of high-SES candidates. In contrast, locally rooted elites in new parties may be less effective in attracting voters when established parties run more locally rooted candidates. In such cases, established parties are already deeply embedded in local networks, making it more difficult for locally rooted elites in new parties to leverage and mobilize these networks for their cause.

I expect the same logic to apply to locally rooted elites in new parties when it comes to building local organizations. Their ability to establish local branches is likely constrained when existing networks are already dominated by locally rooted elites from competing parties. However, I also anticipate variation across party types. In local political arenas dominated by small parties or independent voter groups, locally rooted elites may actually facilitate party building by offering career opportunities and tangible benefits to politically active individuals who are not yet integrated into established national parties.

In sum, I expect local competition from other parties to affect new party elites in two main ways. First, in areas with many competing locally rooted candidates, locally rooted elites from new parties may find it harder to mobilize their networks and translate them into electoral or organizational gains. Second, in communities where small parties and local voter groups are more active, these elites may instead find opportunities to recruit from a politically engaged pool of potential supporters. By contrast, high-SES elites in new parties may perform better in elections held in areas with a higher concentration of similar high-SES competitors, as this resemblance can further reinforce their signal of normalization and credibility.

2.4 Summary of the Argument

New political parties face two fundamental challenges when entering the political arena: an electoral challenge, stemming from their lack of brand recognition, governing experience, or policy clarity, and an organizational challenge, arising from their limited local presence and weak structures. Local party elites play a crucial role in overcoming both challenges by representing their party at the local level and building institutions on the ground. To address these challenges, parties rely on two ideal types of elites: front-stage elites and institution builders. Front-stage elites attract voters through their public image and reputation, whereas institution builders focus on long-term organizational development. Both high-SES and locally rooted elites can serve in either role, but their effectiveness depends on context. In other words, parties can substitute one type for another conditional on the characteristics of local communities.

High-SES elites project competence and professional credibility, helping new parties appear viable, while locally rooted elites draw on familiarity and community ties to mobilize support. However, these advantages vary across party families, rural–urban contexts, and the structure of political competition. High-SES elites are likely to be more effective in

Green Parties and urban settings, where education and professionalism resonate with electorates. Locally rooted elites, by contrast, are especially advantageous in far-right parties and rural areas, where dense social networks and local attachment are key to legitimacy and mobilization.

Finally, the presence of similar elites in competing parties conditions these effects. Locally rooted elites struggle to mobilize where established parties already dominate community networks, but may thrive in fragmented local arenas populated by small parties or voter groups. High-SES elites, conversely, benefit from environments with many similarly credentialed competitors, as this normalizes their profiles and reinforces signals of competence and credibility. Table 2.1 summarizes these arguments.

Together, my argument underscores that local party elites represent important resources whose effect depends on both, party-level features and contextual environments. Local elites thus represent a key mechanism through which new parties gain legitimacy, embed themselves in communities, and develop into enduring political organizations.

2.5   Contribution to Existing Literature

My argument connects to research on the quality of political elites, the drivers of new party success, and the role of political elites in party organizations more generally. Investigating how local party elites in new parties affect organizational and electoral outcomes contributes to the broader literature by deepening our understanding of party-building processes and the role of elites within them. In the remainder of this section, I explore how scholars have conceptualized the quality of political and have analyzed demand- and supply-side drivers of new party success—whether organizational or electoral—and show how my approach builds and expands on these approaches.

Table 2.1: Summary of Argument

Elite Type / Outcome	Electoral Performance	Organizational Outcomes
High-SES Elites	• Enhance electoral performance by signaling competence, professionalism, and credibility. • Electoral appeal primarily via *cues* **Party Family:** • More effective in Green Party given more cosmopolitan and higher educated voters **Rural-Urban Environment:** • Less effective in rural communities **Local Political Competition:** • More successful in areas with more similar competing elites	• Leadership experience from other sectors may not translate to party work • Provide cognitive resources important for learning how to run party and fulfill bureaucratic requirements **Party Family:** • More effective in Green Party given more cosmopolitan and higher educated voters **Rural-Urban Environment:** • Less effective in rural communities **Local Political Competition:** • -
Locally Rooted Elites	• Improve electoral performance by leveraging familiarity. community trust, and within local networks • Electoral appeal primarily via *networks* **Party Family:** • More effective in far-right parties given more locally attached supporters **Rural-Urban Environment:** • More effective in rural communities **Local Political Competition:** • Less effective in contexts with more locally rooted elites given exhaustion of local network effect	• Their dense social ties and local credibility facilitate member recruitment, sustain local branches, and lower the social costs of participation, especially in stigmatized new parties **Party Family:** • More effective in far-right parties given more locally attached supporters **Rural-Urban Environment:** • More effective in rural communities **Local Political Competition:** • More (less) effective in places with more competing elites from small parties and local voter groups (mainstream parties)

Dimensions of Elite Quality

First, research on the quality of political elites has mostly remained focused on high-SES elites and electoral performance (Loxbo and Bolin, 2016; Art, 2011), sometimes blurring concepts, by e.g. effectively equating attributes with outcomes (for a brief discussion, see Valentim, 2024, p. 118). Scholars have regularly used variables such as occupational skill (Art, 2011; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016; Valentim, 2024), or educational attainment (Valentim, 2024) to proxy the quality of politicians. As Valentim (2024, p. 113-114) explains, one implicit argument is that important attributes of successful politicians—including human capital, participation in civic life, and the capacity to foster economic growth—are correlated with, not caused by, education or occupational skills. Thus, we can proxy the qualifications of politicians using their occupational skill or educational attainment. Another arguments relates relates occupational skill directly to legislative competence (Art, 2011, p. 37). However, these argument are empirically contested. Carnes and Lupu (2016*b*) show, for instance, that political leaders with higher levels of education do not perform better than lower educated ones in passing more bills, producing less corruption, or producing economic growth. Furthermore, conjoint experiment cast doubt on a universal notion of an electoral bonus for highly educated candidates (Carnes and Lupu, 2016*a*; Horne, 2022, see). Defining "quality" in terms of the resources that elites provide to parties, I contribute to the literature by outlining and exploring how the tangible benefits of high-SES elites depend on contextual factors.

Second, I go beyond high-SES party elites and propose that locally rooted elites provide important resources, such as access to their local communities and strong social ties to new parties. Voters' local roots matter for the degree political participation (Lueders, 2024), individuals' party preferences in voting decisions (Fitzgerald, 2018), and their preferences for candidates in experimental and observational settings (see e.g. Leininger and Swalve, 2025; Munis, 2021, 2022; Campbell et al., 2019; Nyholt, 2024). Accordingly, locally rooted

individuals act as key intermediaries, enabling new parties to access and embed themselves in local communities.

Third, elite quality can also be defined in terms of its association with success, typically measured in electoral terms (Allen, Cutts and Campbell, 2016). However, far fewer studies have examined how elites influence organizational outcomes (see exceptions Goyal and Sells, 2024; Gulzar et al., 2025). Yet organizational strength matters, as it can bolster electoral performance in weakly institutionalized systems and has become increasingly relevant even in Western Europe, where established parties have weakened and new parties seek footholds (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012; Bischof and Kurer, 2023). While high-SES elites are often assumed to aid both electoral and organizational outcomes (Art, 2011), evidence for the latter is limited, and successful politicians may have few incentives to invest in party building, reflecting a "leadership–structure dilemma" (Bolleyer, 2013). The central question, then, is which elites actually build organizations—an issue especially pressing for new parties that must construct organizations before competing for office.

The Role of Supply Factors

In examining the role of supply factors in the success of new parties, previous studies have emphasized the institutional environment (Tavits, 2008), elite decision making (de de Lange and Art, 2011), a mix of structural factors and elite agency (Tavits, 2013; Bolleyer, 2013), and the role of local party organizations. I will now turn to each of these arguments in more detail.

First, the institutional environment plays a critical role in shaping the prospects of new parties, as it influences their likelihood of entering parliament and securing political office. In particular, the design of the electoral system—particularly electoral rules such as first-past-the-post or electoral thresholds—affects the extent to which parties can realistically expect to win seats (Tavits, 2006). Although most party members do not join with the primary

intention of pursuing a political career (Bale, Webb and Poletti, 2020), many are motivated by ideological commitments and are drawn to the opportunity to shape policy and advance their values. Consequently, even for members not personally seeking office, the perceived chances of electoral success can significantly affect their willingness to invest time and energy in party activities. Moreover, the attainment of political office can reinforce member loyalty due to continuing personal and professional investments in the party (Panebianco, 1988). Furthermore, by entering parliaments, new parties enjoy more opportunities to direct public attention to issues these parties own which can enhance their public support (Bischof and Wagner, 2019; Bolet and Foos, 2025; Danieli et al., 2024).

While institutional approaches offer compelling explanations for cross-national variation in new party success, they fall short in accounting for within-country variation. For instance, they do not adequately explain why some far-right parties thrive in a given institutional context while others fail (de de Lange and Art, 2011). Related to this, institutional approaches tend to downplay the role of agency obfuscating the room for maneuver and possible actions for e.g. party leaders (see also Boix, 2009).

Second, scholars have viewed party institutionalization and party building as a function of elite decision making. Focusing on emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, Tavits (2013) distinguishes, for example, between pragmatic leaders who invest in organizations and amateur leaders who lead emerging parties without institutionalizing them. Similarly, focusing on the case of the League Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and the Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV), de de Lange and Art (2011) attribute the failure of the former and the success of the latter to the agency of party leaders. While Geert Wilders hand-picked candidates and pursued a long-term institutionalization by, for example, educating his supporters about legislative processes[4], recruitment for the LPF was chaotic and less strategic, leading to more intra-party heterogeneity with the result that the party fell apart after the assassination of

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[4]Of course, the PVV is not a hard case for a highly institutionalized party, given that Wilders strictly limited access to membership to himself.

its leader. Investigating party building efforts by US presidents, Galvin Galvin 2009, 2020 argues against a predatory view of presidents who feed on their party and instead highlights how president from Eisenhower to George W. Bush found ways to invest in and strengthen party organizations (Galvin, 2009). Similarly, for the case of Donald Trump, Galvin (2020) argues that Trump pursued a novel party building strategy by focusing on the mobilization of his core electorate instead of wooing new voter groups.

While these agency-based accounts importantly shift attention beyond institutional constraints, they often understate the structural dilemmas and trade-offs leaders face. One such constraint is the leadership-structure dilemma (Bolleyer, 2013), which highlights the tension between organizational stabilization and personal authority. Institutionalizing a party can enhance its long-term viability but may simultaneously dilute the leader's centralized control, as demands for internal democracy and power-sharing from local branches and elected officials intensify. Leaders' decisions within this dilemma are shaped not only by personal preferences but also by their relative power vis-à-vis other party elites and the preexisting party structure. The extent to which party leaders genuinely possess agency remains an open question. Two illustrative cases lie at opposite ends of the internal power spectrum: Geert Wilders, as the PVV's sole formal member, exercises absolute control over candidate selection and organizational decisions. In contrast, Bernd Lucke, the founder of the AfD, was removed from party leadership at a member conference after losing majority support—demonstrating how internal party democracy can curtail a founder's influence. While these cases offer rare clarity about the internal distribution of power, most parties fall somewhere between these extremes. This makes it difficult to relate rather remote outcomes like party performance to party leaders and to disentangle the role of personal agency from structural constraints in shaping elite behavior. While research has particularly has recognized these limitation when e.g. researching the relationship between CEOs and firms (see NeelyJr. et al., 2020, p. 1034f.), this also applies to political parties and their leaders

Third, and closely related, scholars have increasingly conceptualized party building as the

outcome of an interplay between elite agency and structural conditions. These approaches seek to specify the constraints under which party leaders operate by highlighting factors such as the intensity of political competition and the degree of societal rootedness of new parties (Bolleyer, 2013; Poertner, 2024; Tavits, 2013). For instance, Tavits (2013) argues that party leaders are more likely to institutionalize their parties in competitive environments. Faced with hostile media coverage, a saturated electoral arena, or unfavorable public opinion, party leaders may view the development of party organizations as compensatory mechanism to engage voters and to level the playing field. Building on a typology of political parties that distinguishes between rooted and entrepreneurial parties, Bolleyer (2013) explains the sustained success of parties in Western European countries: rooted parties emerge organically from existing social movements or civic organizations such as Green parties in Europe which developed out of peace, environmental, and citizens' initiatives. Entrepreneurial parties, by contrast, are driven by individual leaders or cliques who capitalize on political opportunities. Entrepreneurial parties, however, can become institutionalized and take root if party leaders perceive that the benefits of these processes outweigh the costs. Bolleyer's Bolleyer (2013) empirical analyses suggest that rooted parties are significantly more likely to survive over time and eventually enter parliament than entrepreneurial parties, which are more likely to disintegrate. Similarly, Poertner (2024) argues that new parties can try to use existing social organizations and route their appeals through these organizations. Through this "organizational mediated strategy", new parties can turn organization members or people that close to these organizations to loyal partisans.

While these approaches speak to the constraints in which party leaders make their decision, it is still limited in at least three ways: first, institutionalization under competitive pressure can result not only from top-down elite strategies but also from bottom-up dynamics, where local actors build supportive communities to resist external social pressure. Second, some structural constraints—such as media hostility—may be more malleable than assumed. One AfD organizer, for instance, mentioned that he had an amicable relationship

with a newspaper resulting in a somewhat less hostile coverage of local AfD activity (Interview 4). This calls into question whether media hostility is a constraint and to what extent it can be shaped by new party actors. Antagonizing media may also be a strategical choice leading to greater cohesion within a new party. Third, typologies such as the distinction between rooted and entrepreneurial parties are limited in their ability to account for variation in party-building success within the same institutional and national context.

Finally, more recent scholarship has moved beyond treating the party as a unitary actor and instead focuses on the development and dynamics of local party branches (see e.g., Ellinas, 2020; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016; Dinas et al., 2016). This body of work highlights the importance of organizational longevity, local embeddedness, and the socio-demographic composition of local branches for party development and electoral success. First, the organizational age—that is, the duration of a local branch's existence—has been shown to affect both electoral performance (Loxbo and Bolin, 2016) and activist mobilization (Ellinas, 2020, Chapter 6). In this sense, long-standing organizational roots at the local level appear to contribute positively to a party's broader organizational and electoral growth. Second, scholars have not only highlighted organizational longevity but also the extent to which parties are embedded in local communities as important factors for their electoral success. Dinas et al. (2016) investigate how local party organizations of the Golden Dawn in Greece took root by developing a local presence in Athens. Dinas et al. (2016) detail how Golden Dawn activists gained local visibility by providing services such as "escorting pensioners to the bank or the supermarket" (Dinas et al., 2016, p. 85). This form of visibility, paired with a protective, nativist brand identity, enabled Golden Dawn to consolidate electoral support in local contexts and build political strongholds from below. Third, the composition of local branches also matters. Loxbo and Bolin (2016) demonstrate that local branches of the Sweden Democrats with a higher share of candidates from high-SES backgrounds were more successful in municipal elections.

While disaggregating national parties into their subnational components has generated

valuable insights, several limitations remain. First, although it is intuitive that longstanding organizational presence enhances party strength, such durability is itself an outcome that warrants explanation. It is likely shaped by self-reinforcing mechanisms that can only be fully understood by examining the early stages of party development. Second, if visibility is crucial, it is unclear where and how parties can generate it in the first place and how it is linked to the capacity—e.g. in terms of local party personnel—of local party chapters. Third, regarding branch composition, the presence of high-SES candidates may not simply be a cause of local success, but also a consequence of favorable political environments. For instance, such candidates may be more inclined to join radical right parties like the Sweden Democrats in areas where backlash is minimal and electoral prospects are strong (see Valentim, 2024). Given that candidates are likely to consider costs and benefits of running especially for non-mainstream parties, it is important to specify environments under which candidates emerge or to analyze plausible counterfactuals to address potential endogeneity concerns. Finally, researchers have typically explained the local electoral strength of a given party via the local organizational features of the same party. However, the success of new parties is also partially driven by the actions and capacities of their political competitors. While researchers have particularly emphasized this on the national level (Adams et al., 2006; Abou-Chadi, 2016), evidence also suggests that local political competition can affect the organizational and electoral success of new parties (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017, p. 811). How the structure of political systematically affects the emergence of new parties in local political arenas is, however, still underexplored.

The Electoral Demand for New Parties

Which drivers on the demand side affect the success and durability of new party organizations? Highlighting the role of voters in this process, scholars have argued that new parties take advantage of existing preferences in the electorate (Hug, 2001; Van De Wardt and Otjes,

2022; Riera and Russo, 2016). This perspective builds on a spatial model of party competition, in which new parties emerge to fill representation gaps—that is, ideological spaces not adequately occupied by established parties (Van De Wardt and Otjes, 2022). Empirical findings lend partial support to this logic. In a cross-national analysis of seventeen countries, Van De Wardt and Otjes (2022) find evidence that representation gaps increase the likelihood of emerging new parties and that individuals are more likely to vote for new parties if they are ideologically closer to these parties. Similarly for the case of Germany, Pappi, Kurella and Bräuninger (2019) find that voter preferences were predictive of support for the Greens in 1986 and for the AfD in 2017, consistent with the spatial logic of party competition. And Otjes and De Wardt (2023) find, based on Dutch panel data, that individuals vote for new parties because they perceive them as ideologically closer. Despite this evidence, the spatial model has a couple of shortcomings, namely the sole focus on policy motivated voters, multidimensionality of the policy space, as well as a lack of theorizing constraints of established parties.

First, Wuttke (2020) demonstrates—based on longitudinal panel surveys in Germany and the Netherlands—that voters of new parties often prefer policies that are inconsistent, and sometimes even divergent, from the policies proposed by the new party they support. On the other hand, Wuttke (2020) shows that even voters who are ideologically proximate to new parties often refrain from supporting them due to pre-existing partisan loyalties. While these findings do not fundamentally contradict the spatial model, they complicate a purely proximity-based account of voter behavior (see also Otjes and De Wardt, 2023). Rather than simply choosing parties that fill representational gaps, voters appear to be influenced by a broader set of motivations, including habit, identity, and affective attachments.

Second, the standard spatial model offers an overly simplified view of voter behavior by assuming a unidimensional policy space, whereas in reality, the political landscape is multidimensional (Achen and Bartels, 2016). Voters are often confronted with issue bundles proposed by parties that may involve trade-offs across different dimensions, forcing them to

prioritize among competing concerns. Importantly, not all issues within a party's platform carry equal weight in the minds of voters. Issue salience, however, is not fixed but can be shaped by media and political entrepreneurs (see e.g. Brubaker, 2002). Focusing on the rise of far-right parties, Danieli et al. (2024), for example, show that the growing success of radical right parties cannot be attributed to changing *preferences* in the electorate, but is better explained by the rising *salience* of the issues championed by far-right parties. This insight assigns an important role not only to the media environment but also to the ability of new party organizations to make issues salient in the first place.

Finally, the idea that new parties capitalize on existing preferences in the electorate implicitly assumes that established parties either fail to adapt their programmatic strategies to address representation gaps or are constrained in their ability to do so. In this sense, representation gaps are not solely the result of unmet voter preferences, but also reflect a failure or unwillingness of established parties to respond to emerging societal demands (see Abou-Chadi, 2016; Meguid, 2005). As Poguntke (1992, p. 338) notes in his analysis of the formation of the German Green Party, "the actual reason for the foundation of a Green Party [...] was the deficient responsiveness of the German party system towards those political problems which were particularly relevant for potential Green voters". Theorizing this deficient responsiveness is then as important as the following voter shift when explaining the rise of new parties based on representation gaps.

Taken together, electoral demand must be examined in conjunction with supply-side factors to fully account for the success of new political parties. At the macro level, explanations that focus exclusively on voter demand overlook the agency of new party actors—who actively shape political agendas and issue salience—as well as the strategic (in)action of established party elites, who may fail to respond effectively to emerging representation gaps. As such, the emergence and success of new parties are best understood as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between supply and demand (Golder, 2016). To evaluate the mechanisms behind new party success and to explore how supply and demand interact in practice,

I focus on the local level, where new parties must rely on actors embedded in communities to mobilize support, build legitimacy, and act as local ambassadors of the party's identity and message (Favero and Zulianello, 2023). Understanding how parties convert latent electoral demand into durable organizational presence requires greater analytical attention to local party organization and candidate recruitment.

3 Data

How can we deepen our understanding of party-building processes? Building on a growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of political candidates in shaping party development (Sikk and Köker, 2023), I focus on individuals running for political office and argue that this focus provides valuable insights into how new parties on the ground gain a foothold by building local organizations and attracting voters. In this chapter, I introduce and describe the main dataset that represents the foundation for the empirical analyses in subsequent chapters. This dataset includes detailed information on over 400,000 candidates' occupation, age, place of residence, local embeddedness (proxied via last names), party affiliation, electoral performance, and political experience. Given its geographic coverage and its comprehensiveness, this data allows to study the emergence of new parties on a geographically fine-grained level, offering a new, detailed look into rooting processes of local party organizations. First, I outline how this data was recorded, collected, and digitized. I also provide information about the geographic and temporal coverage and discuss limitations. I then explain how I coded candidate characteristics. In the last part of the chapter, I present descriptive statistics of these characteristics.

3.1 Data Collection

When local party organizations contest local elections in Germany, they must nominate candidates and submit candidate names and information to local authorities. Local authorities, in turn, publish lists of all candidates (so-called "Zugelassene Wahlvorschläge") shortly before the election to inform voters of their choices. Figure 3.1 shows an example of such a candidate list. These lists are informative for researchers studying the parties' ground operations for three main reasons: first, the candidate lists provide rich information about the composition of party activists, since they include candidates' first names (which indirectly allows one to infer gender), list position, year of birth, occupation, and addresses.

Figure 3.1: Example of Candidate List

Note: The figure presents an example of a typical candidate list. I redacted all names and personal details to protect privacy. In some states, the entire county constitutes a single district. Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia also feature birthplaces of local candidates.

Second, candidates are the smallest unit necessary for parties. Parties can do without members—as the case of the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands demonstrates (see e.g. de de Lange and Art, 2011)—but they always have to run candidates to contest elections

(see Sikk and Köker, 2023). Following Sikk and Köker (2023), I use this individual-level information to track candidates over time allowing me to not only observe changes in the party personnel over time but also providing additional information on candidates. In particular, it allows me to code whether new parties' candidates run for the first time in a county election or have been politically active for other parties in previous county elections.

Third, focusing on local-level candidates offers a significant analytical advantage due to the relatively low degree of selection compared to state or federal candidacies. Established parties often face difficulties in filling their local candidate lists (see Alizade et al., 2025), and this challenge is even more pronounced for new and emerging parties. Unlike federal-level candidates, who are often carefully vetted, local candidates provide a more unfiltered view into the inner workings of party organizations.

While data on candidates is very informative, it is often difficult to obtain (Tavits, 2010, p. 219), especially for local elections (Wegschaider, Gross and Schmid, 2022, see also)[1]. This is further complicated by the decentralized nature of the German election administration, which poses practical challenges for researchers. It is often unclear where local officials published candidate lists. Administrators used a variety of channels to publish these lists, such as official gazettes, local newspapers, or, for more recent elections, websites[2] Especially for past periods, such as the 1980s, it is often difficult to trace the correct sources and find available copies.

To avoid sampling bias, I collected data from all sources such as websites, local newspapers, and official gazettes. These documents are not collected in a systematic and easily accessible way. While the German National Library was technically responsible for collecting these records until 2009, the records are sometimes incomplete or were only available in the

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[1]For national elections, candidate surveys have proved useful to tap into attitudes of candidates and their perception of the political environment (Bäuerle and Wurthmann, 2025) but only include top-level candidates and have relatively low response rates (e.g. under 30% for the German Longitudinal Election Study in 2021 (ibid., p. 8).

[2]In some cases, however, authorities told me that they simply posted these lists on the walls of town halls throughout the county. The authorities sometimes dutifully announced this in the official gazettes without publishing the actual lists there. In these cases, I was unable to collect lists of candidates.

respective state libraries, which took over responsibility for the county gazettes after 2009. As a result, additional data was collected in Hanover (*Gottfried-Wilhelm-Leibniz Bibliothek*), Munich (*Bayerische Staatsbibliothek*), Stuttgart (*Württembergische Landesbibliothek*), and Karlsruhe (*Badische Landesbibliothek*). This data came in the form of either microfilm (in the case of local newspapers) or paper documents, which I scanned in order to digitize the material.

My goal was to compile not only candidate lists but also detailed election results, including information on which candidates were elected and, in the case of open-list elections, the number of votes each candidate received. To achieve this, I had to locate, scan, and digitize two sets of documents for each county-year observation: candidate lists—typically published four to eight weeks prior to the election—and official election results, which were generally released four to eight weeks following the election. Both sets of documents required separate digitization before they could be merged. This merging process was essential, as electoral results alone contained limited information—often omitting key candidate details such as birth years or list positions—that were only available in the candidate lists.

Transforming the digitized material into machine-readable data posed another significant challenge, primarily because most of the records—excluding those from most recent elections—were available only as scanned documents. This process was further complicated by the heterogeneity of document layouts and formatting decisions made by local officials, which varied widely across regions and election years. To overcome these challenges, I developed a Shiny application that enabled manual inspection of the documents, allowed for the flexible specification of layout parameters, and facilitated the extraction of relevant columns and rows using OCR (optical character recognition) technology (see Appendix A.5 for technical details). Overall, compiling a dataset of local candidates is already a demanding task. Extending this effort to historical periods and executing it within a federal system introduces an additional layer of complexity.

3.2 Data Coverage

Given the complexity of data collection, I chose county-year observations along two key dimensions. First, on the geographic dimension, I excluded the three city-states (Berlin, Bremen, and Hamburg) from the analysis. The structure of local elections in these states differs significantly from that of other municipalities, particularly in terms of candidate profiles, compensation structures, and career trajectories, making direct comparisons problematic. Second, on the temporal dimension, I focused on collecting data for each county covering the last local election prior to the founding of the respective party, as well as the three subsequent elections following its establishment.

This focus on local elections necessarily confines the analysis to the available dates of such elections, which in Germany are determined at the state level and lack national standardization. Some states synchronize local elections with European Parliament elections, but this practice is not applied uniformly. Moreover, each state sets its own electoral cycle, ranging from four to six years. These institutional differences are summarized in Table 3.1.

I collected data on candidates from all political parties, which enabled me to observe instances of candidate switching both to and from new parties. Moreover, the breadth of this dataset provides a valuable reference group, allowing for comparisons between the initial composition of new party candidates and those of established parties. This, in turn, makes it possible to contextualize the organizational and candidate development of new parties relative to broader trends in the party system over the same time period.

In the next step, I map the coverage of my data in Figure 3.2. The figure shows counties by number of elections covered for my two periods. For the 1980s, the data is more limited than for the 2010s when the AfD emerged. This reflects larger costs and greater difficulty in data collection. Beyond the excluded three city states, there is also a dearth of data for counties in the smallest state, the Saar. Here, I was unable to locate records for most

Table 3.1: Local Election Years Across German States

State	Green Party Emergence	AfD emergence	Legislative period
Baden-Württemberg	1979/1980*, 1984, 1989, 1994	2009, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years
Bavaria	1978, 1984, 1990	2008, 2014, 2020	6 years
Hesse	1977, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1993	2011, 2016, 2021	4 years (until 2001), 5 years (since 2006)
Lower Saxony	1977, 1981, 1986, 1991	2011, 2016, 2021	4 years (until 1981), 5 years (since 1986)
North Rhine Westphalia	1979, 1984, 1989, 1994	2009, 2014, 2020	5 years
Rhineland-Palatinate	1979, 1984, 1989, 1994	2009, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years
Schleswig-Holstein	1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994	2013, 2018, 2023	4 years (until 1998), 5 years (since 2003)
Brandenburg		2009, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania		2009, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years
Saxony		2008/2009*, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years
Saxony-Anhalt		2007/2008*, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years
Thuringia		2009, 2014, 2019, 2024	5 years

Note: * indicates that local elections took place at different dates. In Baden-Wuerttemberg, urban and rural counties voted in different years until 1980. In Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, the variation in election dates stemmed from territorial reforms, with restructured counties voting at different times than those unchanged. Due to the lack of free elections, counties in East Germany were excluded for the emergence period of the Green Party.

county-year pairs in both emergence periods. For the 1980s, coverage is better for South German counties, reflecting more easily accessible data. Overall, the data consists of 1,362 county-election year dyads including 455,817 candidacies[3]. But how representative are the counties in my sample? During the Green emergence period, counties in the sample exhibit lower unemployment rates and higher shares of employment in the industrial sector, but lower shares in the service sector than counties not in the sample. There is no significant difference in population density, logged population, or foreigner share between counties in and out of the sample. For the elections covering the AfD emergence period, counties in the sample differ in their higher logged population, larger foreigner share and lower unemployment rate. I provide more details in Appendix A.2.

Data Coding

Turning to the micro-level candidate, I now briefly outline how I coded candidates' characteristics. In particular, I focus on the coding of socioeconomic status (SES), gender, location, local embedded, political experience, and electoral performance.

Socioeconomic Status. To code SES, I take advantage of candidates' reported occupations and use the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) classification. By classifying into the ISCO scheme, I follow previous research that has used ISCO classification to characterize candidates (Art, 2011; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016) allowing me to compare my results to these studies too. Relying on ISCO codes has the additional advantage that German authorities provide a list of occupations and their ISCO classification. I cleaned the occupational information and used this information in a first step. In a second step, I used a mix of ChatGPT and manual coding for the remaining observations. The ISCO classification divides occupations into ten major groups, namely managers, professionals,

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[3]Candidacies describe candidate-election year observations. Thus, multiple candidacies might result from the same candidate running repeatedly over time.

A. Counties in sample 1976-1991   B. Counties in sample 2008-2024
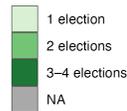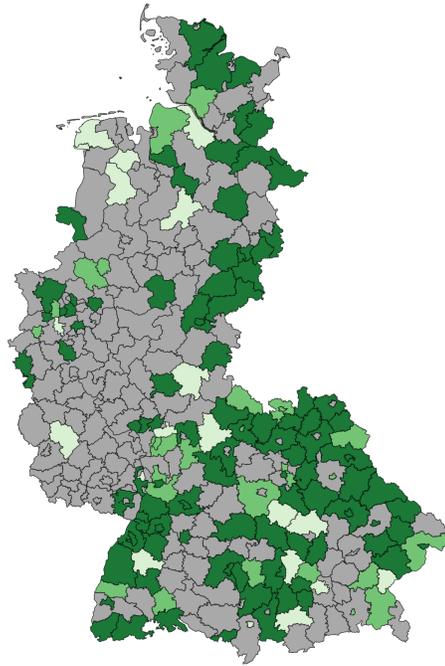
	1 election
	2 elections
	3–4 elections
	NA
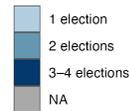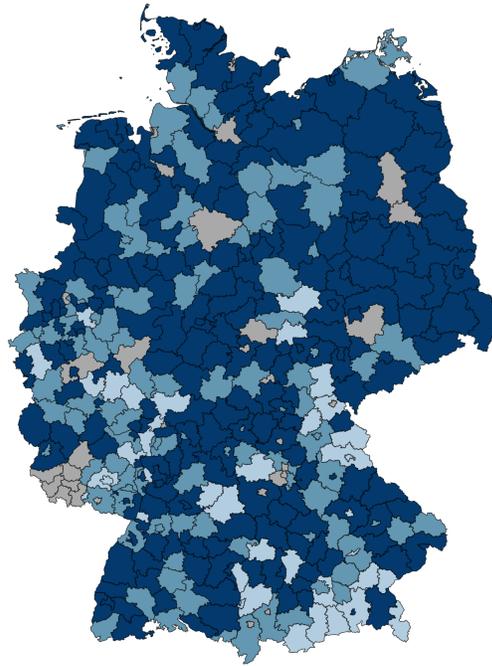
Figure 3.2: Data Coverage

Note: The figure illustrates data coverage across German counties. Darker shading indicates a larger number of available elections. Because some states held a maximum of only three elections, counties with three or four elections have been grouped together.

technicians, clerical support workers, service and sales workers, skilled agricultural work-ers, craft-related workers, plant and machine operators, elementary occupations as well as armed forces occupations. To code high-SES candidates, I follow previous research (Art, 2011; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016; Valentim, 2024) and created a dummy variable equal to one if a candidate belongs to ISCO class 1 (managers) or 2 (professionals). I manually coded additional dummies for information not included in the ISCO classification. These include, for example, retired persons, students, apprentices, the self-employed, the unemployed, and persons who reported not being in the labor force[4]. It is important to note that candidates can indicate several occupations. For instance, many mayors (ISCO 1) list other occupations,

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[4]This last category consisted mostly of women providing 'housewife' as occupational information.

such as farmer (ISCO 6), as well. Furthermore, retired people often used their occupation followed by markers indicating their retirement [5]. In these cases, I code the respective class and the dummy for retirement as equal to one.

Gender. To determine candidates' gender, I used the Gender API, a service that classifies gender based on first names. For candidates who provided both first and middle names, I submitted all given names to the API and assigned a gender label—"male" or "female"— only if the service returned consistent results across all names. In cases where names were ambiguous or could not be classified by the API, I coded names manually. This step was particularly important for names that the API failed to recognize, which were often female names of non-Western origin.

Location. I geocoded candidates' reported places of residence using Google's Geocoding API.[6] To reduce the risk of coding errors, I restricted geocoding queries to the respective county in which the candidate was running. In cases in which automated geocoding failed, I manually coded the location.

Local Roots. To proxy local embeddedness, I use two complementary strategies. First, I generate a binary variable that indicates whether a candidate was born in the same county in which they currently reside. This straightforward proxy captures geographic rootedness by assuming that birthplace correlates with long-term ties to the local community. The second strategy uses lastname distribution to infer regional embeddedness. The underlying intuition is that certain lastnames are strongly concentrated in specific regions and rarely occur outside of them. Individuals with such regionally distinctive names may have deeper familial ties to the area and may also be perceived by voters as more "local." Drawing on a dataset of 36

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[5] An example occupation would read "Oberstudienrat i. R." (Teacher in retirement). Other candidates used "a. D." ('außer Dienst', also translating to retired).

[6] Due to privacy and safety concerns, local authorities have only published candidates' places of residence—rather than full street-level addresses—since 2018. For earlier election years, full addresses were still provided.

million entries from German telephone directories from 1996, I use the distribution of last names to classify names as local. I classify name-county dyads—allowing for variation of localness within lastnames and across counties—as local if a last names a) does not appear in more than 25% of all counties, b) occurs more often in a given county than in all others (absolutely and relative, I provide details in Appendix A.4). This surname-based measure offers several advantages. Unlike the birthplace variable, it is available for all counties and can be applied uniformly across both time periods analyzed. The use of 1996 data is especially beneficial given widespread coverage of landlines at the time. A key limitation, however, is that the data postdates the emergence of the Green Party. Nonetheless, I argue that surname distributions should be relatively sticky over time and are unlikely to change unless entire family networks relocate systematically [7]. Any demographic shifts occurring after the Green Party's founding would also introduce noise, thereby biasing estimates toward zero.

Political Experience. To code political experience, I rely on information indicating whether candidates have previously run for any party. To track candidates over time, I use the fastLink package in R (see Enamorado, Fifield and Imai, 2019) to match individuals based on their first name, last name, and birth year. When birth year information was unavailable, matching was based solely on first and last names. I restricted matches to candidates within the same county. I also allowed for minor variations across elections to account for inconsistencies in how names are recorded — for example, county administrators occasionally misspell last names, or candidates may use different versions of their first names (e.g., omitting middle names). Political experience is coded in two binary variables. The first indicates whether a candidate ran in the previous election (1 = yes, 0 = no). The second indicates whether a candidate was elected in the previous election (1 = elected, 0 = not elected).

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[7]One notable exception may be the significant post-reunification emigration from East German states. However, this should not affect the surname-based measure for the West German counties that form the focus of my analysis during the Green Party's emergence.

Electoral Performance. While candidates lists are published before the election, county officials also release electoral results listing the elected local council members. Details of these results vary, especially across states, due to varying electoral institutions. In open-list elections, they usually provide the total number of votes each candidate received and whether they were elected. In mixed-member county elections, these results often only list the elected politicians by name and party. I attempted to collect the published results whenever possible as well.

Descriptives

How are the candidate characteristics distributed across parties? To evaluate this, I focus on data from the 1980s and 2010s and provide descriptive statistics for the candidates in the two datasets in Tables 3.2 and 3.3. The table shows mean values and standard deviations of local candidates in the two emergence periods in the 1980s and 2010s. I group candidates by new and established parties to compare these two groups in the respective periods.

I begin with the 1980s and the emergence of the Green Party. The dataset for this period includes information on over 11,000 local Green Party candidates, alongside more than 100,000 local candidates from other parties. As shown in Table 3.2, Green Party candidates were significantly more likely to be women, with women comprising 38% of their ranks compared to just 19% among candidates from other parties. In addition, Green Party candidates were less likely to have been born in the county in which they resided, indicating lower levels of local embeddedness. Unsurprisingly, they were also notably younger—on average, about ten years younger—than their counterparts in more established parties.

In line with this age gap, Green Party candidates are also much more likely to be 'In training'—a category that includes apprentices, college, and high school students—and are also less likely to be retired. The occupational structure reveals that Green Party candidates

feature more managers and professionals, but fewer technicians and clerks and crafts and trades people than other parties.

Turning to political experience and office-holding, 11% of Green Party candidates were elected, compared to 20% for candidates from other parties. There are also notable differences in the share of candidates who previously ran for office: for the Green Party, this figure stands at 20%, whereas it is approximately twice as high for established parties. While these numbers may initially appear relatively high, they should be interpreted with caution. These percentages reflect not only actual electoral success but also limited political competition—particularly in the late 1970s, when, in many counties, only three parties (CDU/CSU, FDP, and SPD) fielded candidates. The high share of apparent party switchers is at least partially due to inconsistencies in local party naming conventions and, to some extent, reflects changes in the Green Party's own labeling, such as transitions from "Alternative Liste" to "Green Party."

To assess potential systematic biases in the dataset, I examine the distribution of missing values across variables for Green Party candidates in comparison to candidates from other parties. As shown in Table A.2 in the Appendix, there are only minor differences in the extent of missing data for socio-demographic characteristics and occupational information. For Green Party candidates, there is a somewhat higher level of missingness in variables related to party switching, which can be attributed to a more fluid and less stable candidate pool. Conversely, candidates from other parties exhibit a slightly higher rate of missing values for the variable 'Run (t–1)', which indicates whether a candidate also ran in the previous election.

Turning to the 2010s and the rise of the AfD, the dataset includes over 16,000 candidate-year observations for AfD candidates and approximately 372,000 for candidates from other parties (see Table 3.3). On average, local AfD candidates are older than their counterparts, with a mean age of 55 compared to 51 years for candidates from other parties. They are also

Table 3.2: Local Candidate Descriptives in the Green Party Emergence Period (1976-1994)

	Green Party					Other Parties				
	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Sociodemographics										
Female	11260	0.37	0.48	0	1	112812	0.19	0.39	0	1
Age	10768	36.85	11.07	18	89	103830	46.53	12.41	18	94
Local born	3577	0.33	0.47	0	1	33052	0.42	0.49	0	1
Local name (IQR)	11270	0.05	0.22	0	1	112967	0.08	0.28	0	1
Occupational Coding										
Managers & Professionals (ISCO 1-2)	10791	0.46	0.50	0	1	107170	0.39	0.49	0	1
Technicians, Clerks (ISCO 3-5)	10791	0.22	0.41	0	1	107170	0.35	0.48	0	1
Agriculture, Crafts and Trades (ISCO 6-9)	10791	0.10	0.30	0	1	107170	0.14	0.35	0	1
Military (ISCO 0)	10791	0.00	0.03	0	1	107170	0.01	0.09	0	1
Retired	10791	0.01	0.10	0	1	107170	0.03	0.16	0	1
In training	10791	0.12	0.33	0	1	107170	0.03	0.17	0	1
Political experience										
Elected	7562	0.11	0.31	0	1	71165	0.20	0.40	0	1
Elected (t-1)	1241	0.15	0.36	0	1	20468	0.34	0.47	0	1
Run (t-1)	9531	0.20	0.40	0	1	79690	0.41	0.49	0	1
Run (t+1)	9084	0.35	0.48	0	1	95938	0.43	0.50	0	1
Switching (t+1)	3155	0.04	0.20	0	1	41234	0.10	0.31	0	1
Switching (t-1)	1903	0.12	0.32	0	1	32601	0.10	0.31	0	1

Note: Table provides descriptive statistics on Green Party candidates across socio-demographics, occupations, and political experiences. N refers to the number of non-missing observations. Additional information on the distribution of missing values is provided in Table A.2.

more likely to be male: only 20% of AfD candidates are female, compared to 31% among candidates from other parties.

Occupational patterns further distinguish AfD candidates. They are more likely to be retired and less likely to work in managerial or professional roles. Conversely, the proportion of candidates from craft and trade occupations is notably higher among the AfD. Differences are somewhat less pronounced for other occupational categories such as military personnel, technicians, clerks, and students.

Again, checking for systematic differences in data availability, Table A.3 in the Appendix reveals few differences for socio-demographic variables (female, age, local born) and occupational information. As for the Greens, we see a higher share of missing values for the party

switching variable.

Table 3.3: Local Candidate Descriptives in the AfD Emergence Period (2008-2024)

	AfD					Other Parties				
	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Sociodemographics										
Female	16894	0.20	0.40	0	1	373904	0.31	0.46	0	1
Age	16799	54.10	14.15	17	101	372114	51.04	14.14	16	101
Local born	4417	0.37	0.48	0	1	85457	0.44	0.50	0	1
Local name (IQR)	16903	0.04	0.20	0	1	374122	0.07	0.25	0	1
Occupational Coding										
Managers & Professionals (ISCO 1-2)	15681	0.31	0.46	0	1	352419	0.46	0.50	0	1
Technicians, Clerks (ISCO 3-5)	15681	0.35	0.48	0	1	352419	0.31	0.46	0	1
Agriculture, Crafts and Trades (ISCO 6-9)	15681	0.14	0.35	0	1	352419	0.09	0.28	0	1
Military (ISCO 0)	15681	0.01	0.08	0	1	352419	0.01	0.07	0	1
Retired	15681	0.13	0.34	0	1	352419	0.07	0.25	0	1
In training	15681	0.02	0.15	0	1	352419	0.05	0.21	0	1
Political experience										
Elected	9812	0.24	0.43	0	1	195407	0.15	0.36	0	1
Elected (t-1)	1462	0.35	0.48	0	1	52695	0.24	0.43	0	1
Run (t-1)	13519	0.17	0.38	0	1	274676	0.44	0.50	0	1
Run (t+1)	6871	0.34	0.47	0	1	219416	0.45	0.50	0	1
Switching (t+1)	2351	0.11	0.31	0	1	99477	0.10	0.29	0	1
Switching (t-1)	2352	0.15	0.36	0	1	121132	0.10	0.30	0	1

Note: Table provides descriptive statistics on AfD candidates across socio-demographics, occupations, and political experiences. N refers to the number of non-missing observations. Additional information on the distribution of missing values is provided in Table A.3.

How are locally rooted and high-SES elites distributed across space? To examine this question, I plot the share of locally rooted and high-SES elites across counties. Figure 3.3 illustrates their spatial distribution during the Green Party's emergence period. The figure reveals a particularly high share of high-SES elites in the southwest of Germany, while locally rooted elites are most prevalent in the northwest and southeast regions.

Figure 3.4 displays the spatial distribution of locally rooted and high-SES elites during the period of AfD party emergence. Locally rooted elites are particularly common in the northwest and southeast regions, whereas they are less frequently found in metropolitan areas such as the Ruhr region or the surroundings of Munich. Similarly, the share of locally rooted elites is lower in the East German states.

A. Share of High-SES Elites
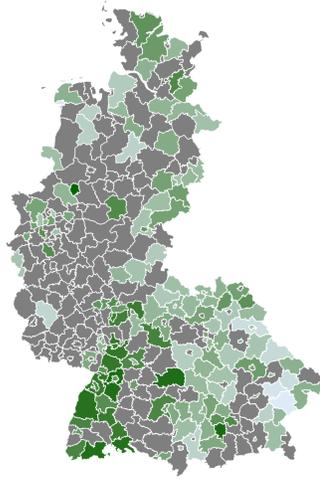
B. Share of Local Elites
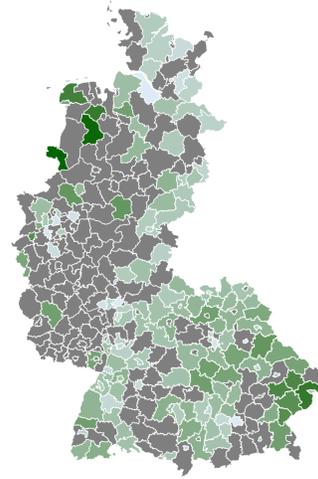
Figure 3.3: Distribution of Green Party Elites

Note: Figure visualizes the share of high-SES and locally rooted elites across all parties and election years between 1976 and 1994. Missing counties in grey.

The spatial pattern of high-SES elites closely resembles that observed during the Green Party's emergence period. Their share is relatively high in the southwest but also notable in parts of Saxony and Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania.

A. Share of High-SES Elites
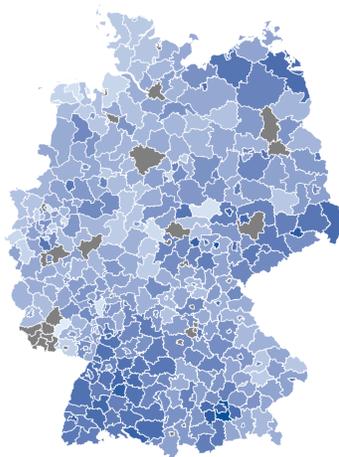
B. Share of Local Elites
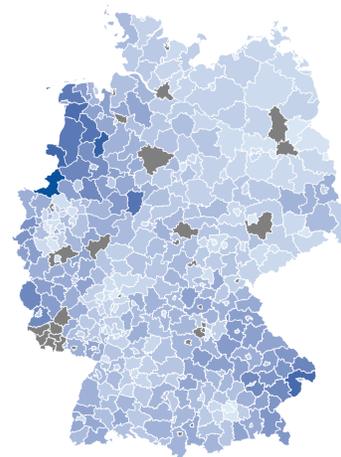
Figure 3.4: Distribution of AfD Elites

Note: Figure visualizes the share of high-SES and locally rooted elites across all parties and election years between 2008 and 2024. Missing counties in grey.

In the following section, I situate these findings within the broader context of the German party system and provide background on the two primary cases examined in this study, the Greens and the AfD. This contextualization is essential for clarifying the conditions under which both the Greens and the AfD sought to establish themselves as viable political actors.

4 Context and Party Development

Why is Germany an instructive case for examining the emergence and development of new political parties? In this chapter, I approach this question in two ways and structure the chapter accordingly: first, I present particulars of the German case focusing on the function of local parties, their role in national party organizations, and the general institutional framework that party organizations face. I situate my cases in the German party system, justifying my focus on Germany and the district level, and explain the particularities of party organization in the German case. I argue that Germany is an ideal case to observe the building of local party organizations during parties' emergence periods the emergence, given the multi-layered political arena and the organizational presence of other competing parties requiring new parties to also build up their ground game. I focus on the county level because it represents a layer of local politics that transcends the narrow local focus of municipal politics, as county positions are stepping stones to higher offices.

In the second part, I present my two cases chronologically, starting with the rise of the Green Party in the 1980s. For each case, I zoom in on the founding processes and the early period in which these two political parties were formed, matured and consolidated. Going beyond existing accounts, I also use candidate data and the spread of local branches to further illustrate and map this development geographically. Finally, I justify my choice of cases and ask: What do we gain from comparing the Greens and the AfD? How do these

two cases compare with other green or radical right parties in Western Europe? I argue that these two cases allow me to examine broader patterns in the party-building process that generalize beyond the German case.

4.1   The German Context

What characterizes the German context in terms of party competition, local-level politics, and party organizations? How is it distinct and how is it similar to other contexts? I first delve into the institutional environment that new parties face and then continue with the organization and regulation of German political parties.

Institutional Framework for Political Parties in Germany

What is the institutional framework for new parties in Germany? There are three main hurdles that new parties face when competing in Germany: the federal structure of the political system, the principle of subsidiarity combined with competences at the state and local level, and the strong position of (established) political parties in German politics due to legal regulations and electoral thresholds.

Federalism. Germany is a federal state—as opposed to unitary states such as France, Italy, Sweden or Denmark. As a result, decision-making is decentralized and, depending on the issue, is assigned not only to the national but also to state or local governments. This multi-level system creates difficulties for new parties cannot simply focus on navigating one political arena to gain political power. Instead, new political organizations find themselves constantly in campaigns on the subnational level where the importance of their core issues may vary. This is detrimental in three ways for emerging new parties: first, subnational campaigns are costly in general but even more so for nascent organizations with limited

monetary resources. Second, they may take the focus away from national discussions to more regional topics that may be harder to attack for new parties. Third, it also puts strains on weak organizations with limited personnel. Take for instance, the Bündis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW)—a party split of the Left Party—who struggled to field candidate lists for the federal elections in 2025, in part because of their limited base of about 1,000 members[1].

Subsidiarity. On the other hand, the local level in Germany also provides ample opportunity for new parties to win seats in local assemblies and gain legislative experience. Germany's political system follows the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that decisions are made, wherever possible, at the lowest administrative level. In practice, this grants municipal councils considerable autonomy over issues such as the construction of schools and kindergartens or the determination of property tax levels. This contrasts with more centralized systems, such as in France, and turns the local level into an important arena where democracy can be directly experienced. As one interviewee noted:

> "I am real fan of grassroots and local politics. I think that's not only exciting, but also important [...] The French really envy us for our local self-government in Germany, so we are not completely undemocratic here, as some people [in my party] think, but I always say that foreign countries also envy us to a certain extent because we can regulate quite a lot in the municipalities ourselves."
> *(Interview 1)*

Being involved in these important local-level political processes can help new parties to train cadres for higher office, and signal legislative effectiveness to their constituents by promoting local success stories. As Paxton (2023, p. 53) describes, local power can serve

---

[1]*Warum die Neuwahl für das BSW ein Dilemma ist.* https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/bsw-wagenknecht-partei-analyse-100.html

as a "laboratory or testing ground" for new parties, allowing them to design and implement policies with a narrow geographic scope that they can potentially scale up.

Strong Competing Parties. The German system implicitly and explicitly advantages established parties in at least two major ways. First, new parties must clear the electoral threshold of five percent applied to local, state, and national elections. Intentionally adopted to foster concentration and provide stability, it essentially disadvantaged emerging parties that sometimes failed to clear it by a slim margins. For example, the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) in 1969 only failed by 0.4 and the AfD in 2013 only by 0.3 percentage points to win seats in the Bundestag. Second, established political receive perks such as the right to establish a political foundation that can distribute e.g. scholarships to students, work as political thinktank, or provide political education[2]. These foundations thus do not only provide valuable recruitment pools through networks but also serve as strategic policy thinktanks that provide important impulses for political parties. The resources that these foundations are provided with are also sizable, totaling e.g. 612 million Euros in 2017 (Lepszy, 2021).

Party Organizations in Germany

How do local party structures look like at the local level? How are they embedded and supported in party finances? And, what role do they play in candidate nominations? In the following, I detail role of local party organization before I delve into the description of my two cases.

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[2]Previously, every party that entered the Bundestag at least two times was granted this provision. However, the law was changed after the AfD sued against it in 2023. More specifically, the new law requires that the foundation has to promote democratic values of the Basic Law—the German constitution—and increased the hurdle from two to three consequences entrances.

Structure and Functions

In general, party organizations in Germany mirror the administrative structure and are structured in three subnational levels, state organizations (Landesverbände), county organizations (Kreisverbände) and municipal organizations (Ortsverbände). There are, however, differences between these three levels. While all three levels have autonomy in personnel and statutory processes—meaning they can freely decide over how they organize their branch and who is leading it —, only state and county organizations have financial autonomy. Thus, municipal organizations are financially dependent on resources from their county organization. This structure is virtually the same across all major parties even though it had not always been the case. For instance, the CDU implemented the financial autonomy of county organization only in the 1960s when it started to transform to a party with a broader mass appeal (Salten, 2022).

The financial autonomy of county organizations means in practice that they generate their own funds via membership dues paid by those party members that live in their territory. This means that they also have to keep the membership files up to date. State organizations have an important control function on county finances. County organizations also have financial obligations to state organizations that finance state-level activities such as state party conferences. Membership dues are only one source of income for political parties: the state finances German parties with 0.45 Euro for every Euro in member dues (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2022). The idea behind this is that parties should be rooted in society and accordingly compensated. Thus, parties in Germany have strong incentives to build up their membership. Finally, parties also receive a financial compensation for electoral campaigns from the state if they manage to clear low electoral threshold (e.g. 0.5% in federal elections) (Korte, 2021).

Apart from the financial side, subnational party organizations contribute in two important way to intra-party democracy—an important, mandatory principle in German party

regulation —, by ensuring democratic intra-party decision making and democratic nom-inations of candidates for local and higher-level offices. First, subnational organizations democratically legitimate higher-level intra-party decision-making. For example, the Green Party ensured from the beginning proper grassroots representation at national party conven-tions by relying on a delegate system that gave each county branch representation according to their membership size (with a minimum of one delegate for the smallest branches). While initially relying on national member conferences on the national level—allowing each member to join and vote in national party convention —, the AfD switched to a delegate system in 2017 (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021, p. 266). Second, subnational organizations nominate candidates for local and higher-level elections. For instance, county organizations directly choose candidates for county assemblies but also for electoral districts in state or federal elections[3] (Detterbeck, 2016).

County Organizations & Intra-Party Power

Matters of organization directly relate to the distribution of intra-party power and are there-fore often highly politicized. In fact, asked for conflicts in the emerging period of the Green Party, one active member during that time told me that conflicts arouse mostly around or-ganizational issues and intra-party power (Interview 5). This is also reflected to some extent in existing scholarship (Kitschelt, 1989; Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021). In my interviews, three contentious topics within party organizations were mentioned by party organizers: the choice of organizational structures, intra-party control and autonomy of local branches, and the design of intra-party democracy.

First, party organizations do not always map perfectly onto administrative units. For example, the CDU in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia featured three state organizations until the 1980s. Similarly, some county organizations either combine more than one county

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[3]This concerns only candidates that run in electoral districts via the personalized component of the German mixed-member-district (MMD) system. The party list component in the MMD system is passed on the state level.

(such as the SPD in the counties of Uelzen and Lüchow-Dannenberg) or, less commonly, feature more than one county organization in the same administrative unit (such as the Green Party in the Rhein-Neckar-Kreis area). The same applies to the local level where the AfD, for example, has introduced area organizations (Gebietsverbände) that combine several municipalities. While parties are free to organize themselves, the convergence to administrative units is not coincidental. Overlapping boundaries facilitate the allocation of resources and candidates nominations. Deviations from this defaults can be grouped according to two logics: first, cases in which limited membership did not make geographically more fine-grained viable. Take for instance, the county branch of Bayreuth-Forchheim combining the city district of Bayreuth, the county of Bayreuth and the county of Forchheim. Founded in 2013, the county branch split in 2014 due to the increase in members in to separate units, Forchheim and Bayreuth[4]. On the other hand, county branches sometimes established aggregates of several municipalities. Asked for the origin of these constructs, one interviewee recalled the founding story involving a former local party leader who would eventually become a member of the Bundestag but had initially run for state parliament:

> "[...] he [former local party leader] was a candidate in the 2016 state election [in the constituency here in the district] before he was [elected to] the Bundestag. And he is also a certified lawyer and then thought, we'll tailor the local association so that no one gets in our way, [...] exactly to the state constituency. Then I can decide for myself when to invite [for a local nomination conference].
>
> But the electoral law in [state] is now also outdated. [...] [I]n the past, we actually elected the member of the state parliament through these constituencies. And so it happened that we had these local associations, which comprised several municipalities and were usually tailored to the state election districts. But then you see that these tailored constituencies don't actually exist [in practice].

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[4]See the portray of the county branch of Bayreuth: `https://afd-bayreuth.de/index.php?vorstellung/`.

The electoral districts are together, but they don't provide you with any sense of orientation. [...] And that's why, when we had enough members in the south [of the district], I said, let's go to [place name] in the big district town, then set up a proper city association." *(Interview 1)*

There were, however, sometimes organizational considerations for merging several communities in one local association. Some county associations merged municipality associations to increase organizational density in the respective county. However, this led to more infighting and conflict as one interviewee recalled:

"Well, I had already received a warning from my district executive because I said I wouldn't follow a direct [...] And the reason for that at the time was that we hadn't managed to set up as many city and local associations as I would have liked, so the district said, oh, then we'll just put a few together. You still take care of [place name], which is our neighboring town, and then [another place name] and I said I don't take care of anything. I am [resident place of residence I2], I say I can support [the other places], we can also do a stand over there and so on, but we don't pool our money. Because the first problem is when several associations pool their money, as I said, it's like with clubs. First of all, it's about the money. And I also donate 100€, almost 300€ a month to the city association. Because the city association has to build up the war chest for the next election. And when we are with three city associations and I actually donate to [place of residence I2] and we are then a block and then the local elections come, then the [person from the neighboring town] says, listen, we also need posters. Then I say, that wasn't really what I had in mind [when I was donating].

[...] I said that doesn't work. I really fought against it, held general meetings and called for a revolt, and then the district executive committee said, you are a dependent unit and you jump as high as I tell you to, and I said, you don't tell

me anything, I say, if we are merged here, my entire board will resign or at least I will resign and I assume that we have such a relationship of trust and there is another city association that had thought the same because they were also supposed to be merged and then we were lucky that only another [part of the district] was merged. And this [part of the district] lasted, in personnel options, exactly as I predicted, uh, not even six months, and then fell apart for various reasons, because it simply doesn't work." *(Interview 2)*

This quote already demonstrates the importance of the second contentious topics within party organizations: intra-party control and autonomy of local branches. The question of structuring organization is tightly linked to that of control and autonomy of local branches. And party elites in emerging parties are conscious of this. Conflicts, for instance, arouse to what extent local level roots should be actually encouraged and also institutionalized:

"At the beginning of 2013, there were people on the [state AfD] party executive who were still predominantly from the old CDU or FDP parties and they didn't even want to found district associations. We prevailed back then. [...] We originally wanted to include the local associations [Ortsverbände] as the lowest party structure in the state [party] statute. But [...] at the state party conference, it didn't catch on, and today I'm a bit glad that we only have it at district level for the time being." *(Interview 1)*

Similarly, once established, county-level party organizations sometimes became reluctant to founding local chapters. As one AfD organizer told me, this was out of the fear that the county-level organization would lose their control about local-level activities and party work:

"We were a new party, of course, but the biggest obstacle actually came from our own people. We had a district association here, but there were no local branches, and, let's say, nobody really wanted to give up any control." *(Interview 2)*

These concerns of losing control are some extent also substantiated. The same interviewee, for instance, also recalled a rowdy municipal association that had to be disbanded which he explained vaguely with ideological differences (Interview 2).

How parties organize on the local level can have important consequences because of intraparty democracy. Especially in national, state, or even local party conventions, the mode of convening—either member-based or delegate-based—can decide over the outcomes of intraparty democratic decisions, leadership selection, and nominations. Therefore, party elites are highly aware of the importance of such structural decisions as one AfD organizer outlined in the case of a state convention:

> "[...] we still have membership conventions. We have one coming up [...], and it's going to be a tough confrontation. The people who have literally ordered buses with money to, I'll say it bluntly, cart in voting fodder [Stimmvieh]—are starting to realize that this kind of thing gets expensive in the long run. So now they'd prefer a more controlled delegate system.
>
> I've said that with a delegate system, the district associations—where we're also a power factor—could actually benefit. And that's how people start calculating, saying, 'Yes, then maybe we should do it that way.' But that's always a kind of lex momentum—'it suits me right now, so I'll change the rules.' I'm not a fan of that." *(Interview 1)*

Taken together, the interviewed local party organizers recalled internal conflicts that primarily revolved around organizational issues. Such questions are crucial, as they can profoundly shape intra-party decision-making by altering institutional processes and redistributing resources both within the party and across its organizational levels.

Why Focus on German Local Politics?

In sum, new emerging parties in Germany face an environment which strongly incentivizes them to build strong local roots for at least three reasons: first, they profit financially from a solid membership base because members pay dues but also because the state subsidizes parties proportional to their membership size. Second, the local level in Germany is responsible for issues such as the construction of schools and kindergartens or the determination of property tax levels. Competing in the local political arena—and ultimately winning local offices—can not only signal credibility, competence, and legislative effectiveness to voters. It can also serve as a crucial training ground for emerging elites, preparing them for future positions in state or national parliaments. Third, new parties face strong competition on the local level from existing parties. If having party ambassadors in local communities matter, then new party have to catch up with the ground game of their competition to win over voters.

These three factors, combined with the requirement in German party law for intra-party democracy, make the German case particularly interesting. The local level not only matters politically, but the way local organizations are structured can also determine the distribution of power within parties. Understanding how different party elites shape this competition and support new parties in such a context is therefore crucial.

4.2   The Development of New Parties in Germany

The Rise of the Green Party

How did the Green Party emerge? In the 1970s, in the midst the oil crisis and with the emergence of nuclear power, environmental concerns sparked the foundation of independent citizen groups in Germany. These were non-partisan groups, the largest was the Federal Associa-

tion of Environmental Citizen Initiatives ('Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz') in which local citizen groups organized (Mewes, 1998). In 1978 and 1979, various environmental groups attempted to enter state parliaments and the European parliament but ultimately failed to clear the necessary 5 percent threshold (Mewes, 1998). The base of the environmental movement, however, was shaky which was visible in the dissolution of precursor organizations such as 'Die Bunten' in Hamburg. This electoral alliance competed in the state election 1978 but "most activists [...] returned to their preexisting party and movement affiliation and the electoral alliance became dormant" (Kitschelt, 1989, p. 84).

When the Green Party in West Germany was eventually founded in early 1980, observers often thought that they would become a short-lived phenomenon (Kitschelt, 1989, p. vii). While the newly found party brought issues to the forefront that had been neglected by other parties such as nuclear energy, disarmament, or environmental protection (Poguntke, 1992, p. 338), the expectation was that other parties would address these issues which would eventually marginalize the nascent party. This, however, did not happen. While the Greens only earned 1.7% of the votes in the 1980 federal election, they jumped over the 5% hurdle in their second attempt and entered the Bundestag in 1983.

Even following its founding, the Green Party remained characterized by persistent internal conflict among competing ideological factions, though the intensity of these disputes varied across federal states (Kitschelt, 1989, p. 85). It is important to note that such intraparty tensions were primarily elite-driven and not necessarily mirrored at the grassroots level. As Poguntke (1992, p. 342) observes, proposals frequently lost support at party congresses once they became associated with a particular ideological camp. In light of this organizational volatility, the Green Party's strong connections to civil society—particularly the peace and environmental movements—played a crucial stabilizing role. These social movements offered not only institutional support but also a pool of politically experienced activists and personnel, contributing significantly to the party's organizational development (Poguntke, 1992, p. 338). As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the Green Party experienced substantial growth

during its first decade, expanding from approximately 20,000 members in 1980 to over 40,000 by 1990.

Figure 4.1: Green Party Growth

Note: Figure visualizes total number party of Green Party members aggregated to the national leve based on data from Niedermayer (2021).

How was the Green Party's early membership growth distributed geographically? To answer this question, I draw on county-level membership data from West Germany, which measures the number of Green Party members per capita. This provides the first empirical insight into the party's territorial expansion. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, the Greens initially gained traction in smaller university towns in the southern states, including Tübingen and Freiburg. Notably, the party also exhibited early organizational strength in the rural county of Lüchow-Dannenberg—highlighted in red in 1980—due to its proximity to the controversial nuclear waste site in Gorleben. Between 1980 and 1985, the Green Party expanded across nearly all West German counties, leading to a more geographically balanced membership base. During this period, the party continued to consolidate support in university cities such as Frankfurt am Main and Gießen, while also making notable inroads into their surrounding areas. For instance, counties like Emmendingen near Freiburg experienced substantial increases in Green Party membership, indicating a diffusion of support from urban academic centers into adjacent rural and semi-urban regions.

a) 1980

b) 1985

c) Change between 1980 and 1985/86

Members per
1,000 capita   0.5 1.0 1.5

Members per
1,000 capita   0.5 1.0 1.5

Member p.c. 1985/86 /
Members p.c. 1980   2.5 5.0 7.5 10.0
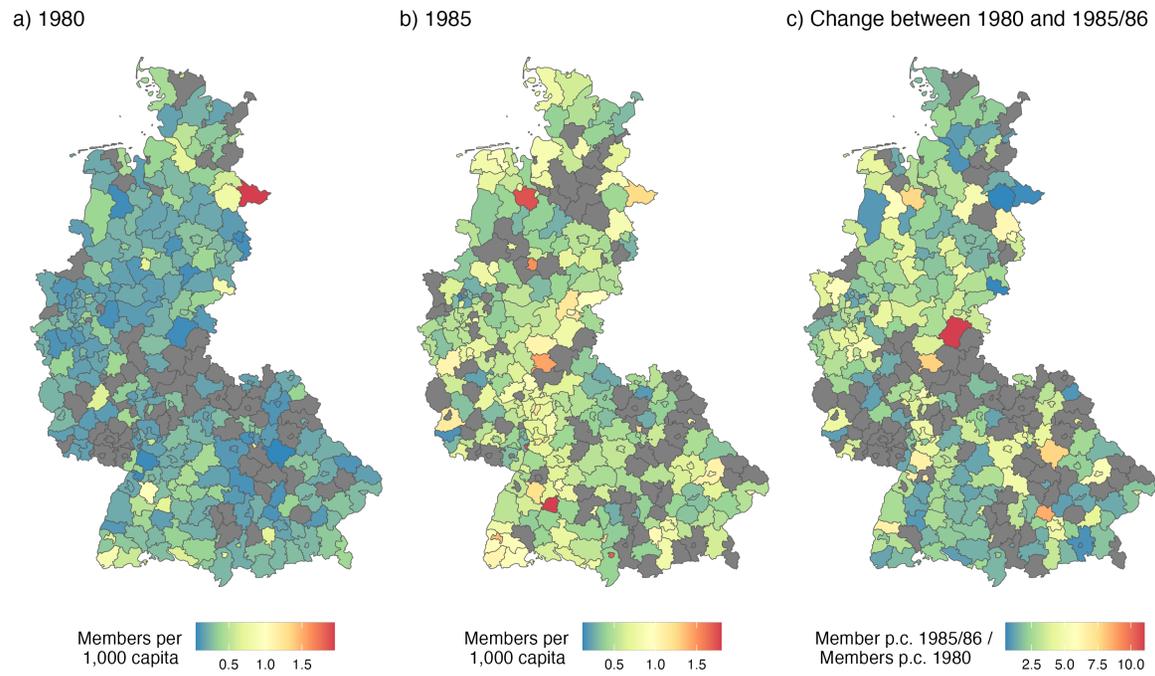
Figure 4.2: Green Party Membership per Capita

Note: Based on original data retrieved from the Green Party Archive (*Grünes Gedächtnis*).

A second piece of evidence for assessing the Green Party's geographic expansion lies in its participation in municipal elections during the 1980s. Figure 4.3 visualizes where the Greens fielded candidates in municipal elections (in green) and where they did not field any candidates (in red). The map shows this organizational in two electoral periods: the initial phase between 1980 and 1985 (Panel A) and the subsequent period from 1985 to 1990 (Panel B). As shown in Panel A, the Greens initially concentrated their electoral efforts in traditionally left-leaning regions, particularly in urban areas of North Rhine-Westphalia and South Hesse. In contrast, their presence was more fragmented in the southern states of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, where the party contested elections in a smaller number of municipalities. Nonetheless, within South Germany, notable clusters of local electoral activity emerged around major metropolitan areas such as Munich, Nuremberg, and Stuttgart. These patterns suggest that the party's ability to contest local elections was shaped both by ideological receptiveness and by proximity to urban centers with a supportive social base.

Finally, I proceed to the individual level tracing the development of the German Green Party using unique data on local candidate profiles. In a first step, I explore the origin of Green Party candidates. Did they run before as candidates and, if so, for which party? Figure 4.4 shows that even in the consolidation period which coincides with the breakdown of the federal government and a notable flight from the social liberals out of the FDP, most Green candidates were first-time candidates. While the number of Green candidates who ran repeatedly become larger and approached levels of other parties (see Figure B.1 in the Appendix), the number of Green candidates that run for nationally established parties or local and small parties remained low. This substantiates the image of the German Greens as a genuinely new party with only limited ties to previous party organizations.

As Figure 4.5 shows, the Greens successfully recruited from the manager and professional class. Only in the very beginning of Green Party emergence was this share of high-SES individuals lower on Green lists than on other lists. From 1981 onwards, Green Party lists included consistently more high-SES individuals than other party lists. And the share of

A. 1980-1984   B. 1985-1990
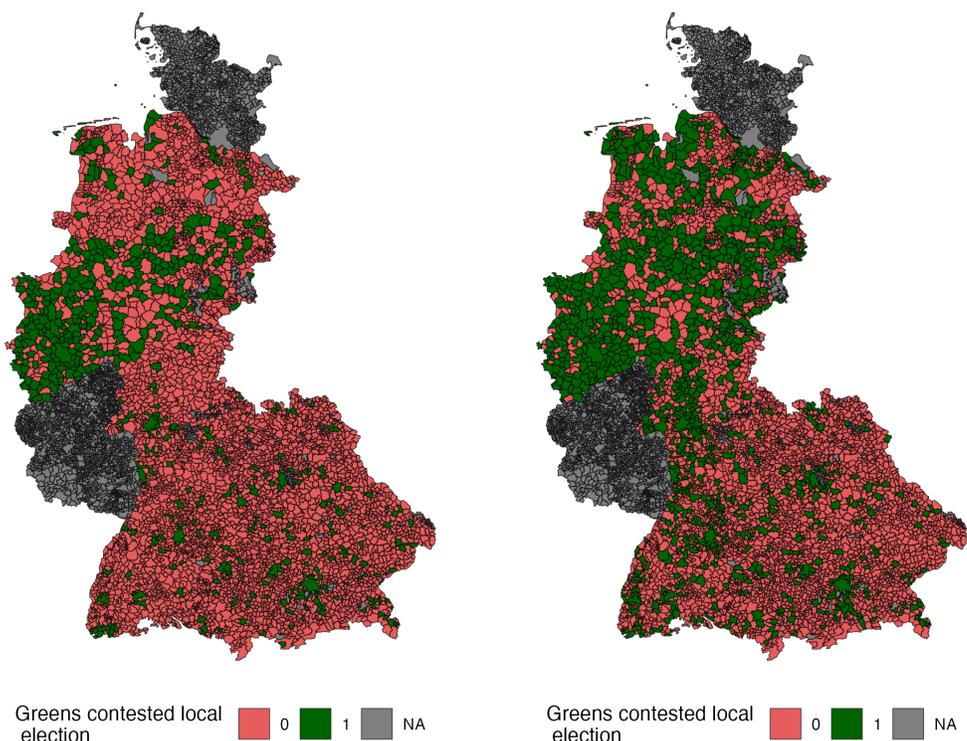
Figure 4.3: Contestation of Municipal Elections by Green Party Lists

Note: Data based on Heddesheimer et al. (2024) and own data for local elections before 1990. Values of 1 (in green) indicate that the Greens contested municipal council elections in a given community, values of 0 (in red) indicates the Greens did not contested municipal elections. *NA* indicates missing data.

managers and professionals grew even larger, reaching more than 50% by the end of the 1980s.

The Emergence of the AfD

Germany had long been a outlier given its lack of any significant radical right party. One reason for this was the stigmatization of radical right parties and the resulting problems for organizations like the Republicans ('Die Republikaner') or the National Democratic Party (NPD, 'Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschland') to recruit candidates and attract candidates in good social standing (Art, 2011). This landscape shifted significantly with the founding of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in 2013.

The AfD emerged from a coalition of former rank-and-file members of the Free Demo-
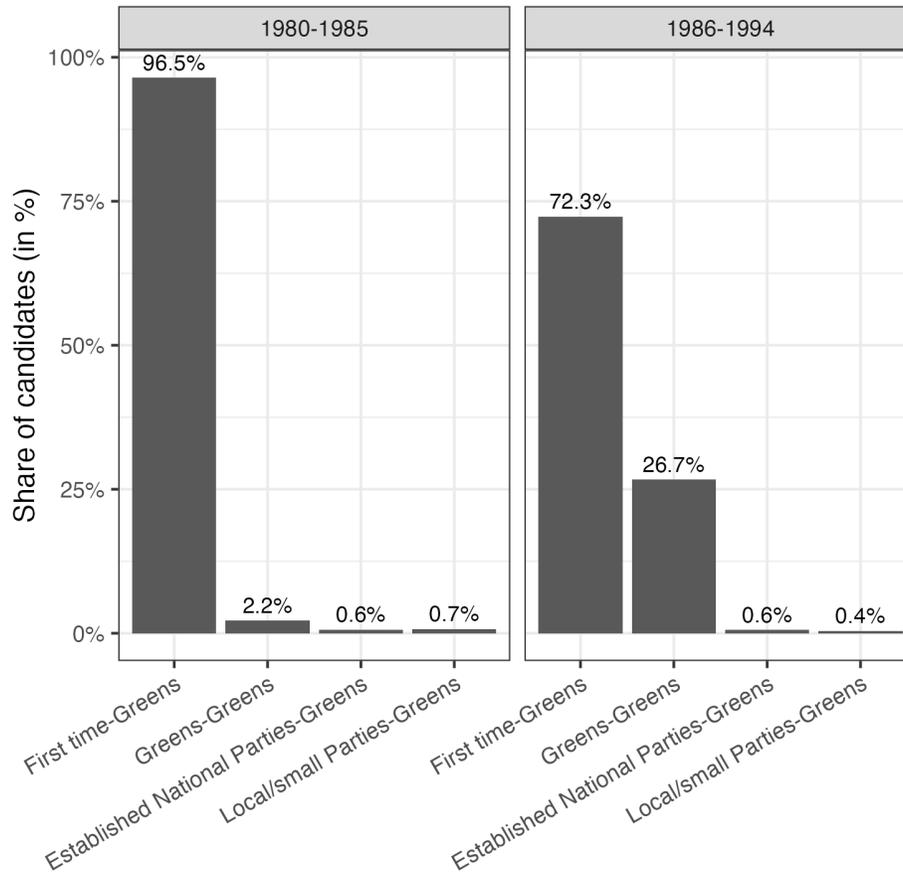
Figure 4.4: Origin of Local Green Candidates

Note: Based on original data, with candidates linked across time by first name, last name, and birth year (see Enamorado, Fifield and Imai, 2019).

cratic Party (FDP), the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and Christian conservative activists (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021, p. 264). Initially, the party's platform was centered on a critique of the German government's handling of the Eurozone debt crisis under Chancellor Angela Merkel. However, in pursuit of broader electoral appeal, the AfD soon expanded its agenda to include cultural and identity-based issues (Art, 2018, p. 80). Over time, this strategic shift intensified, with the party increasingly adopting anti-immigration rhetoric. The AfD's electoral breakthrough coincided with the so-called "refugee crisis" and the arrival of over one million asylum seekers in Germany, marking a pivotal moment in its transformation into a major radical right force in German politics.
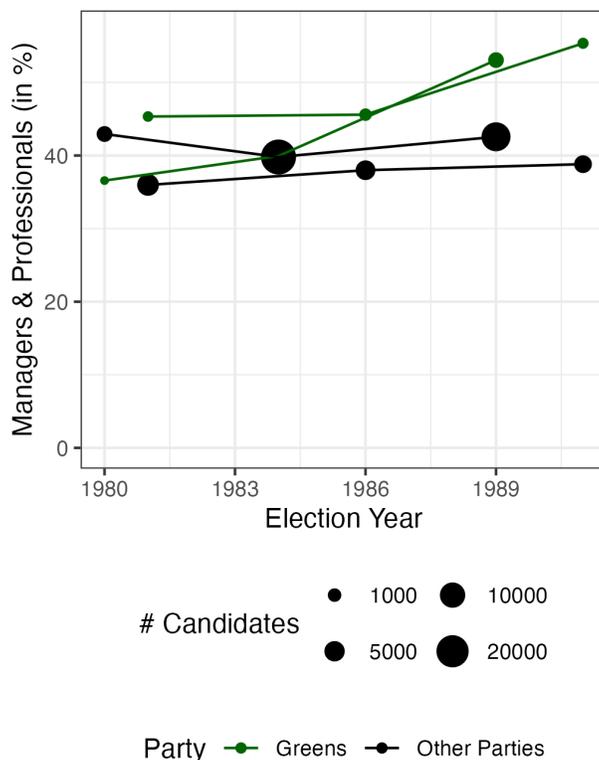
Figure 4.5: SES of Local Green Party Elites

Note: Figure shows the share of managers and professional running between 1980 and 1994 grouped by candidates of the Green Party and Other Parties. Based on original data.

The AfD's transformation from a Euro-skeptic to an overtly anti-immigrant party was accompanied by significant organizational shifts. Central to this evolution was the removal of the party's founding leadership, first Bernd Lucke and later his successor Frauke Petry. These leadership changes were closely tied to internal disputes over the strategic direction of the party, with both Lucke and Petry representing comparatively moderate positions within the party's ideological spectrum (Art, 2018). Despite these changes at the top, the AfD has maintained a model of collective leadership, diverging from the personalized, charismatic leadership styles often associated with other radical right parties in Europe (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021).

Organizationally, the AfD is notable for its comparatively large and structured membership base, setting it apart from many of its European counterparts on the radical right

(Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021). In its founding year, the party registered more than 17,000 members, a number that grew to over 30,000 by 2019 (see Figure 4.6). This expansion facilitated a gradual process of organizational professionalization. Notably, the party moved away from open member congresses—where all members could participate and vote—toward delegate-based party conventions, at least at the national level, reflecting a shift toward more centralized and efficient decision-making structures (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021).
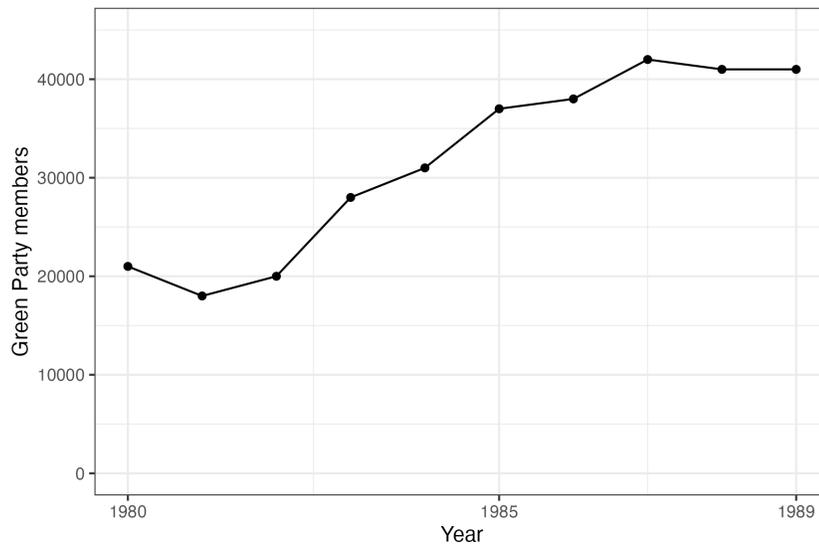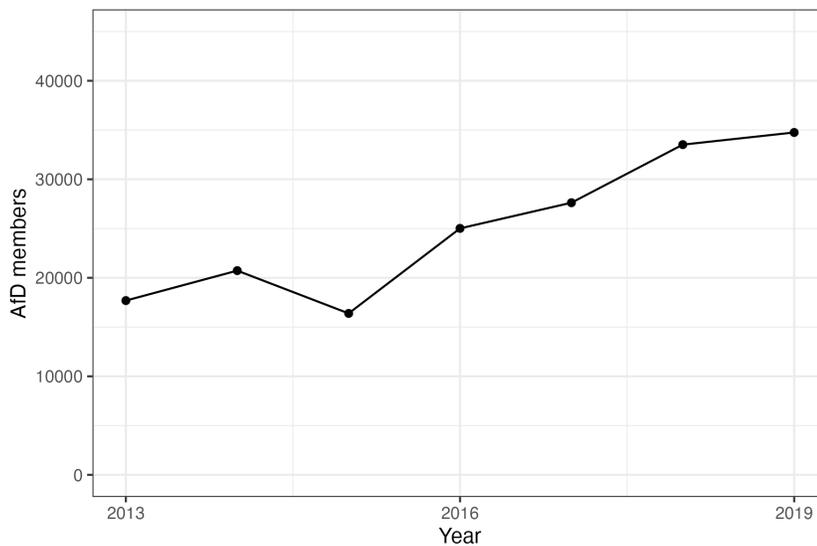

Figure 4.6: AfD Party Growth

Note: Figure visualizes total number party of AfD members aggregated to the national leve based on data from Niedermayer (2021).

Where did the AfD gain ground most rapidly? Although the party was initially launched with strong support from EU-skeptical elites in West Germany—led by economics professor Bernd Lucke—it quickly shifted its center of gravity eastward. The turning point came with the 2014 state elections in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia, where the AfD delivered strong performances and began consolidating its base in East Germany. This eastward momentum is clearly reflected in the development of the party's local infrastructure, visualized in Figure 4.7. Panel A shows that even in the first round of local elections the AfD contested, East German municipalities were disproportionately represented. During the second electoral cycle (2019–2023), the AfD continued to expand its local presence nationwide—but the growth was especially pronounced in the East. The data highlight how the AfD has ac-

tively built a dense network of local branches in the region, transforming it into the party's organizational stronghold.

A. 2014-2018   B. 2019-2023
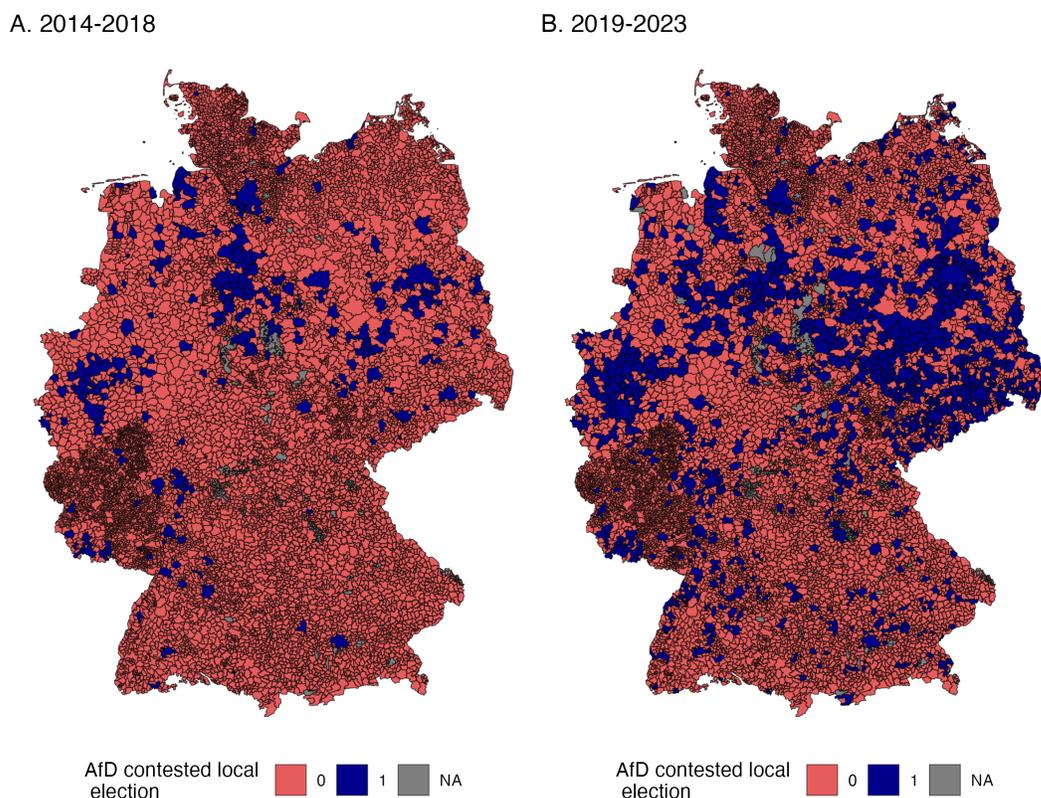
Figure 4.7: Development of Local AfD Branches

Note: Data based on Heddesheimer et al. (2024) and own data for the 2024 local elections. Values of 1 (in blue) indicate that the AfD contested municipal council elections in a given community. 0 (in red) indicates municipalities uncontested by the AfD. *NA* indicates missing data.

To further examine the AfD's organizational development, I turn to the composition of its local elites over time. Figure 4.8 reveals that, much like the Green Party in the 1980s, the AfD initially fielded local candidates who were largely political newcomers, lacking prior experience in county-level politics. Over time, however, the party has seen a degree of stabilization at the local level. By the 2024 local elections, the re-run rate of AfD candidates had increased to 28%, indicating a growing reliance on experienced party actors—though first-time candidates still constitute the majority. The patterns of candidate recruitment have also shifted. In the early years, the AfD drew a notable share of its candidates from nationally established parties and, to a lesser extent, from local political groupings. In

contrast, during the 2019–2023 period, candidates with prior affiliations to small parties became the largest source of party switchers. This shift may reflect an increasing presence of opportunistic actors from marginal parties seeking greater electoral viability under the AfD banner.
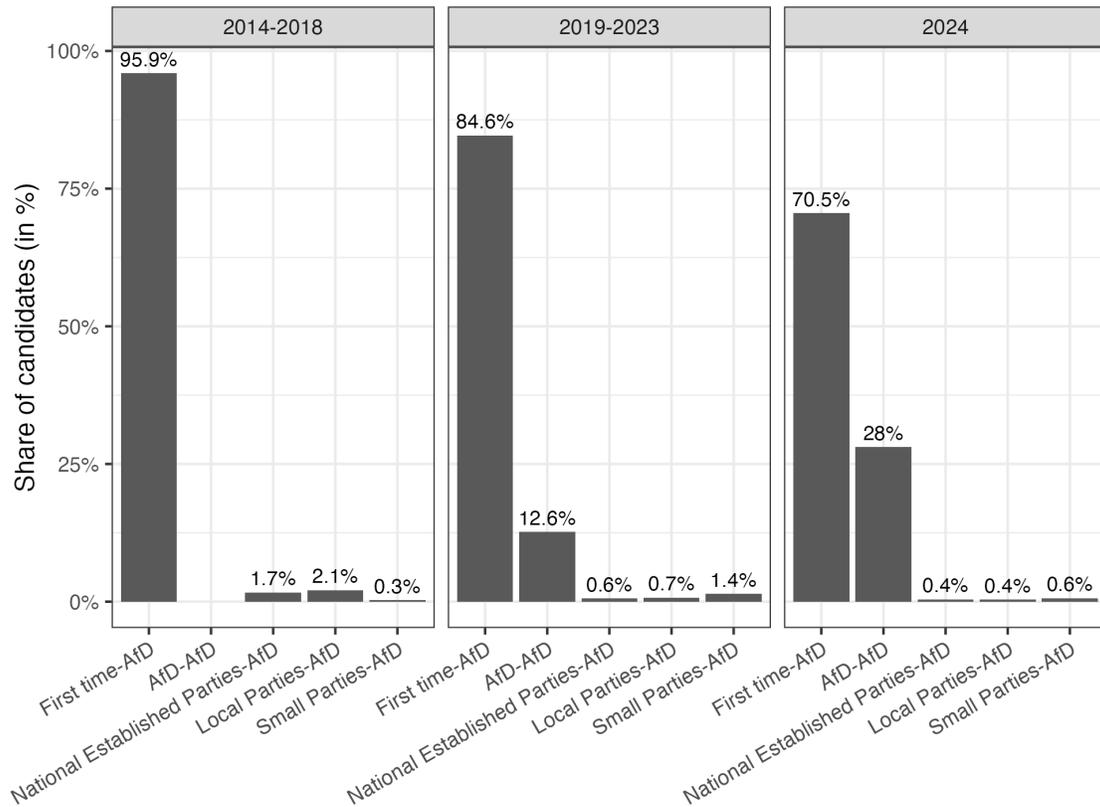
Figure 4.8: Origin of Local AfD Candidates

Note: Based on original data, with candidates linked across time by first name, last name, and birth year (see Enamorado, Fifield and Imai, 2019).

A stark contrast to the Green Party emerges when examining the socioeconomic composition of AfD local elites. As illustrated in Figure 4.9, the share of candidates with high socioeconomic status — meaning managers and professionals (ISCO codes 1 and 2) — has declined significantly over time. In states that held local elections in 2014, 2019 and 2024, the proportion of AfD local elites drawn from high-status occupational groups fell from over 40% to below 30% within a decade. The magnitude of this shift is striking, especially in light of existing research that highlights the value of high-SES party elites (Art, 2011). Fur-

thermore, previous research have argued that the sustained electoral success of radical right parties is likely to enhance candidate quality over time (Valentim, 2024). However, the AfD presents a counterexample: despite its growing electoral footprint and repeated entry into the Bundestag between 2014 and 2024, the party has seen a notable decline in the socioeconomic status of its local candidate pool. This trend raises important questions about the professionalization and institutional development of the AfD at the subnational level.
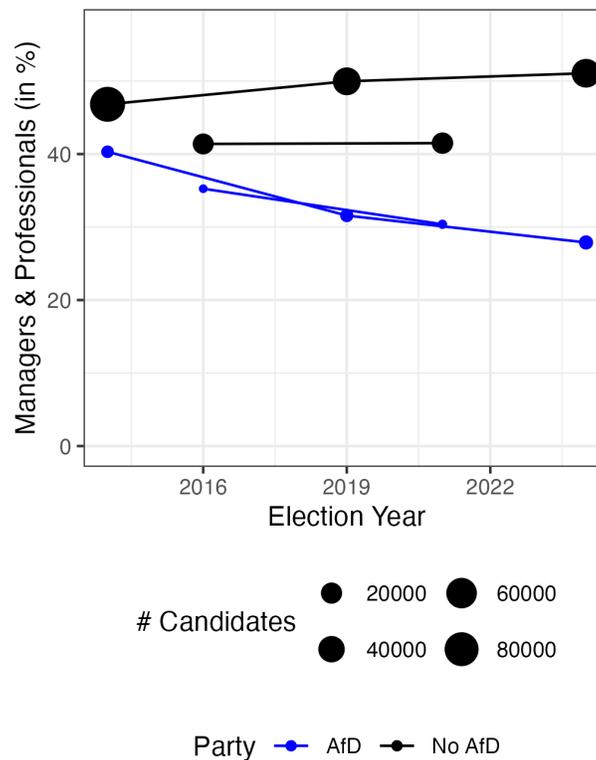
Figure 4.9: SES of Local AfD Party Elites

Note: Figure shows the share of managers and professional running between 2013 and 2024 grouped by candidates of the AfD and Other Parties. Based on original data.

AfD and Green Party in comparative perspective

How do my cases relate to the broader universe of new parties, and what can be learned from comparing them? First, Green Parties and the radical-right parties have often been treated as distinct party families but as Meguid (2005) argues, they function in a similar way:

They tend to emphasize issues, like immigration or environmental protection are located on the second, or cultural, dimension of the ideological space[5] (see also Kitschelt, 1988; Kriesi et al., 2008). Such parties also appeal to cross-pressured voters by cross-cutting through traditional lines of political conflict (Meguid, 2005). Finally, Meguid (2005) argues that Green and radical-right parties differentiate themselves from other parties by focusing on a limited set of issues rather than broad policy platforms. Based on these similarities, Meguid (2005) groups radical-right and Green parties together coining the term "niche parties" for them.

Following Meguid (2005), researchers have analyzed the varying success that niche parties had across Europe (Kitschelt, 1988; Valentim, 2024; Grant and Tilley, 2019) with some scholars specifically focusing on party organizations (Art, 2011; Bolleyer, 2013). Bolleyer (2013), for instance, distinguishes between 'rooted' parties, who rely on links to social organizations, and 'entrepreneurial' parties without such linkage. The author finds not only that rooted parties are more likely to persist and sustain electoral success but also that these categories roughly map onto Green parties who tend to be rooted and far-right parties who tend to be entrepreneurial (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 21). This divide was also visible in interviews: Green party activists in the 1980s recalled that local chapters were born out of social networks or social organizations like Amnesty International (see Interview 6). In contrast, AfD organizers depicted organizational growth as driven by party elites without a clear base. Thus, in terms of societal links, the German Green party in the 1980s and the AfD in the 2010s appear similar to their European counterparts.

Niche party elites and supporters also belong to certain demographics with e.g. more men among radical-right and more women among Green party (see Folke, Rickne and Szulkin, 2024; Weeks et al., 2023; Oshri et al., 2023). These patterns align with my data on local party elites: women constitute 20% of AfD elites compared to 31% in other parties. Likewise, prior

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[5]Though it is unclear to what such distinctions between the economic and cultural dimension especially with regard to the environment or immigration are still justified (see Gidron and Tichelbaecker, 2025).

research has shown that far-right parties tend to recruit elites from low-SES occupations, whereas Green parties more often draw on high-SES professionals (Folke, Rickne and Szulkin, 2024; Valentim, 2024). My cases reflect this demographic divide: the Green Party includes a disproportionately high share of high-SES local elites (46% vs. 39% in other parties), while the AfD shows a comparatively lower share (31% vs. 46%). This electoral divide explains, at least partially, the rough geographic patterns with the AfD increasingly championing rural areas while the Greens overperform in urban spaces.

There are, however, important differences. The German Green Party, for example, grants greater authority to its subnational units than many of its European counterparts (Bolleyer, 2012). Likewise, the AfD diverges from other European far-right parties through its emphasis on internal democracy and its lack of a strong, charismatic leader (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021). These characteristics are shaped in part by the German institutional framework, which mandates transparency in party finances and organizational structures. Parties must disclose aggregate membership figures—since state subsidies are calculated on a per-member basis—and provide lists of major donors. While such regulations give large contributors potential influence, they also compel them to reveal their support publicly.[6] German party law also requires internal democracy: party decision-making must be legitimated through democratic procedures. Although parties retain flexibility in designing these processes, the requirement constrains excessive concentration of power, reflecting lessons drawn from the Weimar Republic.

Taken together, German Greens and the AfD resemble other European niche parties in their programmatic and issue appeals. Furthermore, their electorate and composition of party elites appears to roughly match those of other Green and far-right parties respectively. However, the German institutional framework puts emphasis on the democratic and transparent organization of political parties. In the following chapters, I explore how local party

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[6]Notably, the AfD has faced multiple financing scandals for failing to disclose major contributions, as donors sought to avoid publicity.

elites help their party organizations to gain traction.

5 The Relevance of Local Party Organizations

Why do local branches matter? Existing research has highlighted the crucial role that local party organizations play across a range of functions. They act, for instance, as key arenas for recruiting and training future elites, serve as spaces for political socialization, and play a central role in campaigning. In these ways, those elites active in local branches are the faces of their party on the ground linking their party to voters in their community (Horne, 2022; Doherty, Dowling and Miller, 2022). This local-level ground game can have important upstream effects (Doherty, Dowling and Miller, 2022, p. 4), shaping parties' broader electoral fortunes and organizational strength. This argument follows a long tradition in political science that has emphasized the role of social networks, social interactions, and social norms in shaping individuals' behavior (see Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1968). The advent of social media and increasing online campaigning, however, has provided new campaigning to political parties and scholars have found evidence that political online ads displayed on social media can be effective campaigning tools (Hager, 2019; Bär, Pröllochs and Feuerriegel, 2025).

Against the backdrop of this discussion, I explore the extent to which offline party presence in local communities remains a relevant factor in contemporary political arenas. In the first part of this chapter, I theoretically address three key questions: how has traditional political science conceptualized the importance of offline party presence? To what extent can

party organizations rely on online rather than offline outreach to connect with voters, and under what conditions? And finally, how do local party branches matter in the digital age? In the second part of the chapter, I empirically examine the relationship between local party activity, election outcomes, and political attitudes. Specifically, I link party- and branch-level election results to the local organizational roots of political parties and analyze, at the individual level, the extent to which these organizational roots shape political visibility.

5.1 The Traditional Perspective on Local Party Organizations and Electoral Outcomes

Political scientists have long emphasized the importance of party organizations (Duverger, 1963) and the role of personal networks (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1968) in mobilizing voters. According to this view, political parties cannot rely only on mass media to reach local communities. Instead, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1968) proposed a two-step process in which local opinion leaders—politically informed and knowledgeable, and trusted people—are central because other less politically interested people rely on these cues when making their own political decisions. Especially during the first half of the 20th century, opinion leaders and local notables constituted an influential political force often outside formal party structures in traditional rural communities (Schneider 1999, p. 125-126; Scarrow 1996, p. 24). As Schneider (1999) writes for the case of Germany, parties were seen as intruders in the self-governing of towns (ibid. p. 125). This changed only when political parties paid increasing attention to local politics and local party organizations (Salten 2022, Schneider 1999, p. 126).

But even without such hierarchical models of public opinion formation, scholars have assigned an important role for local party organizations in local communities. According to this view, ordinary community members can still be "potentially valuable ambassadors to

the community, as people who can multiply votes through their willingness openly to declare, and even to explain, their personal political allegiances. Party members' everyday contacts may be especially valued in parties which are struggling to gain, or regain, public recognition and acceptance." (Scarrow, 1996, p. 43). This is because such ordinary citizens are known faces in their community whose personal reputation may help to legitimize and normalize previously outcast parties (see also Favero and Zulianello, 2023). Taken together, local village elites but also ordinary community members are valuable for parties to familiarize voters with their messages and present known faces to to local communities. Doing so can enable them to change local political attitudes in the long run (see Loxbo, 2025)

The local level can also present an important opportunity to attract voters in second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Previous work has emphasized the role of second-order elections, such as European or local elections, as "midwives assisting in the birth of new parties" (Van Der Eijk and Franklin, 1996, p. 53). This is because voting for non-mainstream parties is less costly for voters who perceive political power as concentrated at the national level. Moreover, party preferences tend to be self-reinforcing — voters who have deviated from mainstream choices in the past are more likely to maintain their established patterns in subsequent elections (Dinas, 2014; Mullainathan and Washington, 2009). In consequence, local elections can become important springboards for infant parties.

5.2   Online Ads in Political Campaigns

But why should political parties still invest in local party organizations? After all, establishing local branches is costly for political parties (Ellinas and Lamprianou, 2017, p. 810) and political parties now can reach millions of voters more easily online via social media and online ads. An option that all political parties make use of. In the 2024 European election campaign alone, German parties invested roughly €1.3 million in online advertising, while according to estimates, Belgian parties spend more €2.1 million (Paulke and Kruschinski,

2025, p. 261)

And some researchers have suggested that this is money well spent. In this vein, Hager (2019), for instance, finds tentative evidence that randomized online campaign ads increased the electoral performance of a German mainstream party in a state election by 0.7 percentage points. He argues that this results in a comparatively low dollar-per-vote ratio of \$3 to \$7 per vote (Hager, 2019, p. 386). Similarly, Bär, Pröllochs and Feuerriegel (2025) show that additional ad impressions on Facebook boosted the electoral performance of candidates running in the 2021 German federal election. More specifically, Bär, Pröllochs and Feuerriegel (2025) find that an additional 200,000 Facebook ad impressions are linked to an increase of about 2.1% in vote share.

At the same time, it is important to note that not all studies find online ads to be effective. Instead, research has also found null effects on political participation (Unan et al., 2024) or political attitudes and behavior (Allcott et al., 2025) casting doubt on the general effectiveness of online campaign ads. While technological advances allow now for more targeted messages, empirical evidence also suggests that targeting can create backlash effects (Gahn, 2025).

Which parties, if at all, might profit from online ads? Studies have linked social media consumption especially to to the rise of far-right parties (Schaub and Morisi, 2020; Neumann, 2023). In general, extreme political parties seem to benefit from social media, perhaps because social media "[may be] best suited for shorter, simpler, and more emotionally charged messages" (Zhuravskaya, Petrova and Enikolopov, 2020, p. 433). That extreme parties can benefit tremendously from social media is exemplified by the case of the 2024 Romanian parliamentary election during which a massive Russian-backed TikTok campaign appears to have contribute to far-right support (see Pop-Eleches, 2025).

Without denying the increasing relevance of online content, offline networks and inter-actions appear still relevant. The Romanian elections are a case in point. Beyond TikTok

exposure, Pop-Eleches (2025) also notes that exposure to preachings of Orthodox priests appear to have driven radical right support. This continued importance of offline networks, social interactions, and social norms is also reflected in other work: Green and McClellan (2020) show that tapping into voters' personal networks led to significant increases in turnout in low-turnout local elections. Bischof and Kurer (2023) show that grassroots campaigning led to significant effects in referendums. And Pons (2018) shows that massive canvassing efforts can still produce large electoral gains, even in the 21st century. Furthermore, Fisher et al. (2018) find that party supporters in the UK—defined as non-member, informal supporters—are predominantly recruited through offline channels, underscoring the significance of face-to-face networks.

Taken together, the social media and the internet, more generally, have provided political parties with opportunities to directly appeal to voters. While this presents parties with potential of mobilization, it does not appear to have made local party organizations obsolete.

5.3   Local Party Organizations in a Digital Age

What is then the role of local party organizations in a digital age? As Scarrow (1996, p. 49) writes "no amount of direct mail from national headquarters can replicate the experiences offered by involvement within a local party community." This is because the local level is essential for party building because local party chapters serve a crucial socialization function. They facilitate interaction among like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community rooted in shared values—a dynamic that Bolin and Jungar (2024) documents for the case of Swedish party youth wings. In this vein, a local AfD outlined:

> "I have a few people here who are actually more of a disruptive factor. They say, "Yes, this is a political party, nothing more." But the vast majority in my local party association would agree with me that we also have private friendships

and function like a kind of camaraderie. [...] That spirit of camaraderie—I know it well from my time in the military. I was deployed, and in those situations, you stand up for your guys. And that's how it has to be. Also, on May 1st, for instance, we go on a hike or something like that. And of course, that really brings people together [...] and it definitely creates bonds. I always say, you have to "entertain" your people a bit. But it's more than just entertainment. It helps people get to know each other better. And that's absolutely essential." *(Interview 1)*

This function is particularly significant for stigmatized parties, as local chapters can provide safe spaces where members can engage without fear of social repercussions. It is also crucial because campaign activities rely heavily on voluntary participation. Establishing local branches as social spaces for like-minded individuals (see also Schneider, 1999) can foster such engagement and sustain organizational vitality.

Social media might not necessarily substitute for this socialization function. Instead, it might actually complement offline conversations. For instance, Datts (2022) finds that AfD is disproportionately represented among local party chapters in Germany on Facebook that are more dialogue oriented, i.e. replying to user comments and commenting user posts. Social media might also allow political parties to coordinate offline activities (see also Gibson and Ward, 2009; Whitesell, Reuning and Hannah, 2023). In some instances, social media can even enable activities as one interviewee recalled:

"And that brings us to the second point, the on-the-ground work, because now we've already managed to set up booths, but we also need to find a venue where we can hold our regular meet-ups, where we can come together. [...] In the beginning, there were venues [in which we] had regular meet-ups, and when people came out afterwards, cars were damaged, the venue was spray-painted, and beforehand there had also been such actions. That's something Antifa likes to

do. [...] Well, by now we've managed to have a regular venue, where I sometimes even say, ah, should we advertise this the way the CDU does, that it appears in the daily paper with address and all that? But then many still say, no, let's not take such big steps. We're just glad that we can at least advertise on our website or on Facebook that the event is in [place of residence of I2]." *(Interview 2)*

Such events are important to build a coherent member base, socialize supporters, and also pull in supporters who are not currently active. Local events are key in this process by disseminating political information and acting as a point of contact for non-members. An AfD organizer described how regular gatherings—frequently attended by state or national parliamentarians—served as an anchor for individuals who were politically engaged and inclined toward supporting the AfD:

"I say, when we hold a regular meeting [Stammtisch]— even if only five people show up when we have a Bundestag member there—that's part of their job. First, they help politically educate the people who end up working at our information booths and stands. People want, I'd say, to have their member of parliaments 'within reach.' They want to know what's really happening in the Bundestag or the Landtag or wherever. So that's why it's extremely important—as a kind of point of contact, too. Nowadays, we even have a lot of non-members attending these events, and they're happy to have the chance not just to see things through the media or, let's say, on Facebook or other platforms, but to actually meet member of parliaments in person." *(Interview 2)*

Altogether, these insights underscore how local party chapters not only anchor organizational structures but also foster personal ties and political engagement, particularly for parties operating on the fringes of the political spectrum. This function is crucial, as it contributes to more cohesive and motivated branches that are likely to perform more effectively

during campaigns. Thus, even in the age of digital politics, local party branches continue to play a vital role. The following section examines whether this significance is also reflected in quantitative analyses.

5.4 Correlates of Local Party Presence

How can we assess whether local party branches provide tangible benefits to party organizations? I approach this question in three ways, examining empirical evidence at the macro (party), meso (branch), and micro (individual) levels. The aim of these analyses is not to argue that local party organizations are more important than online campaigning tools. Rather, the goal is more modest: to demonstrate that local party organizations—and the presence of people on the ground more broadly—continue to matter, even in an era when political parties can communicate directly with voters through digital channels.

Macro-Level Evidence: Local Organizational Strength & Elections

In a first step, I inspect the party-level and explore to what extent strong local roots are related to the electoral success of political parties. To address this question, I use the 'Varieties of Party Identity and Organization' (V-Party) dataset (Düpont et al., 2022) which is based on expert survey fielded in 2020. Experts were asked to code parties according a variety of organizational features such as organizational extensiveness or intra-party decision-making. Most importantly, the V-Party data includes two variables asking experts to code local organizational strength and local party offices of a given party. More specifically, the questions read:

> Does this party maintain permanent offices that operate outside of election campaigns at the local or municipal-level? *(v2palocoff)*

> To what degree are party activists and personnel permanently active in local communities? *(v2paactcom)*

I use these two independent variables in linear regression analyses to predict parties' vote share. My results provide evidence for a strong positive relationship between these two variables and electoral performance. More specifically, the regression coefficients in Figure 5.1 show that a one-unit change in the expert coding of local party organizational strength and local party offices is associated, on average all else equal, with an increase in the vote share by 2 percentage points. This relationship holds in a variety of models including models with and without fixed-effects for parties and election year, with issue mobilization, and with other organizational characteristics. It is not only statistically significant throughout all models, the magnitude of the coefficients is also relatively high, trumping coefficients of e.g. party personalization and party cohesion. In a second set of robustness tests, I also conduct subset analyses including e.g. only European countries or elections after 2000. Again, the regression coefficients for local party organizational strength and local party offices are positive and statistically significant.

Of course, this data can only provide limited evidence. One problem is endogeneity: successful parties might be more likely to build local strength and local party offices. This reverse causality might then lead to the observed empirical relationship. Another problem is the inherent subjectivity in the expert coding. The local organizational strength of parties is difficult to observe (even for experts). Data on the local level is often produced by parties themselves and may be unreliable (see e.g. Heidar, 2006). Therefore, even expert coders might e.g. retrospectively attribute parties' electoral success to their strong local showing following narratives of strong party grassroots that are often disseminated after successful campaigns.
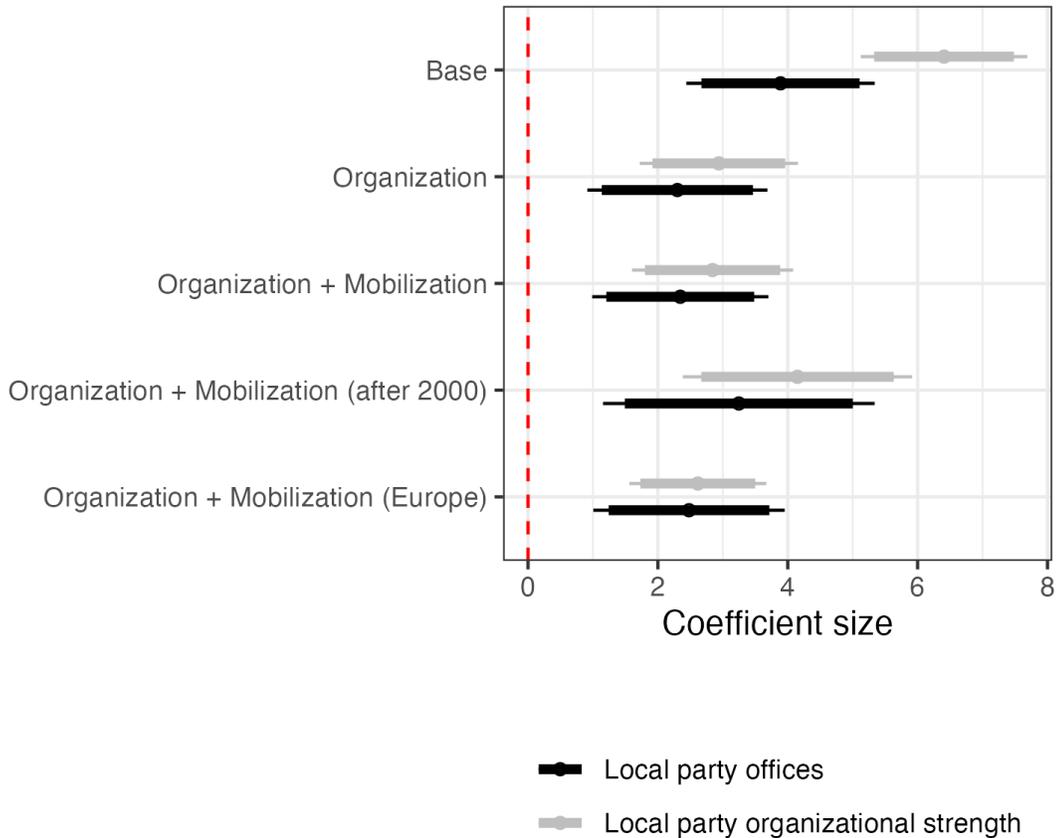
Figure 5.1: Correlation Between Local Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicates 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table C.1.

Meso-Level Evidence: Local Organizational Strength & Elections

To address these shortcomings of the V-Party data analysis, I focus in a second step on data on local party branches in Germany and ask how does the presence of local party activity affect electoral outcomes? To explore this question, I use the strength of local party organizations as independent variable to predict the AfD vote share in local and federal elections. I argue that researchers should not only care about candidate recruitment and supply due to the campaigning, socializing, and mobilizing effects described in the previous section, but should also be conscious of the mechanical effect that lacking supply can have on electoral setting under open-list PR.

Mechanical Effect

This mechanical effect is a result of a simple restriction under open-list PR settings in Germany. Voters have as many votes as there are seats in councils and they can cumulate up to three votes per candidates. If they prefer to assign all their votes to a given party, this party must also have fielded enough candidates. For example, the AfD list in the town of Saaldorf-Surheim in the municipal election of 2020 included only one candidate, even though the municipal council consisted of twenty seats and each voters had twenty votes. AfD supporters, however, could only spend three of their votes to the single AfD candidate, either forfeiting the remainder of their voting power or assigning their votes to other parties strengthening competing parties. In consequence, the number of AfD candidates relative to total council seats should be mechanically related to the electoral success in a given municipality. Furthermore, the linear relationship should be particularly pronounced in settings where the AfD is unable to field more than one third of the number of total council seats[1]

To empirically test these expectations, I only include municipalities on which I have information on AfD lists in municipal elections and estimate the following empirical model:

$$
\begin{aligned}
afd\_vote_{itc} =& \alpha_c + \gamma_t + n\_list_{itc} + small\_list_{itc} + n\_list_{itc} \times small\_list_{itc} + \\
& lag\_afd_{itc} + lag\_turnout_{itc} + comp\_elites_{itc} + \\
& comp\_elites_{itc} \times n\_list_{itc} + \epsilon_{itc}
\end{aligned}
$$

where afd_vote_{itc} is the local share of AfD votes in a given municipality i, n_list_{itc} refers to the number of candidates relative to the total number of seats to fill, and α_c and γ_t indicate county and election year fixed-effects respectively. lag_afd_{itc} refers to the lagged AfD vote

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[1]This is because voters can spend up to three votes per candidate.

share in the last federal election and $lag\_turnout_{itc}$ to the turnout in the same election. I use the lagged federal election given that these elections have the highest turnouts and are thus more accurate in reflecting the political preferences of local populations. Furthermore, the AfD has in many cases only started to enter the local political arena. Furthermore, I also add an interaction term with a dummy variable $small\_list_{itc}$ equal to one if the AfD fields less than one third of seats. Finally, I also control for the supply of competing party $comp\_elites_{itc}$ and interact with the n_list_{itc} to allow for varying effects of list size depending on the local competition. I vary models and report coefficients with only fixed-effects and with without controlling for competing elites.

In the results in Figure 5.2, I show that the share of filled positions on AfD municipal council lists are positively correlated with electoral performance in local elections. However, this correlation is much stronger and positively correlated for smaller AfD lists on which less than one third of all positions are filled. This strongly points to the interaction of electoral rules and candidate supply. In other words, unfilled list seats matter only insofar voters cannot compensate them with cumulating votes. This difference between small and larger is not existent when using federal vote shares as placebo outcome (see Table C.2. Scholars who seek to analyze local AfD shares or include them as predictors in their empirical analyses should be aware of this mechanical effect and thus include information on local candidate supply.

Organizational Effect

Beyond this mechanical effect, active party chapters may also affect the electoral performance of new parties through non-mechanical or organizational effects, i.e. the mobilization of voters through familiar candidates. To test this idea, I use a similar setup as before but this time predict federal election results. The idea is that the presence of local party elites has spillover effects on voters living in the same places. To test this idea, I repeat the previous
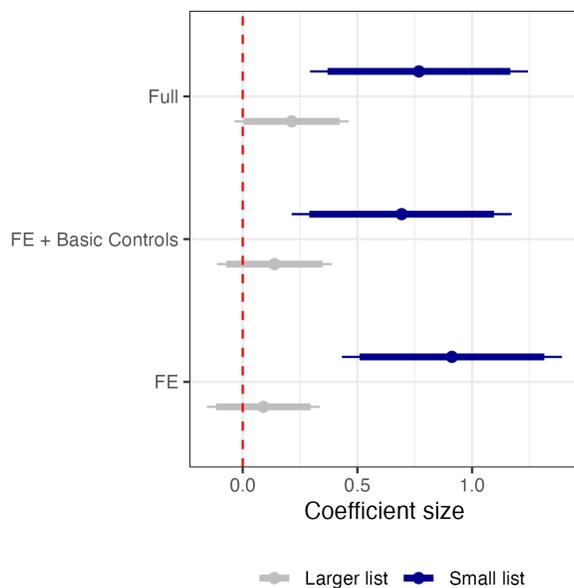
Figure 5.2: Correlation Between Local Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance (AfD Branches)

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicates 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table C.2.

analyses but this time I rely on the logged number of AfD party elites in a given municipality to ensure comparability of results. For completeness, I also include my strength indicator on the share of filled positions in municipal races.

In Table 5.1, I present evidence suggesting that the number of elites is positively correlated with electoral success. This is true for both parties during their emergence periods. By contrast, the coefficient for the list strength indicator is positive but not statistically significant, unlike the logged number of AfD elites. Overall, the results also highlight the influence of competing elites: vote shares tend to be lower in areas with a higher number of rival elites. Moreover, there is a consistent interaction effect—the impact of new party elites becomes increasingly negative as the number of competing elites in the community rises.

Thus, while the local presence of new parties alone may not be a strong predictor, it becomes more informative when combined with additional data on political competition in local communities.

Table 5.1: Correlation Between Number of New Party Elites and Electoral Performance

	AfD		Greens
	(1)	(2)	(3)
# AfD cand. / total seats	0.004		
	(0.004)		
Log(# New party elites)		0.003*	0.002+
		(0.001)	(0.001)
Log(# competing elites)	-0.002***	-0.002***	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
# AfD cand. / total seats x Log(# comp. elites)	-0.003+		
	(0.002)		
Log(# New party elites) x Log(# comp. elites)		-0.001***	-0.001
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Lagged new party vote	0.881***	0.895***	0.550***
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.041)
Lagged turnout	-0.191***	-0.192***	-0.000+
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.000)
Log(Population)	-0.005***	-0.005***	0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
N	10357	10770	1709
R²	0.95	0.95	0.75
Adj. R²	0.95	0.95	0.74
County-FE	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. OLS. Lagged turnout and lagged new party vote shares refer to the lagged results in the previous national election. Standard errors clustered on municipality level.

Micro-Level Evidence: Local Organizational Strength & Visibility

How does new party presence affect the visibility of political campaigns? To address this question, I draw on two geocoded surveys from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) (GLES, 2022), which enable me to situate respondents in communities with and without a local AfD presence. The surveys were fielded around the German federal elections in 2013, 2017, and 2021. Given the sensitive nature of geocoded survey data, the data can only be accessed in a secure data room at the GESIS Institute in Mannheim which I visited on December 9th and 10th 2024.

The analyses aimed to identify differences in the contact that people reported having with the local branch. The GLES includes an item battery to proxy this contact by asking respondents to state whether or not they saw e.g. posters of a given party. I use two indeces that summarizes this context. The first contains all measures of contact to AfD party campaigns including emails, direct contact, street campaigning, ads, events, social media, or information material. I calculate the share of all experienced contact types by an individual respondent and then take the mean across respondents. In the second index, I only include the three most mentioned forms of contact (posters, ads, direct contact). Again, I take the mean across respondents.

As independent variable, I include the existence of a AfD municipality list in a local election as a dummy variable to predict individual contact with AfD campaigning. In Table 5.2, I report simple bivariate regressions between AfD local presence and reported contact with AfD campaigns. Table 5.2 shows that the contestation of local elections through the AfD was associated with an increase in the reported contact of about 0.05 standard deviations. This increase is more precisely estimated for commonly reported contacts through e.g. posters. Thus, these results suggest that the AfD is more actively campaigning in communities where the party has a local presence and also contests local elections.

Table 5.2: AfD Local Presence and Reported Campaign Contact

| | Contact w/ AfD campaign | |
| | **All** | **Posters, ads, direct contact** |
	(1)	**(2)**
AfD present (1/0)	0.045+	0.058*
	(0.025)	(0.026)
N	17,652	17,652
R^2	0.06	0.06
Election-Year FE	✓	✓

Note: $+ p < 0.1$, $* p < 0.05$, $** p < 0.01$, $*** p < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered by municipality. Columns *All* refers to all types of campaign contact. Columns 2 only refers to most common campaign contact via direct personal contact, ads, or posters.

Of course, there are other theoretically plausible proxies for the AfD's local presence as well such as having representatives in the municipal council, the share of the AfD in local elections, or having a social media profile for the local branch. I repeat the analyses from Table 5.2 in the Appendix using these alternatives (see Table C.3). However, none of them correlates meaningfully with individuals' reported contact with AfD campaigning.

To further examine the relationship between reported campaign contact and local AfD presence, I investigate heterogeneity along two dimensions. First, I expect local presence to matter more in smaller villages, where citizens may be more responsive to the campaigning efforts of a new party. Second, I test whether the result is driven by a particular region by interacting the party-presence indicator with a dummy for East German municipalities. I anticipate that AfD presence may have a stronger effect on reported campaign contact in the party's strongholds, where its activity is likely to be more pronounced.

In Table 5.3, I report findings for these analyses. The table indicates that the effect of AfD presence on reported campaign contact diminishes as population size increases (Models 1 and 2), as shown by the negative coefficient on the interaction between AfD presence and logged population. Furthermore, the association between AfD presence and reported campaign contact is pronounced in East German municipalities, but essentially absent in the West (see Models 3-4).

Table 5.3: Heterogeneity In Relationship Between AfD Local Presence and Reported Campaign Contact

	Contact w/ AfD campaign			
	All (1)	Common (2)	All (3)	Common (4)
AfD present (1/0)	0.416***	0.407***	-0.021	0.006
	(0.114)	(0.119)	(0.027)	(0.028)
log(Population)	0.026**	0.030**		
	(0.009)	(0.010)		
AfD present × log(Population)	-0.037***	-0.036**		
	(0.011)	(0.012)		
East (1/0)			0.084+	0.066
			(0.047)	(0.052)
AfD present × East			0.149**	0.119*
			(0.053)	(0.056)
N	17,652	17,652	17,652	17,652
R^2	0.047	0.062	0.053	0.065
Election-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: $+\ p < 0.1$, $*\ p < 0.05$, $**\ p < 0.01$, $***\ p < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered by municipality. Columns *All* refers to all types of campaign contact. Columns *Common* only refers to most common campaign contact via direct personal contact, ads, or posters.

Taken together, these results indicate that local presence by the AfD is associated with an increasing visibility of electoral campaigns. This visibility is associated with the contestation of local election by the AfD, but not with other indicators of local party presence such as the presence of local councillors. The visibility is larger in smaller than in larger communities and predominant in the East where the AfD has its strongholds but essentially absent in West German municipalities.

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter has examined the continuing relevance of local party organizations in an era increasingly defined by digital campaigning. While online communication and social media advertising offer political parties unprecedented opportunities to reach voters directly, the analyses presented here demonstrate that local party branches continue to serve indispensable

functions within party organizations.

The theoretical discussion highlighted that local branches provide more than mere organizational infrastructure—they foster personal relationships, socialization, and trust within like-minded communities. For stigmatized or newly emerging parties in particular, these local arenas can serve as safe spaces that help mobilize supporters and strengthen cohesion.

Empirically, the evidence across macro-, meso-, and micro-level analyses underscores the enduring value of local presence. Parties with stronger local roots tend to perform better electorally, though the mechanisms vary—from mechanical effects under electoral rules to community-based mobilization. Moreover, local presence enhances visibility and contact with voters, particularly in smaller and more cohesive communities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that offline organization and digital campaigning should not be viewed as substitutes but as complements. Local branches remain vital for building trust, mobilizing volunteers, and maintaining sustained voter engagement—functions that digital tools alone cannot replicate. Even in the digital age, politics continues to rely on people and places.

6 New Party Elites & Electoral Success

In this chapter, I explore which, how, and where local party elites can help new parties to attract voters. To that end, I link the attributes of local party elites running in local elections to their electoral performance and structure the chapter around three questions. First, I analyze *which* candidates are most important for new parties, relating their performance in open-list proportional representation (PR) elections to their personal characteristics. I expect high-SES candidates to perform better in Green Parties and locally rooted candidates to perform better in far-right parties, as these candidate types may be able to draw support from both marginal and ideologically committed voters.

In a second step, I focus on *how* new party candidates attract voters. Existing research suggests that candidate profiles matter in two primary ways: through the perceptions they generate and through the mobilization of their social networks. Local representatives can shape both the perception and the brand of their parties (Horne, 2022; Adams et al., 2022; Favero and Zulianello, 2023). This role is particularly significant for new parties appealing to voters for the first time. For example, high-SES candidates may project competence and legitimacy, helping emerging parties establish credibility. Second, candidates contribute also by mobilizing pre-existing social ties (Dancygier, 2017; Arzheimer and Evans, 2012). The extent to which candidates can leverage these networks for mobilization likely depends e.g. on how deeply they are embedded within local communities. Locally rooted candidates

should therefore hold an advantage in mobilizing local networks. In sum, I expect high-SES candidates to primarily impact voters' perceptions, while locally rooted candidates are mainly effective through their ability to mobilize personal networks.

In the final empirical step, I examine *where* high-SES and locally rooted candidates running for new parties are most effective at attracting votes. I focus on contextual variation in the supply of competing parties and differences in population density. The supply of competing parties matters because new party candidates do not enter the local political arena in a vacuum. I expect high-SES candidates in new parties to perform better when they resemble the typical candidates of established parties, since they rely more on the signals they send to voters. In these settings, voters may perceive such new party candidates as 'normal' given that they resemble typical candidates of other parties. For locally rooted candidates, however, I expect the opposite. More locally rooted candidates in established parties may prevent those in new parties from effectively mobilizing their networks. Differences in population density, on the other hand, may also matter because residents of smaller towns have to rely less on the signals sent by candidates. In these contexts, candidates must mobilize networks of people who know them directly or who are indirectly linked to them via acquaintances or family members. In such smaller communities, I expect that locally rooted candidates will perform better since they can rely on long-standing social relationships and reputation.

Exploring the direct links between candidates and electoral performance in the context of local elections and new parties matters for at least three reasons: first, previous research has often relied on assumed or indirect links between high-SES politicians and electoral performance (Art, 2011; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016; Valentim, 2024). As Valentim notes, the relationship between politicians' quality and their electoral success is so close that some research treats it as interchangeably (Valentim, 2024, p. 118). This is reason enough to break this relationship up and closely inspect how SES and local roots of political candidates affects their electoral performance. Second, local elections are especially important for new parties,

which lack a stable base of loyal supporters. They allow these parties to field well-known local figures capable of drawing personal votes. To what extent these parties are successful in doing so and which types of elites are actually helping them in attracting voters has so far remained underexplored. Finally, previous research has often only focused on particular attributes and less on the combination of e.g. localness and SES (see as an exception Gagnon, McElwain and Ikeda, 2025). Broadening the focus to these attributes can help to understand how different types of attributes can boost new parties electorally.

Empirically, this chapter takes advantage of detailed data on individual candidates allowing me to move beyond aggregate branch-level analyses and tie candidate characteristics directly to their personal electoral performance. The richness of the data allows me to not only compare candidates across parties but also within parties. To analyze network effects, I use unique data that allows me to observe a given candidate's performance across communities. This allows me to compare candidates' performance between their hometown—i.e. their place of residence—and other communities. To analyze to what extent voters are receptive to cues, I complement my observational analysis with conjoint data conducted by researchers in other contexts (Campbell et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2021).

The chapter is structured along the lines of the three questions I explore. Before I delve into these, however, I present the data and explain how I link electoral performance to the attributes of local party elites.

6.1   Data & Estimation Strategy

To test for the relevance of high-SES level and local roots, I use mainly observational data from local open-list PR elections in Germany. These elections allow me to directly track candidate attractiveness since voters can allocate their votes freely among candidates. First, I describe my sample coverage and the structure of the data. In a second step, I discuss my

estimation strategy.

Data Structure & Sample Coverage

To examine the electoral appeal of individual candidate characteristics, I rely on personalized votes—that is, the number of votes each individual candidate receives—and focus on local county elections in which multiple candidates from the same party run. In other words, I can compare the effect of candidate characteristics on votes within parties. Figure 6.1 shows the sample coverage of my election results for the Green Party in the 1980s (Panel A, only West Germany) and the AfD in the 2010s (Panel B). For both periods, South German counties are well represented. This is especially the case for the Green Party emergence period, simply because during that period only Lower Saxony held open-list elections[1].

My main data is nested in several ways: candidates run on party lists that are nested in electoral districts which are embedded in counties. States differ in the structure of electoral districts: While some states—like Bavaria and Hesse—feature at-large districts in county elections, other states like Baden-Wuerttemberg or Saxony divide the county territory in several electoral districts. Each party can nominate as many candidate as there are seats available in the county parliament. Due to the open-list system, voters can vote for individual candidates resulting in a personalized vote for each candidate. Figure 6.2 provides an stylized overview for this nested structure.

For a subset of my data, I can also further dis-aggregate candidate votes. More specifically, these data allow me to observe how many votes each candidate receives in each community within the county. By matching this information to candidates' residence, I can differentiate between votes that candidates receive in the community they are living in and compare that to their electoral performance in other towns. Figure 6.3 shows how this struc-

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[1]States that feature open list systems are visualized in gray (NA) and those without open-list elections in light gray. Some states, such as Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse, switched to open list systems between the 1980s and 2010s, which explains some of the discrepancies in the sample coverage between the two periods.
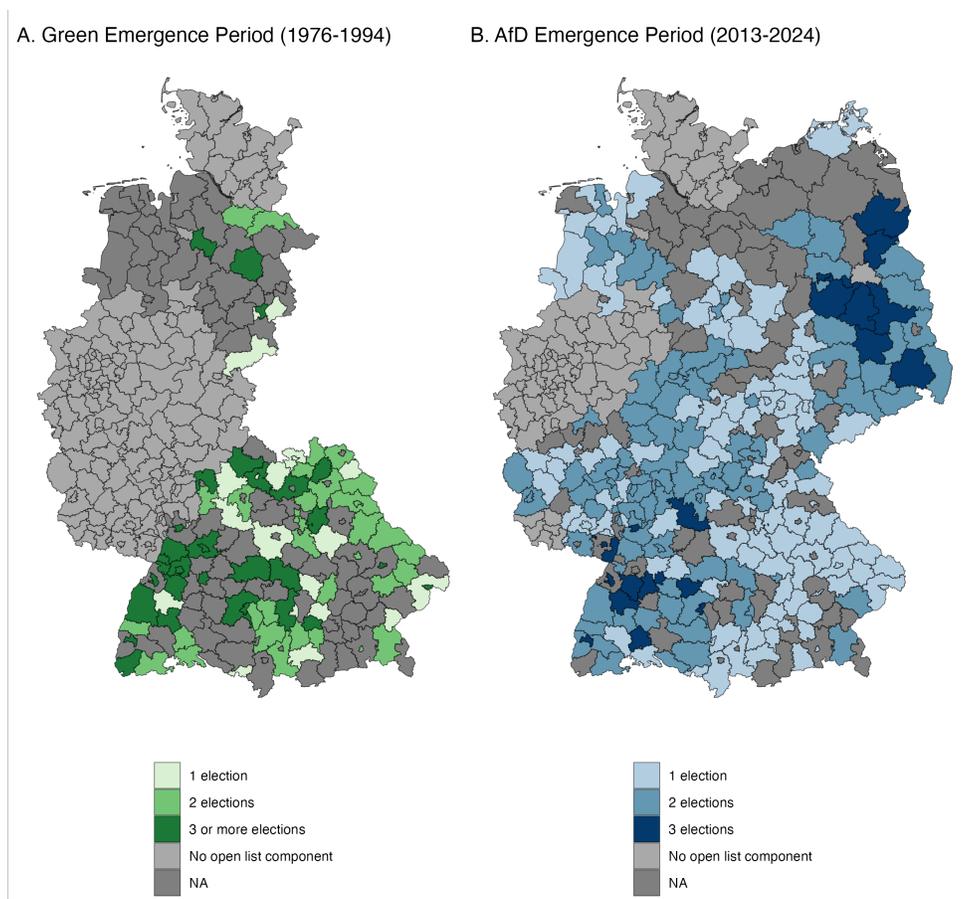
Figure 6.1: Counties in Election Samples

Note: The figure illustrates the coverage of elections in many sample across German counties. Darker shading indicates a larger number of available elections with electoral data. Because some states held more than four elections in the Green Party emergence period, I grouped counties with three or more elections together. For the AfD emergence period, number of available elections varies between two and four (see also Table 3.1).

ture extends the one in Figure 6.2 by adding another nested layer. There are two important limitations to this data: first, it is only available for rural counties ("Landkreise") given that these counties consist of several municipalities while city counties ("Kreisfreie Städte") have only one administrative boundary. Second, it is only available for more recent elections, limiting me to the AfD emergence period.

Estimation Strategy

To examine my hypotheses, I explore the presented data and proceed in three steps: in the first set of estimations, I take advantage of detailed electoral results, providing me with the
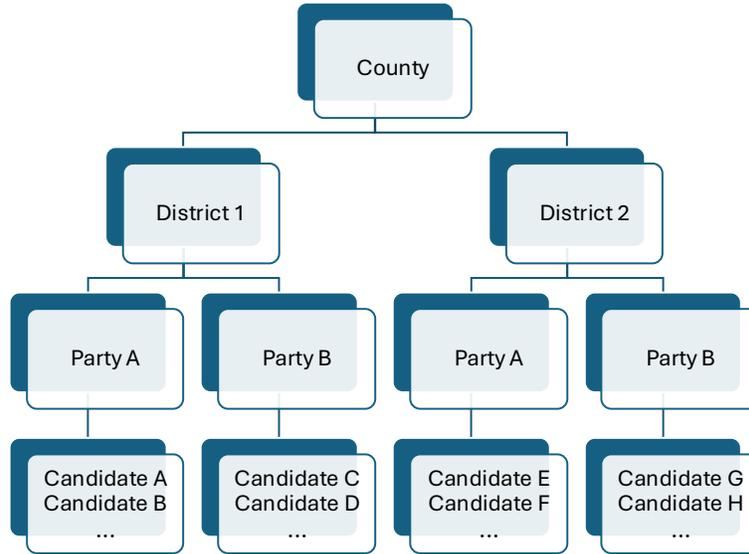
Figure 6.2: Nested Structure in County Elections

Note: Figure visualizes data structure for all following analyses on the county level (see Figures 6.4, 6.8, and 6.9).

number of votes that each candidate receives. Given that I am interested in the variation within lists, i.e. between candidates of the same party, I calculated for each candidate how many votes they contribute to the overall list performance. For example, for a candidate receiving 100 votes on a list with a total of 1,000 votes, this would result in a *candidate list vote share* (CLVS) of 0.1 or 10%. There are two pitfalls: For one, this within-list variance should depend on the length of the list and also local voter preferences. Since I seek to isolate variation that is driven by candidate traits, I opt to standardize these shares such that coefficients can be interpreted as changes in the standard deviation of the candidate list vote share. This is particularly warranted given that the length of party lists is, at least in parts, driven by the electoral system: In Baden-Wuerttemberg, fewer candidates run per list compared to Bavaria simply because counties are divided up in different electoral districts. The second pitfall consists of the clustering of standard errors: The nested structure of my data leads to dependency between candidate observations and therefore has to be modeled.
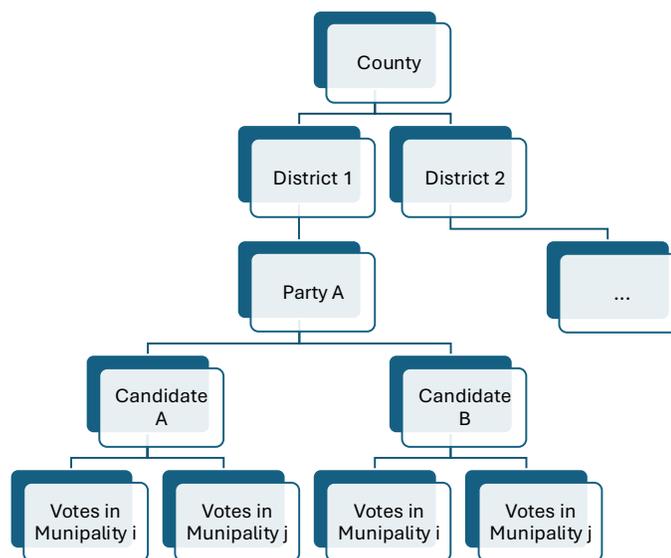
Figure 6.3: Nested Structure in County Elections

Note: Figure visualizes data structure for analyzing candidate vote shares on the municipality level (see Figure 6.5).

I choose to cluster-standard errors at the local party list level given that my dependent variable is the sum of candidates on these lists. In addition, I also include list fixed effects such that all variables are centered around the mean value of the local party list. For the dependent variable, this means that I evaluate the deviation of candidate list vote shares from the list's mean value.

$$CLVS_{ijpdc} = \delta_{jpdc} + local_{ijpdc} + SES_{ijpdc} + \mathbf{X}_{ijpdc} + \epsilon_{ijpdc}$$

,

where $CLVS_{ijpdc}$ corresponds to the standardized candidate list vote share of candidate i in year j running on party list p in district d and county c. δ_{jpdc} are list fixed effects, $local_{ijpdc}$ indicates my localness and SES_{ijpdc} my high SES measure (see Section 3.2 for details). Finally, $\mathbf{X}_{ijpdc}$ is a vector with controls for age, age squared, and gender. I use

this model later also to model heterogeneity by interacting candidate traits with context variables.

In a second step, I break down candidate-level vote shares into the number of votes that each candidates received in municipality m. I proceed in the same way as above but also cluster standard errors not only on the party list but also on the candidate level to account for the connection between vote shares of the same candidate across municipalities. In addition, I code a dummy variable equal to one for the electoral results in a given candidates' hometown—i.e. the town indicated as place of residence on candidate lists. This makes it possible to assess how candidates' electoral impact differs between their hometowns and other communities.

$$CLVS_{ijpdcm} = \delta_{jpdcm} + hometown_{ijpdcm} + local_{ijpdcm} \times hometown_{ijpdcm} +$$
$$SES_{ijpdcm} \times hometown_{ijpdcm} + \mathbf{X}_{ijpdcm} + \epsilon ijpdcm$$

6.2 Which Type of Candidates Matter?

What makes candidates more electable than others? I examine candidates from new parties with attention to two main attributes: socio-economic status (SES) and local roots. For new parties, both attributes may be especially important because weak organizational brands make individual candidate traits more salient. High-SES candidates can help legitimize and professionalize new parties (Art, 2011), reassuring marginal voters that these organizations are competent and effective (Devine, Turnbull-Dugarte and Ryan, 2025). At the same time, locally rooted candidates can make new parties appear "normal" and committed to community concerns, bolstering their credibility as viable representatives (Favero and Zulianello, 2023). Established parties, by contrast, should be less dependent on such individual profiles,

since their brand recognition reduces the weight of candidate attributes.

Previous research has provided evidence for the relevance of these attributes in established parties. For instance, Simon and Turnbull-Dugarte (2025) show in a meta analysis of conjoint experiments that voters generally prefer higher educated candidates. This preference is stronger among respondents with higher education (see also Horne, 2022). Similarly, studies have shown that locally rooted candidates enjoy advantages over competitors without such roots (Munis, 2021; Campbell et al., 2019; Nyholt, 2024; Leininger and Swalve, 2025).

Yet the electoral value of these signals may differ systematically across party families. Among Greens, whose electorates are, on average, more highly educated, SES signals could resonate more strongly. When it comes to local roots, far-right voters are especially likely to display strong place-based attachments (Fitzgerald, 2018), suggesting that far-right candidates benefit more from local connectedness than their Green counterparts, for whom place identities are less central. At the same time, variation in open-list elections among candidates of the same list is driven by those voters who prioritize personal attributes over party slates. Consequently, disparities among new parties may be smaller than one might expect based on the characteristics of their supporter bases.

Figure 6.4 presents the regression results for the Green Party (Panel A) and the AfD (Panel B), with additional details reported in Table D.1 in the Appendix. Before examining the electoral impact of local roots and high SES, I first assess basic sociodemographic factors as plausiblity check. The results suggest that when voters can choose between a male and a female candidate from the same party, they tend to prefer men. Notably, this pattern does not appear among Green Party voters in the party's early period. For the AfD, the female penalty appears somewhat larger, reinforcing findings that far-right parties pose a particular threat to gender equality (see Dancygier, 2020; Weeks et al., 2023)[2]. Turning to age, the results reveal that electoral performance declines with increasing age. However, this

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[2]This finding contrasts with prior evidence of no gender discrimination in higher-level elections (Fujiwara, Hilbig and Raffler, 2025) or conjoint experiments (Schwarz and Coppock, 2022), raising doubts about the universal nature of those results even within the same national context.

relationship is nonlinear: the statistically significant negative coefficient on age squared (see Table D.1) indicates that the decline is even steeper for older candidates. This pattern aligns with prior research on age-based representation preferences (Kurz, Wurthmann and Gross, 2025).

Attention now turns to the coefficients of the main explanatory variables: high SES levels and local roots, the latter proxied by local names. Figure 6.4 indicates that, in both new parties, high-SES candidates are more strongly associated with electoral performance in new than in established parties. This is true for the AfD *and* the Greens. More specifically, the estimated coefficients suggest that high-SES individuals are associated in both parties with an approximate 0.25 increase in the standard deviation of my candidate share of list votes measure. This underscores the importance of new party candidates who can signal competence and thereby build legitimacy among voters (Art, 2011; Valentim, 2024).

By contrast, locally rooted candidates (proxied by local names) tend to generally receive more votes on average than other candidates, but the pattern does not differ substantially between new and established parties. While locally rooted Green candidates contribute to list success at levels similar to established parties, AfD candidates with local roots gain more votes, though the difference is not statistically significant.

I also test for an interaction effect between local roots and high SES. However, I do not find evidence that this interaction matters. In fact, for the Green emergence period, it is negative and statistically significant. The triple interaction terms between local roots, high SES, and new party dummies are positive, meaning that new parties profit more from locally rooted elites with high SES. However, the triple interactions are not statistically significant in either emergence period.

Taken together, socio-economic background matters for the performance of candidates in both, the AfD and the Green Party, during their emergence period. While localness matters too, it does so in the same extent as it matters for established parties.
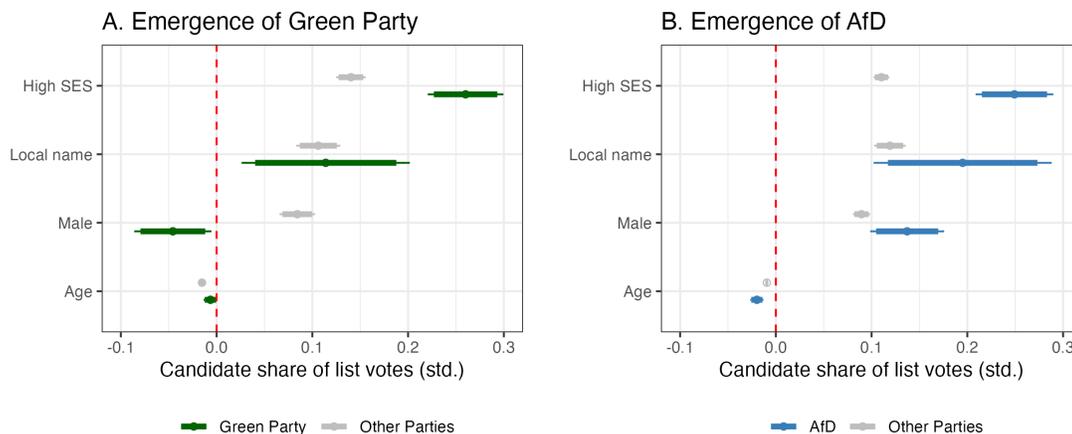
Figure 6.4: The Appeal of Candidate Traits

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicates 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table D.1.

To what extent does the relevance of candidate attributes relative to established parties diminish over time? To address this question, I use additional data to track Green Party candidates and analyze how their performance compares to similar candidates in established parties over time. Figure D.1 in the Appendix shows that, as hypothesized, the premium for high-SES Green Party candidates declined as the Greens became established within the German party system, reinforcing the idea that such candidate profiles are especially advantageous for new parties.

A further question is to what extent party organizations become better in selecting well performing candidate types over time (see also Auer, Portmann and Tichelbaecker, 2025). In Table D.3, I show that women on Green and AfD lists receive worse list positions over time. While there is no movement for locally rooted candidates, high-SES candidates climb AfD lists over time and claim more promising list positions.

6.3   How Do Different Types of Candidates Matter?

How do high-SES and locally rooted candidates help new parties to attract voters? Scholars have distinguished between explanations based on cues and those based on networks: according to the former, voters make decisions based on cognitive shortcuts that use some information such as ethnicity or endorsements when choosing between political candidates (see Dawson, 1995). Networks-based approaches have posited that candidates can appeal to voters through their networks of 'friends and neighbors' (see e.g. Arzheimer and Evans, 2012; Johnston et al., 2016; Harfst et al., 2023; Rice and Macht, 1987) especially in low turnout elections (Green and McClellan, 2020). These approaches are not mutually exclusive and political parties use both to strategically appeal to voters (see Dancygier, 2017).

Networks

The ability of new party candidates to mobilize voters often hinges on their capacity to activate personal networks and act as opinion leaders. Conceptualizing political information as a two-step process, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1968) argued in their seminal work that most voters receive political information from intermediaries or opinion leaders (for the German case, see e.g. Schneider, 1999). While the social, information, and political environments have changed over time, this two-step process still appears to be relevant today: for example, Mutz and Young (2011) argue that social media makes it easier for individuals to become opinion leaders. Furthermore, in a field experiment mimicking the two-step process, Druckman, Levendusky and McLain (2018) show that individuals who follow the news influence the opinions of others in their offline networks who do not.

High-SES individuals may be particularly socially influential given that they are more likely to belong to media consumers and may also profit from their high-status, professional background. This could allow them to shape peers' opinions through offline interactions.

Elites in high-SES occupations can thus be valuable assets for new parties due to their potential multiplier effect. However, this effect depends on their willingness to express political preferences—something less likely in stigmatized contexts. For far-right parties in particular, high-SES supporters often experience social stigma, such as being excluded from a social networks of friends[3].Based on interviews with 30 right-wing party members in Sweden, Ammassari (2023) finds that such feelings are especially common among highly educated members. Complementary quantitative evidence from Sweden and Italy (Ammassari, 2024) shows that perceived stigma can deter participation in party activities. Together, these findings cast doubt on potential multiplier effects for stigmatized new parties on the far right.

By contrast, locally rooted candidates may circumvent these barriers. Their personal networks are typically broader and deeper, formed through long-term residence, enduring community ties, and family-based connections. These ties are harder for others to sever, even when candidates affiliate with stigmatized parties. Consequently, locally rooted elites are less vulnerable to social sanctioning and can continue to engage in political activity without risking exclusion from their communities. For far-right parties, this makes locally rooted candidates especially valuable: they combine strong mobilizing networks with lower costs of political engagement, enabling them to amplify the party's message more effectively than high-SES elites.

Observing the same candidates and their electoral performance across multiple communities, Figure 6.5 shows the marginal effect of candidate traits differentiating by parties (AfD vs. other parties) and by place (separating candidate's places of residence vs. other towns in the same county). One the right-hand panel, the figure shows expected relationship: high-SES and locally rooted candidates fare better in their hometowns compared to other towns in the same county. This hometown advantage is greater for locally embedded candidates

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[3]One interviewed AfD organizer recalled the story of a fellow party member who dined with friends in a restaurants. These friends abruptly ended the dinner and left the table when the fellow party member declared his support for the AfD (Interview 2). The same organizer recounted that former acquaintances from his earlier involvement in local politics with another party would no longer spoke to him, and that even those rare case who did would only do so in private (Interview 2)

than for high-SES candidates but visible and statistically significant for both variables. The picture for the AfD looks slightly different. Here also, locally rooted candidates overperform in their hometown compared to their performance in other towns. However, this is not the case for high-SES candidates. High-SES candidates gain as much votes in their hometown as in other towns.

These findings support the view that locally rooted AfD candidates are particularly effective at mobilizing close social networks and securing their backing. By contrast, high-SES AfD candidates show no clear hometown advantage, which may stem from stigmatization within their networks or from their own reluctance to actively promote their ideas (Ammassari, 2024, 2023). While the success of high-SES candidates shown in the main analyses may be driven primarily by informational cues, locally rooted candidates appear additionally capable of activating direct support in their communities.
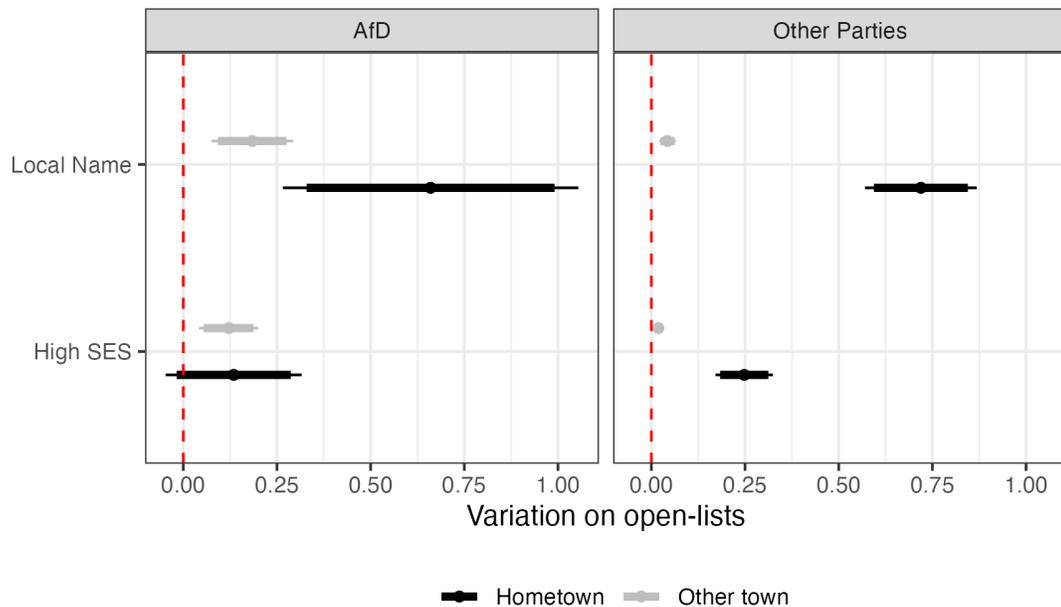
Figure 6.5: Candidate Traits and Mobilization of Local Networks

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicate 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table D.4 in the Appendix.

Cues

Both attributes, high SES and local roots, can serve as cues that can shape electoral outcomes in contexts where voters rely on heuristics rather than detailed knowledge of individual candidates. SES can, for instance, signal competence, skill, and effectiveness (Devine, Turnbull-Dugarte and Ryan, 2025), but can also make candidates appear elitist or less relatable (Carnes and Lupu, 2016a)[4]. While conjoints back, on average, the claim that voters prefer candidates with e.g. higher education levels (Simon and Turnbull-Dugarte, 2025), the observational evidence is less clear cut (see Carnes and Lupu, 2023).

Local roots, in turn, convey embeddedness in community life and a commitment to representing local interests (Munis, 2021; Campbell et al., 2019). Conjoint experiments with fictitious candidates show that voters generally care about these cues and are even able to identify localness cues when they are implicitly signaled, e.g. by lastnames (Leininger and Swalve, 2025). This vote for local voting appears to be driven by the desire to pick candidates that are invested in local communities and advance local interests (Campbell et al., 2019; Nyholt, 2024) and not by place-based identities responding to symbolic representation (Nyholt, 2024).

While previous research has shown that local roots and high SES can be useful cognitive shorts, I argue the attractiveness of these cues differ for left- and right-leaning voters. To explore this further, I take advantage of survey experiments conducted by Campbell et al. (2019) in the UK featuring local roots and Kang et al. (2021) in Australia featuring education levels. In both conjoint experiments, candidate parties are randomly assigned to either the major right- (Conservative/Liberal) or left-leaning party (Labour/Labor). I only use pairs featuring candidates from different parties and respondents that identify as either Conservative/Liberal or Labour/Labor. While this analysis does not speak directly to the

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[4]To what extent the socioeconomic backgrounds reflects actual political competence is contested. For example, Art (2011, p. 37) links education to competence while Carnes and Lupu (2016b) do not find that the socioeconomic background of politicians matters for political output.
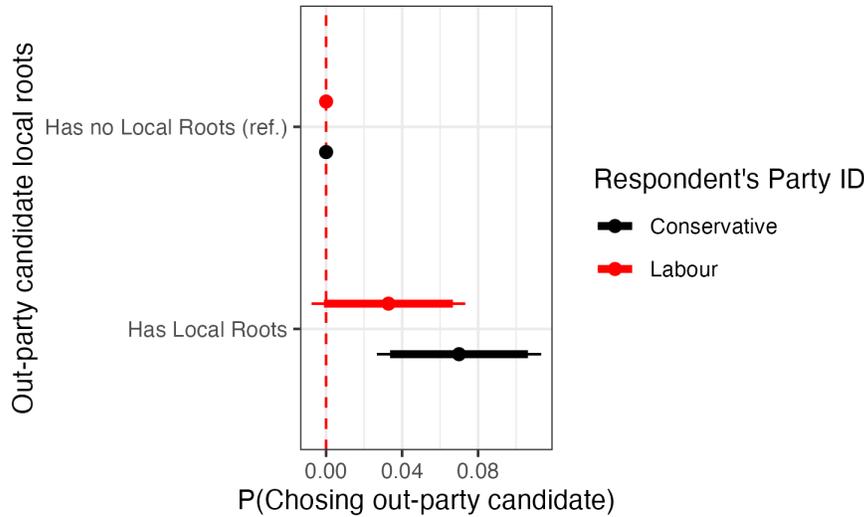
Figure 6.6: Probability of Choosing Outparty Candidate Conditional on Local Roots

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicate 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table D.5 in the Appendix.

appeals of new party candidates, it shows how left- and right-leaning voters make their decisions when ranking out-party candidates.

I then estimate the probability to choose the out-party candidate conditional on local roots and education levels. Figure 6.6 visualizes the results for local roots. The results show that for voters of both major parties in the UK, the probability increases to choose the out-party candidate if the out-party candidate has local roots. However, the coefficient is only statistically significant for conservative voters while it is indistinguishable from zero for Labour party voters.

By contrast, Figure 6.7 shows how the probability of choosing the out-party candidate conditional on their education level based on Australian data. Figure 6.7 shows that out-party candidates' higher education levels are only positively and statistically associated with the choice of Labor party voters. For supporters of the Liberal Party, this effect is null.

Taken together, these results imply that education and local roots can work as important heuristics for new parties. Recruiting and running locally rooted and high SES candidates
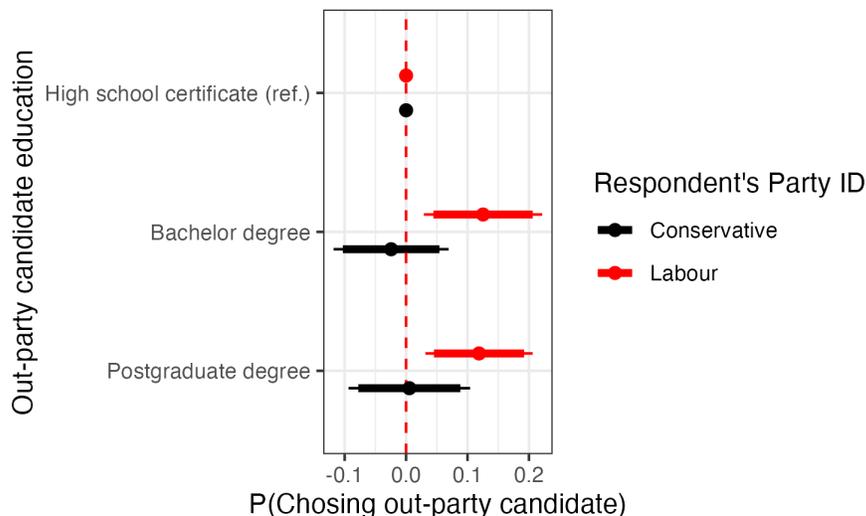
Figure 6.7: Probability of Choosing an Outparty Candidate Conditional on Education Level

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicate 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table D.5 in the Appendix.

can attract voters from other parties. The differential appeal of education on left-leaning and local roots on right-leaning voters points to an important scope conditions. New parties might be more or less successful in attracting voters depending on whether they are positioned on the poltiical left or political right. However, this also depends, of course, also on the extent to which the political right and left are divided by education or local attachment (see **?**Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021).

6.4 Where Do Different Types of Candidates Matter?

The electoral performance of high-SES and locally rooted candidates should also vary across contexts. More specifically, I expect the electoral performance of new party elites to vary across the rural-urban environment and the supply of elite types across competing parties.

Rural-Urban Environment

First, locally rooted candidates should perform better in rural than in urban areas for at least two reasons: the mobilizing effect of locally rooted candidates in their personal networks, as shown in Section 6.3, should be more pronounced in rural communities than in urban areas. In more populated areas, activating networks matters less given that the voter base is larger. Furthermore, people in cities may have more heterogeneous networks (see e.g. Fischer, 1991) making them harder to mobilize than more cohesive networks. Second, voters in rural areas might be more willing to support someone with local roots if more voters hold a distinct place-based identity (see e.g. Leininger and Swalve, 2025; Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof, 2024). In urban places, local roots might not only be more difficult to identify for many voters but these voters might also be less willing to vote based on them (see also Velimsky et al., 2023).

For high-SES candidates, the role of the rural-urban environment is somewhat ambiguous. In rural areas, new parties may particularly benefit if they can recruit high-SES elites who are opinion leaders in their communities. However, it is unclear to what extent high-SES elites can serve as opinion leaders or whether their high-SES occupation marks them instead as outsiders. In urban areas, by contrast, high-SES candidates may gain an advantage because voters there are disproportionately drawn from higher socio-economic backgrounds themselves and are more likely to value signals of education and occupational prestige (Simon and Turnbull-Dugarte, 2025; Horne, 2022). Given this ambivalence, I do not expect systematic differences between urban and rural constituencies in the overall performance of high-SES candidates.

Of course, rural and urban areas are different on more characteristics than just the structure of social networks in them. Differences may also arise due to different political leanings or the composition of the electorate, particularly the sorting of higher educated voters into cities. To account for this, I also include controls for the share of high-SES voters and support for the given new party.

The results in Figure 6.8 indicate that locally rooted AfD candidates perform significantly better in rural than in urban areas (statistically significant at the 1% level), whereas the performance of high-SES candidates does not differ between these contexts. For the Greens, locally rooted and high-SES candidates attract more votes in urban areas; however, none of these differences among Green Party candidates reaches statistical significance.

The detailed results in Table D.6 in the Appendix also reveal that neither the share of high-SES voters nor the pre-existing electoral support of the AfD or Greens matters for the electoral impact of locally rooted and high-SES candidates. However, I find that locally rooted AfD candidates perform better in regions with more distinct dialects, suggesting that voters in these historically more peripheral areas (see Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof, 2024) place greater value on local roots. However, this does not extend to locally rooted Green Party candidates.
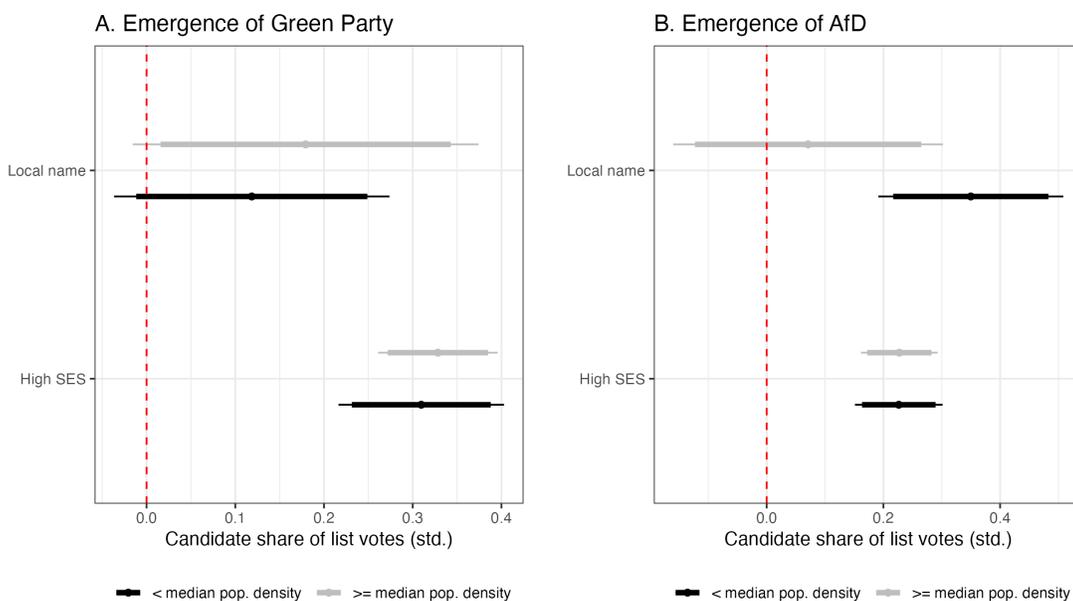
Figure 6.8: Electoral Appeal in Rural vs. Urban Environments

Note: Thin (thick) horizontal lines indicate 95% (90%) confidence intervals. Detailed regression results are provided in Table D.6 in the Appendix.

Competing Supply

Not only the rural–urban environment but also the supply of candidate types in other parties may shape the electoral performance of new party candidates. I expect high-SES candidates that appear to derive their appeal mostly from cues, to perform better with higher shares of high-SES candidates in competing parties. The signals from high-SES candidates, depicting their new party as normal and legitimate, may be stronger when these candidates match the existing supply structure of established parties. For locally rooted elites, for whom the mobilization of local networks seems to matter more, the logic might be reversed. If established parties have a strong standing in local networks, these candidates might find it harder to appeal to their voters and mobilize their personal, local networks.

The results in Figure 6.9 show that consistent with these considerations, high-SES candidates perform significantly better in environments of high-shares of high-SES candidates on competing lists. This is true for both, the Green Party and the AfD, during their emergence periods and the difference is statistically significant at the 1% level. The supply of locally rooted candidates in competing parties also moderates their electoral impact, but only in the case of the AfD. As hypothesized, AfD candidates perform worse in contexts where competitors field more locally rooted candidates themselves.

This pattern provides suggestive evidence that the electoral advantage of locally rooted candidates primarily stems from the mobilization of personal networks, whereas high-SES candidates benefit mainly from the signals they convey to voters.

6.5   Conclusion

How do local party elites enable new parties to overcome the electoral challenge, that is to attract voters? In this chapter, I have explored which, how, and where local party elites
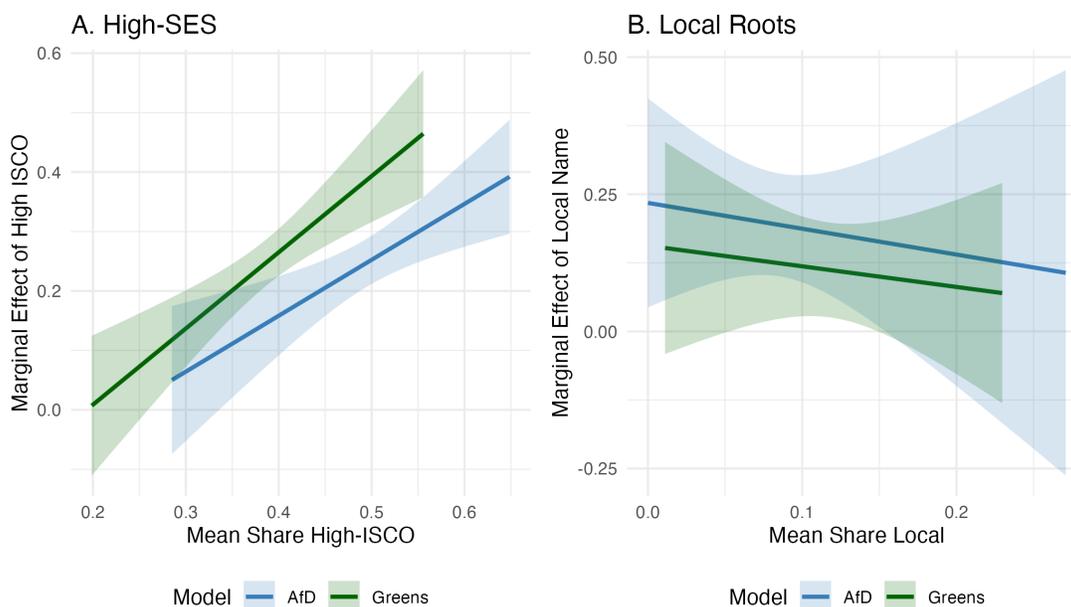
Figure 6.9: Electoral Appeal of High-SES and Local Roots Moderated by the Supply of Candidate Types in Competing Parties

Note: Shaded areas indicate 95% confidence interval. Detailed regression results are provided in Table D.6 in the Appendix.

help new parties gain voter support. Focusing on two types of party elites, locally rooted and high-SES candidates, in new parties, I find that both types bring electoral advantages. More specifically, I find that high-SES candidates contribute more votes to their party lists in new parties than in established ones. This is true for the Green Party and the AfD in their respective emergence periods. The size of the electoral bonus of high SES is also similar in both parties. In contrast, while locally rooted candidates are also associated with an electoral bonus, this bonus is about of the same size as in established parties.

How do new locally rooted and high-SES candidates in new parties attract voters? Arguing that there are primarily two mechanisms, networks and cues, I find evidence that locally rooted candidates running for the AfD are effective in mobilizing social networks, while high-SES candidates fail to do so. To further delve into cue-based mechanisms, I take advantage of conjoint experiments conducted by other researchers (Campbell et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2021) and explore how high SES and local roots serve as cues when choosing

outparty candidates. My results show that both, proxies for SES and local roots, can serve as cognitive shortcuts in these situations. While cues on SES appears to be more relevant for left-leaning individuals, fictitious locally rooted candidates were more likely to attract the support right-leaning individuals. In consequence, I argue that while high SES appear to primarily appeal via cue-based mechanisms, locally rooted candidates are important for new parties because they do not only appeal to voters via localness cues but are also able to mobilize close networks at election times.

Finally, I examine where locally rooted and high-SES candidates in new parties attract voters, focusing on rural–urban differences and the candidate supply of competing parties. For the AfD, locally rooted candidates perform better in rural areas, consistent with network-based appeals. In contrast, no such patterns emerge for Green candidates, nor does the prevalence of higher education shape electoral outcomes for either party along urban-rural divide. Regarding candidate supply, high-SES candidates of both parties gain more support in places with a higher share of competing high-SES candidates, likely because their similarity enhances perceptions of normality and legitimacy. Conversely, AfD candidates with local roots face disadvantages where competitors field more locally rooted candidates, suggesting difficulties in penetrating communities dominated by established parties; again, no such effect appears for the Greens.

Taken together, the findings show that high-SES candidates are particularly associated with an electoral advantage for new parties, whereas the impact of locally rooted candidates is more conditional and most pronounced for the AfD. The effects of both candidate types vary across contexts: high-SES candidates benefit primarily from the cues they signal to voters, while the advantage of locally rooted candidates—again mainly for the AfD—appears partly driven by local networks.

Overall, these results point to important differences in the electoral challenges faced by new parties. During its emergence in the 1980s, the German Green Party benefited

primarily from high-SES candidates, particularly in areas where rival parties also fielded similar profiles. The AfD likewise gained from recruiting high-SES elites, but by attracting locally rooted elites, it was also able to penetrate rural communities. This highlights the importance of locally embedded candidates in helping far-right parties overcome electoral barriers and appeal to voters in rural and peripheral regions. These patterns underscore the distinct constraints that new parties face when mobilizing support through local party elites. In the next chapter, I examine whether these differences also extend to the organizational dimension.

7 Growing Roots? New Party Elites and the Building of Local Branches

How do new parties meet the organizational challenge, that is building stable organizational roots on the ground? Scholars have typically paid attention to those within parties who manage to attract voters and build a vibrant public image. Although intra-party processes are often opaque and difficult to analyze, it would be misleading to depict them as purely procedural and reactive to organizational incentives or contextual variables. Instead, local organizers pictured local party building as highly dependent on individual effort and abilities: "The local chapter itself, as the smallest organizational unit, only functions when there is [...] someone who takes initiative" (Interview 1). The downside of attributing organizational success to individual leadership is that destructive leadership can drive people away and potentially cause branch development to fail. One interviewee, who was active in a local Green Party branch in Northern Germany in the 1980s, recalled:

> "He [the local party leader] had joined up with people who were engaging in really aggressive bullying and were threatening others [in the local branch] both physically and psychologically. As a result, many of those ahead of me on the list ended up not taking up their mandates. And I, still a student just about to graduate from high school, suddenly found myself in the position of having to consider taking on a mandate in a very difficult situation. At the same time, my

English teacher, who was also part of the parliamentary group, strongly advised me against accepting it, because he said it was very important that I finish school successfully and not focus on the mandate at that point. And that's what I did. But it drove many people out of the party and the [local] parliamentary group."

(Interviewee 7)

Together, these insights provide the motivation for the inquiry of this chapter which is guided by two main questions: first, I ask which local party elites prove conducive to party building? I address this question by analyzing local-level party activity and the residential locations of local party elites, linking these elites to the communities in which they live and to the presence of local party branches. Theoretically, I expect differences across parties with high-SES elites being more effective in establishing local Green Party branches, while locally rooted elites should be conducive for setting up far-right branches. This theoretical rationale follows a homophily preferences logic where local party elites are most effective in recruiting party members and setting up local branches if they are similar to core supporters of their respective parties (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001; Ammassari 2023, p. 5).

In a second step, I place elite information into context to analyze in which places local party elites succeed to establish new local roots for their organizations. Following the empirical findings and the central argument of this thesis, I argue that not the type of party elites per se is decisive but the allocation of these elites to places where they prove most effective. In particular, I focus on how the rural-urban environments and the supply of competing parties enables locally rooted and high-SES party elites to establish local chapters.

Focusing on how local party organizations emerge in the first places extends to previous research highlighting the longterm durability local party chapters (see Ellinas, 2020; Loxbo and Bolin, 2016). In other words, once parties have established local roots, these roots grow and can not only affect the long-term electoral performance but may also slowly move public opinion in local communities (Loxbo, 2025). It also complements research that has focused

on how parties gain traction by e.g. infiltrating civic associations, thus winning influence in social life (Berman, 1997). Finally, focusing on the emergence of local party chapters and the role of local elites advance, previous work has shown *that* local elites and their networks in the emergence phase of new parties (Sells, 2022). This chapter analyzes this link systematically and scrutinizes also the role of contextual variables.

I begin by outlining the theoretical framework that connects local party elites to local organizational outcomes. In a second step, I introduce the data and empirical setting, explaining in greater detail why county-level candidate characteristics are linked to municipal-level outcomes. In final part of this chapter, I present my analyses and results.

7.1 The Role of Local Party Elites in Organization-Building Processes

The idea that party elites shape the trajectory of their organizations is well established. Prior studies have shown, for example, that national party leaders play a crucial role in building party organizations (Bolleyer, 2013; Tavits, 2013; de de Lange and Art, 2011). While occupying powerful positions, these leaders, however, have to consider intra-party factional interests and can almost never unilaterally decide over the development of their organization. On the local level, the personal impact is more direct (see e.g. Sells, 2022) and local party leaders have to keep their organizations running by recruiting party members (Fisher et al., 2018) and by incentivizing them to provide work for the party (Panebianco, 1988). Empirical work has shown, for instance, that local party elites can affect parties' local base through recruitment messages (Gulzar et al., 2025), by being more or less welcoming to immigrant-origin individuals (Eriksson and Vernby, 2021), and by attracting more and different types of members once they have taken over local or national offices (Sells, 2020; Poertner, 2023). While these strands in the literature highlight the effect that local elites can

have on shaping local-level organizational outcomes, the scope of this impact remains unclear. I contribute to this literature by focusing who manages to build local party branches and where. To explore these questions, I first focus on elites' incentives to build local branches, to then outline which type of party elites I expect to be institution builders. In a last step, I focus on the context in which party building occurs.

Elites' Incentives for Party Building

Why should party elites be motivated in extending the organizational reach of their parties? Traditional work on party organizations has often treated parties' institutionalization processes as desirable step to ensure that a party can consolidate, mature, and eventually become electorally successful (Panebianco, 1988). Thus, if elites' interests are aligned with the interests of their organizations, they should face strong incentives to build local party branches. However, more recent work has questioned this premise of aligned interests (Bolleyer, 2013, 2016). Bolleyer (2016) takes the perspective of party leaders that face decisions to either invest in party institutionalization processes and rely on a weak party structures. Importantly, party elites face a trade-off in this choice. Weak organizational structures can undermine a party's medium- and long-term prospects by limiting its capacity to recruit effectively, which in turn jeopardizes organizational development. Since parties rely heavily on voluntary contributions—whether for campaigning or filling candidate lists—inefficient recruitment ultimately threatens the supply of this essential labor. At the same time, investing in party infrastructure is costly and may constrain the autonomy of party leaders. Institutionalization also comes with the risk of breeding challengers who, over time, might replace party leaders (Bolleyer, 2016, 99). Taken together, there is "a tension between individual [party leaders'] short-term and collective long-term interests" (Bolleyer, 2016, 99). While this "leadership-structure dilemma" has been applied to the national level (Bolleyer, 2013, 2016), it also concerns local-level dynamics: local party leaders who found local party

branches face the same kind of pressures as national parties and institutionalization processes are ambiguous with regard to their personal benefits. One local AfD party organizer expressed this trade-off in his own words:

> "[...] gaining members is difficult, but at the moment, the general political situation is really driving people toward us in droves — which is, on the one hand, nice. You get a lot of new members. On the other hand, if you already have a solid core, you're a bit set in your ways and you know what you're doing, then suddenly you also get people coming in who, well, take a more critical view of things, you know? Or there are, other "alpha animals," so to speak, who would also like to take over the leadership position." (Interview 2)

This leads to the question who builds party and under which conditions.

Types of Elites and Party Building

Why should the characteristics of local party elites matter for organizational outcomes? I argue that local roots and high SES affect organizational outcomes via two channels. On the one hand, these attributes come with resources. High-SES elites in new parties can climb more easily to leadership positions benefit their party organizations because they can more easily acquire knowledge about regulation and bureaucratic procedures that is important for thriving party branches[1]. One AfD organizers told me that his acquired knowledge about bureaucratic procedures made him an important resource in his party:

> "[...] [other members] always say, 'Well, you know how it's done, so teach us.' And I'm happy to do that. But I had to teach myself, too. No one showed me how to do it, and there wasn't even a book I could read about it. So now I just try to make sure I pass on whatever knowledge I have." *(Interview 1)*

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[1]In Germany, for instance, parties must provide documentation about the intra-party democratic elections of candidate lists to (local) election committees.

High-SES individuals are more likely to be capable of acquiring such knowledge, and in contexts where institutional experience is scarce, this knowledge and functional expertise become especially valuable. These skills may also enable high-SES elites in the first place to form local branches in their hometowns.

Locally rooted elites also come with resources, specifically their personal networks, that make them attractive to new parties. These networks can be especially useful to get in touch with citizens and provide low-threshold opportunities for interested citizens to get in touch with new parties as one local AfD organizer outlined:

> "The citizen wants to meet you. Where does that happen? At association events [Vereinsevents]. And if they don't talk to you directly — say, during the meeting itself — then it happens on the way to the restroom. You're standing next to each other, or maybe at the bar. And that's when conversations start, with people saying things like, 'Hey, have you heard about this?' or 'We've got this or that problem — can't you do something about it?'" *(Interview 2)*

For new parties, publicly embedding themselves in local networks such as associations can be difficult due to the risk of backlash. The same AfD organizer, for instance, recalled that he had to reconsider his public involvement in local associations because of his political visibility:

> "I had associations where I could have stayed on the board, and they even asked me to, but I said 'no — I can't do that to you'. [...] Out of protection for the associations that I care about, I've said, 'I'll stay in the background — I'll support you and help however I can, but I can't take a board position.' Because if I did, there's a real risk that members would quit, or that politicians from outside would say, 'That association shouldn't get funding anymore.' And I've even heard that directly from the boards — that people approached them again

asking why they have someone like me involved, and things like that." *(Interview 2)*

Locally rooted party elites, such as the AfD organizer quoted above, often find ways to remain involved in these associations, albeit not always publicly. They also draw on their personal connections to navigate such challenges and avoid being fully ostracized within their local communities enabling them to normalize the image of their party in their home community over time and to expand their parties' organizational roots.

From this resource perspective, I expect that both types of party elites, locally rooted and high-SES, benefit their organizations. Given that these resources may very well complement each other, I also expect that the combination of the two attributes, i.e. high-SES party elites with local roots, is particularly effective in expanding new parties' organizational reach.

But locally rooted and high-SES candidates come not only with certain resources that are conducive for party building. Party elites are also embedded in their own personal networks of family and friends whose ideological slant may make them more or less likely to expand their parties' organizational reach. High-SES elites in far-right parties might, for instance, be less capable to recruit from their own social networks if these are predominantly composed of higher educated individuals given higher stigmatization of far-right parties in such networks (Ammassari, 2023). Such stigmatization can then also deter the political activity of high-SES members (Ammassari, 2024). Elites may not deterred in the same way as ordinary party members, but it might limit their ability to win followers for starting a local branch and increase their incentives to invest instead in higher-level party work instead of exposing oneself in the local community.

While high-SES elites may face greater stigmatization when becoming active in far-right parties, one might expect similar pressures to apply to locally rooted individuals active in Green Parties. However, a local Green Party politician who became active in his hometown during the 1980s cautioned against such a conclusion, noting that stigmatization against his

party nowadays would be much stronger than it was in the 1980s:

> "[...] you were more seen as an outsider. Or, you know, as a bit of a nutcase in that direction. But it wasn't really aggressive back then — not like it often is today with all the polarized right–left debates. Back then, people were more like, 'What do you even want?' — a bit dismissive or just indifferent. Or if there was rejection, it was more along the lines of, 'What nonsense,' that kind of thing. But I don't remember any really aggressive hostility." *(Interview 5)*

Taken together, I expect that locally rooted and high-SES elites are particularly conducive to party building processes. However, given high levels of stigmatization, I expect that high-SES elites in far-right parties are less effective in expanding their parties' roots.

In Which Contexts Do Party Elites Matter?

Different types of elites may shape organizational outcomes in varying ways depending on the context in which they emerge and contest office under new party labels. Just as their electoral appeal varies across contexts, elites' impact on organizational outcomes might vary too. I make this point in the following by focusing on elites' organizational effects conditionally on population size and supply of competing parties.

Particularly small communities are difficult to penetrate for new parties given that even smaller national parties often struggle to gain an organizational foothold in such remote communities. In these contexts, individuals hold more information about their friends, neighbors, and fellow townspeople simply because networks are denser and social interaction more likely (see Browning et al., 2017). Political parties compete with other organizations when they want to provide space for socializing with like-minded people. Locally rooted elites may be particularly helpful in these difficult environments given that they can build on a long-standing social reputation. Thus, such locally rooted elites might more likely to build an

organizational presence in such places because they are not perceived as outsiders, which makes it easier to normalize political activities for a given new political party. By contrast, the role of high-SES elites is more ambiguous: on the one hand, high-SES elites that function as opinion leaders and are well integrated into townspeople's daily lives are ideally positioned to expand the organizational roots of new parties. On the other hand, high-SES elites are often not well embedded in rural communities given that their jobs are more often located in larger cities. In these cases, high-SES elites may face a stronger challenge to establish organizational roots on the ground in more remote communities.

Another factor conditioning the organizational impact of party elites is the structure of the local political arena. In particular, the presence of other party elites may make it more difficult to find and recruit party members needed to form a local branch. In communities with more active political elites, these elites may have not only already exhausted the pool of potential aspirants but may have also shaped public opinion for a long period. While this logic is straightforward, it might actually matter who these elites are for two reasons: first, locally rooted and high-SES elites may find it more difficult to recruit supporters in their networks if competing elites are of the same type (i.e. locally rooted or high-SES). This is because they might be embedded in the same networks or use their attributes in the same way to appeal to potential followers and recruit them for their cause. In other words, high-SES and locally rooted elites may not have a competitive advantage against these already active elites. On the other hand, it might be important whether locally active elites are affiliated with mainstream parties or small and marginal parties and local voters groups (SMPs). In areas with more active elites of mainstream parties, locally rooted party elites may have difficulties to attract followers given that the political arena is more nationalized and their local roots may be less appealing. In this context, their local knowledge and connections may be less effective. By contrast, high-SES elites with a richer knowledge of national policy issues but limited knowledge of local politics may find it easier to recruit followers in a context where residents are attentive to national issues. Conversely, locally

rooted elites may find it easier to setup local chapters in communities with more active elites in SMPs. In these contexts, local knowledge and local networks may be important to tap into a politically active community without entrenched mainstream parties. This is important given that e.g. Jankowski, Juen and Tepe (2022) show that the AfD's entrance in local political arenas was associated with electoral among independent local lists. Locally rooted new party elites might be ideally positioned to draw activists from such local lists to their new party.

7.2 The Case of German Local Politics

How can party elites be empirically linked to local party-building processes? I argue that the German system is particularly well suited for such an analysis because of its two-tier local structure. The top lay, the county level constitutes not only the primary arena of local politics[2], but also an important springboard for political careers in new parties. Elites active on the county level often, however, also engage in building up municipal branches. These municipal branches are dependent on the county branches, meaning that even their formal formation has to be sanctioned by the county branch. Asked how branches open, one AfD organizer outlined:

> "[...] But there are also people here who like to keep control from the top — and then it says in the party statutes that the district executive has to approve it. So basically, I and my district executive board have to give the approval, and that really rubs the people the wrong way who are eager to set up their own local branch." *(Interview 1)*

One of the contentious points is whether a local branch should be formed when there is

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[2]This is primarily due to county branches' financial and organizational autonomy. Furthermore, the county also represents a local layer where organizing new parties is, however, still feasible across the country (for details see also Chapter 4).

enough demand for one or whether the local branch is viewed as a precondition to generate demand. Even among interviewed AfD organizers, opinions about this differed.

However, interviewees agreed that local branches sometimes simply do not function well. Reasons mentioned in interviews included factionalism, extremism, or lack of serious interest in party work. Furthermore, some branches were only established to facilitate candidate nomination procedures for higher-level elections. Given that electoral districts in some states would cut through administrative county borders, some elites worked intensively to establish local branches, sometimes including more than one municipality, in order to run the nomination process only through municipality associations that were located in a given electoral district. Thus, it might not be surprising that one interviewed organizer went so far to state that "the local branches primarily served as small personal kingdoms, without any measurable success for the respective parties." (Interview 3). One of the explicit reasons that this AfD organizer gave was that local branches would often not even manage to field and run candidate lists in local council elections.

Therefore, the empirical analysis in this chapter focuses on the contestation of municipal elections. I argue that running candidates for municipal councils represents the minimum threshold local branches must meet to anchor the party within local communities. This matters not only because it enables voters to support the party in local races, but also because it enhances the party's visibility and provides recognizable faces to the community. And while research has often focused on the politicization of municipality politics or the electoral outcomes of municipal elections (see e.g. Tavits, 2013; Jankowski, Juen and Tepe, 2022), there is a dearth of evidence investigating what factors drive the formation of municipal party lists in the first place. I treat local party elites, i.e. county-level candidates, as key drivers of expanding new parties' organizational reach to the municipal level. Before I empirically examine how these elites are associated with local branch formation, I present the data that I use in more detail.

7.3 Data

Before delving into the results, I first present those key dependent and independent variables here that were not introduced in Chapter 3. In particular, I introduce my measures for local party building and the presence of local party elites.

Local Party Presence. This variable entails a dummy variable equal to one if a party has fielded candidates in a given municipality election. As Tavits (2010) explains, this measure is a compound measure for organizational strength since it requires that parties have an organizational presence in a locality, have members to nominate as candidates, and the organizational management to put together and submit a candidate list (p. 40). Local branches can sometimes exist without running local lists, but this poses the question to what extent these branches are actually functional. While in principle, new parties have to collect supporters' signature and clear a threshold this requirement is waved once a given party has entered local, state or national parliament[3].

Local Recruitment Strength. This variable goes beyond the simple binary and represents share of positions that local party chapters can fill on candidate lists for local council. Theoretically, political parties can field as many candidates as there are available seats. However, even established parties struggle in many contexts to do that (Alizade et al., 2025, p. 2110). To what extent these parties then fill the seats cannot only affect electoral outcomes (see Chapter 5) but also reflects their organizational pull in local communities. This data is, however, only available for the AfD emergence period and only for a subset of municipalities.

Local Party Elites. This variable makes use of residential information on county-level party elites. This residential information allows me to link these party elites to the commu-

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[3]I provide more information in Appendix Section E.2

nities they live in. Leveraging this information, I code how many new party elites live in a given community and how many competing party elites live in a given community. For the latter group, I also split this further into mainstream and non-mainstream party elites, competing locally rooted and high-SES elites. This allows me to get at several dimensions of political competition in a given municipality.

7.4 Results

Contextual Predictors of New Parties' Organizational Expansion

Before I delve into the main research questions, I take a step back and explore the role of context. This is important because it is not clear to what extent organizational outcomes are results of presence of local elites and to what extent they are driven by contextual factors. To simultaneously test for the role of elites and context, I analyze municipalities and merge information on local party elites from established and new parties as well as data on contextual variables. More specifically, I focus on pre-existing electoral demand, population size, attention to local issues, supply of competing parties, and local developments raising the salience of new parties' core issues such as nuclear power or immigration. I take the contestation of municipal elections as outcome and regress it on these contextual predictors as well as the logged number of new and established party elites.

The findings in Table E.1 show a clear pattern with regard to party elites: the logged number of new party elites is positively associated with the establishment of local branches. The coefficients are statistically significant across both new party emergence periods. The role of competing elites hints to the opposite direction: an increase in the number of competing elites is associate with a decreasing probability of local branch formation hinting to a deterring effects of existing elites on the organizational expansion of new parties.

Surprisingly, the patterns are less clear regarding the lagged vote share of new parties. I expected the probability of local branch formation to be strongly dependent on the vote share that new parties received in the previous national election. While all coefficients are positive, in line with that expectation, they are only statistically significant for the Green Party emergence period and more imprecisely estimated than the coefficients for elites. For the AfD, the lagged vote share does not have any predictive power at all.

Another important factor is turnout though theoretically the impact of turnout is ambiguous. New parties may fare better in areas with higher turnout if they manage to gain a foothold in a politically interested electorate. On the other hand, they may also profit from lower turnout if abstention indicates discontent with the current political supply. In these contexts, new parties may be able to build roots based on this discontent. However, there is no detectable relationship between lagged turnout and local branch formation. Turnout might also matter in a different way. Lueders (2024) argues that larger gaps in turnout between national and local elections hints to a nationalization of local political arenas. Employing this metric reveals important differences across parties: local Green Party branches are more likely to be formed in more nationalized local political arenas, where the difference between national and local turnout is larger. The reverse is true for the AfD who is able to grow roots in communities with smaller gaps between national and local elections hinting to less nationalized political arenas.

Heading over to population, I find a consistent positive association between population size and local branch formation for both emergence periods. This is unsurprising given that larger cities provide more opportunities to find and match with like-minded people. Furthermore, branches in larger communities may provide appealing career opportunities for new party elites who aspire to run in higher-level elections given that they can hope to draw more supporters due to the larger recruitment pool. In this chapter, I focus on population size given that I already subset to more rural areas (Landkreise). Results, however, remain similar when also controlling for population density (see Table E.3 in the Appendix). While

population levels are systematically related to local branch formation, population changes, operationalized as relative change over the last ten years, are not.

New parties could also take advantage of the presence of universities given that students may provide a pool of potential recruits. Given their youth, they might also be more open than other segments in the population to back a new party and provide voluntary labor for the party. However, I do not find any detectable effect.

Finally, I find evidence that local contextual factors that raise the salience of new parties' core issues, such as nuclear power or immigration, appear to be related to local branch formation. For the Green Party, municipalities that are located closer to nuclear power plants are more likely to see the formation of local Green Party branches. For the AfD, communities who see increases in the share of unemployed foreigners are also more likely to see the establishment of local branches.

Taken together, these results indicate that while contextual factors such as turnout and population size matter, local party elites play a crucial role. This applies both to competing elites, who appear to deter party building, and to new party elites, who seem to drive it.

Which Party Elites Matter

Given the key finding of the preceding analyses—that local party elites matter—the next question is: to what extent do the individual characteristics of these elites shape the creation of local party branches? To explore this question, I use my candidate data and regress the creation of local party branches on elite characteristics and control variables. To observe how elites' characteristics shape organizational outcomes, I merge organizational outcomes to my candidate list data. Intuitively, this means that I analyze how different candidate types differ in their impact, excluding municipalities without any elites. I then regress organizational outcomes on elites' characteristics as well as contextual controls:

Table 7.1: Correlation Between Contextual Factors and Organizational Expansion

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log(# New Party Elites)	0.171***	0.176***	0.228***	0.221***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Log(# Competing Elites)	-0.027***	-0.028***	-0.003	-0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Lagged std. new party voteshare	0.013*	0.012*	0.002	0.004
(nat. election)				
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Lagged turnout (nat. election)	-0.001	-0.001	0.019	0.019
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Diff. in turnout (nat.-local election)	0.002+	0.002*	-0.194***	-0.178***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Log(Population)	0.076***	0.081***	0.030***	0.029***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}	-0.040	-0.046	0.048	0.052
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.037)	(0.037)
University (1/0)	-0.079	0.080	0.015	-0.014
	(0.071)	(0.091)	(0.027)	(0.036)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.015*	-0.016*		
	(0.007)	(0.007)		
% unempl. foreigners			-0.003	-0.027*
			(0.014)	(0.012)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			0.011	0.028*
			(0.014)	(0.011)
Contested local election in $t-1$	0.366***	0.367***	0.350***	0.426***
	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.030)	(0.038)
N	3553	3466	11969	11648
R²	0.48	0.44	0.42	0.35
Adj. R²	0.48	0.44	0.42	0.35
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sample	All	Small communities	All	Small communities

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Linear probability models with the contestation of local elections as outcome. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Table E.2 in the Appendix also includes the lagged vote shares of mainstream parties in national elections as additional controls.

$$party\_presence_{jt} = \delta_t + \gamma_j + \theta_j + \beta_1 local\_roots_{ijt} + \beta_2 high\_SES_{ijt} +$$

$$\beta_3 \mathbf{X_{ijt}} + \beta_4 \mathbf{Y_{jt}} + \epsilon_{ijt}$$

where $party\_presence_{jt}$ indicates the contestation of municipal elections at time t in municipality j, while $local\_roots_{ijt}$ and $high\_SES_{ijt}$ represent dummy variables for candidate i. I also include controls on the individual ($\mathbf{X_{ijt}}$) and municipality level ($\mathbf{Y_{jt}}$). Crucially, I cluster standard errors at the municipality level given that more than one candidate can

run in one municipality. I also introduce fixed effects for the election year (δ_t), the state (γ_s) and the number of new party elites in a given municipality (θ_j). I run analyses with all municipalities and with smaller communities with less than 30,000 inhabitants.

I present the results of these analyses in Figure 7.1. This figures shows that the presence of candidates with local names is positively correlated with the existence of local branches in both parties. However, estimates for both parties are statistically insignificant. Moving to high-SES party elites, I find that high-SES party elites are associated with a higher likelihood of establishing a local party branch for the Green Party. In contrast, point estimates for the AfD are even negative, indicating that the presence of high-SES party elites is linked to a lower likelihood of establishing a local branch. However, these estimates do again not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Results remain substantially unchanged when including municipalities with less than three county-level party elites (see Figure E.1 in the Appendix). I also retrieve null findings when going beyond the binary measure and instead use the local recruitment strength of AfD branches, i.e. the share of positions they fill in municipal elections (see Figure E.2).

These overall effects, however, might cover heterogeneity in the empirical relationship between candidate traits and the establishment of local party branches. After all, I argue that different types of elites may vary in their appeal to voters. To explore this, I interact candidate traits with place-based variables.

Placing Elites into Context

To explore elite characteristics across contexts, I regress the local contestation of elections on elite attributes as well as contextual variables and interact the two sets of variables. As was the case for variation in electoral results, I explore variation across competing supply of other parties and the rural-urban environment. I include all contextual predictors as control variables and report associated coefficients in full tables in the Appendix.
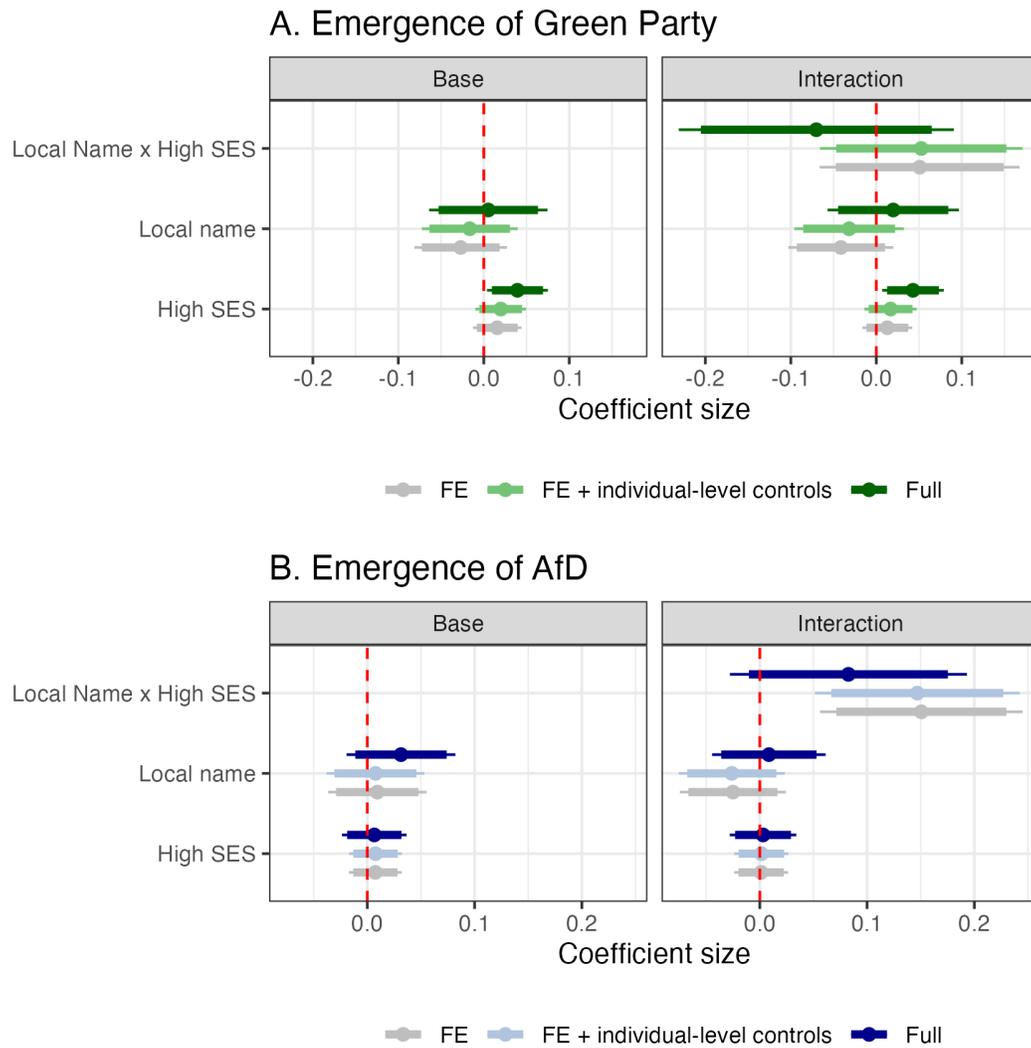
Figure 7.1: Correlation Between Local Elite Characteristics and Local Branch Formation

Note: OLS regression coefficients with local contestation as DV. 'Base' refers to base models without interaction effect and 'Interaction Term' to models including an interaction term. The corresponding tables are provided in the Appendix in Tables E.4 (Green Party) and E.5 (AfD).

Starting with population size, I hypothesized that high-SES individual are less likely and locally rooted elites in new parties more likely to be associated with local branch formation in rural areas. In Table 7.2, I find this exact pattern. Coefficients for the interaction between high-SES elites and logged population are positive throughout. However, they are only statistically significant for the Green Party emergence period (and turn insignificant when also controlling for population density, see Table E.10 in the Appendix). For locally rooted elites, the relationship reverses as the likelihood of branch formation decreases for them with increasing population size. The resulting negative coefficients are statistically significant for both emergence periods and robust to alternative specifications (see Table E.10 in the Appendix).

Notably, population change, operationalized as relative change in the total population over ten years, does not meaningfully predict local branch formation. This is true for the baseline coefficient, as well as for all interaction terms.

Results remain substantially unchanged when restricting the sample to only communities with one or two new party elites present (see Table E.12). When examining the share of list positions filled in municipal races instead of the binary outcome, there is hardly any significant link with high-SES and locally rooted elites. Table E.9 shows that if at all, high-SES elites are associated with a higher share of filled list positions in larger communities. All other results are null, suggesting that across contexts, high-SES and locally rooted elites differ primarily in their propensity to establish branches, rather than in determining their size.

Continuing with the competing supply of other parties, I expected that high-SES and locally rooted elites are less likely to establish local chapters when other parties are already well represented in their communities. In areas with more competing elites, established parties might be more entrenched in local communities. Thus, building organizational roots for new parties may be more difficult in these places. In line with these expectations, the

Table 7.2: Elite Attributes, the Rural-Urban Environment, and Local Branch Formation

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Local name	0.623+	0.929+	0.494**	0.306
	(0.342)	(0.509)	(0.187)	(0.556)
High SES	-0.483*	-0.183	-0.252	-0.273
	(0.199)	(0.295)	(0.162)	(0.267)
Log(Population)	0.174***	0.173***	0.078**	0.078**
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}	-0.155	-0.019	-0.157	-0.171
	(0.222)	(0.224)	(0.177)	(0.186)
High SES x Log(Population)	0.062**	0.062**	0.027	0.027
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Local Name x Log(Population)	-0.073+	-0.073+	-0.053**	-0.053**
	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.020)	(0.020)
High SES x Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}		-0.284		0.025
		(0.204)		(0.240)
Local Name x Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}		-0.290		0.198
		(0.403)		(0.505)
N	2055	2055	3997	3997
R²	0.36	0.36	0.45	0.45
Adj. R²	0.35	0.35	0.44	0.44
Control Variables	✓	✓	✓	✓
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Complete results with coefficients for all control variables are provided in Table E.7 in the Appendix.

results in Table 7.3 show a negative relationship between the logged number of elites in other parties with new party branch formation (see Models 1 and 2 in Table 7.3). This indicates that a higher presence of competing elites is associated with a reduced likelihood of new party branch formation. However, this is only statistically significant for the Green Party emergence period. Interestingly, the interaction terms for high-SES and locally rooted elites with the presence of competing elites point in opposite directions. High-SES elites in new parties are more likely to be associated with local branch formation—statistically significant only for the Green Party—whereas locally rooted elites show the opposite pattern, significant only for the AfD.

To further understand these patterns, I split the group of competing elites into high-SES and locally rooted elites. The results in Models 3 and 4 in Table 7.3 show, however, only little variation. The presence of high SES elites is linked to a reduced likelihood of

local party formation only for the Green Party. This reduction is partially offset in contexts where the Greens also fielded more high-SES candidates themselves. Similar to the findings on electoral results, this points to the importance of high-SES new party elites in contexts that are dominated by high-SES competition in other parties. While locally rooted elites are, on average, less likely to be associated with the formation of party branches in contexts with more locally rooted elites in other parties, this relationship does not reach statistical significance.

A more detailed analysis that distinguishes between elites from small and marginal parties and local voter groups (SMPs) and those from mainstream parties reveals considerable heterogeneity. The link between high-SES new party elites and party formation is positive and stronger in places with more mainstream party elites, while negative but statistically insignificant in contexts with more competition in SMPs. The reverse is true for locally rooted elites who are more likely to establish branches in areas with a higher supply of SMP elites (only statistically significant for the AfD) and less likely in communities with more active mainstream party activists. This suggests that AfD elites are particularly effective in building local organizations in politically active communities without deep ties to mainstream parties.

It is also notable that the baseline coefficient for the local name dummy is statistically significant for the AfD in two of three models. This baseline suggests that locally rooted AfD elites may be particularly valuable in communities without any competing party elites. Restricting the sample to only municipalities with one or two new party elites yields substantially similar results (see Table E.13)[4]. Again, examining the continuous outcomes does not yield substantial variation (see Table E.8).

Overall, these patterns suggest that elites from mainstream parties tend to discourage organizational formation. This effect is especially pronounced for locally rooted elites, though

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[4]There are minor discrepancies. For instance, the interaction term between the local name dummy and the logged number of elites in SMPs is still positive but insignificant.

it can be partially mitigated by the presence of high-SES elites from new parties. In contrast, locally rooted AfD elites are more likely to be associated with local branches in communities with no competition or where competition primarily comes from SMP elites.

Table 7.3: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation

	DV: Contestation of local elections (1/0)					
	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Local name	0.172+	0.156*	0.010	0.014	0.118	0.224**
	(0.097)	(0.077)	(0.052)	(0.040)	(0.093)	(0.073)
High SES	-0.111*	-0.043	-0.026	-0.005	-0.086+	-0.068
	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.035)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.057)
Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.006	-0.002				
	(0.026)	(0.027)				
Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.017	0.004
					(0.030)	(0.016)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.132***	-0.021
					(0.040)	(0.028)
Log(High SES elites in other parties)			-0.080*	-0.034		
			(0.037)	(0.025)		
Log(Local Elites in other parties)			-0.024	0.019		
			(0.036)	(0.022)		
High SES x Log(Elites in other parties)	0.061**	0.014				
	(0.023)	(0.019)				
Local Name x Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.071+	-0.052*				
	(0.040)	(0.026)				
High SES x Log(High SES elites in other parties)			0.047*	0.003		
			(0.023)	(0.020)		
Local Name x Log(Local elites in other parties)			-0.015	-0.015		
			(0.055)	(0.030)		
High SES x Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.007	-0.032
					(0.029)	(0.024)
High SES x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					0.072*	0.043+
					(0.030)	(0.025)
Local Name x Log(Elites in SMPs)					0.037	0.076*
					(0.044)	(0.036)
Local Name x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.091+	-0.126***
					(0.047)	(0.037)
N	2055	3997	2027	3842	2055	3997
R²	0.33	0.45	0.35	0.46	0.36	0.45
Adj. R²	0.32	0.44	0.34	0.45	0.35	0.44
Control Variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: $+$ p < 0.1, $*$ p < 0.05, $**$ p < 0.01, $***$ p < 0.001. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Full results provided in Table E.6 in the Appendix.

7.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how local party elites shape the organizational trajectory of new party organizations on the local level. More specifically, I have analyzed the drivers behind the establishment of local party branches, conceptualized as the contestation of municipal elections. Predicting this outcome based on contextual variables, such as proximity to nuclear power plants (during the Green Party emergence period) or increasing numbers of unemployed foreigners (during the AfD emergence period), shows some predictive power. However, this analysis also highlighted the relevance of local new party elites even when controlling for contextual predictors. More specifically, I show that the logged number of party elites present in local communities did predict the establishment of local branches.

Further exploring the role of local party elites, I find that there are only few general relationship with regard to the type of party elites. High-SES candidates appear to be associated with a higher likelihood of establishing local branches for the Green Party. That relationship is, however, not statistically significant in all specifications. Furthermore, high-SES elites who are also locally rooted are associated with a higher likelihood of establishing local branches in the AfD emergence period.

Placing elites into context and interacting place-based characteristics with elites' traits, I find that locally rooted elites are less likely to establish branches in more populated places hinting to their effectiveness in smaller communities with dense social networks. High-SES elites show the reverse image, though coefficients only reach statistical significance for the Green Party. Exploring the role of competing elites, I find that generally speaking, competing elites in other parties have a deterrent effect that is, however, less pronounced for high-SES elites. This deterrence effect is mainly driven by the presence of mainstream party elites. While it is again partially offset for high-SES elites in new parties, it becomes even stronger for locally rooted elites. Locally rooted elites, however, appear to be more likely to build

new branches in communities characterized by the presence of active elites in small parties and local voters groups. In these contexts, locally rooted elites may be well positioned to take advantage of an politically active community without a strongly entrenched mainstream parties.

These results are relevant for three main reasons: first, they highlight the importance of local political actors that are willing to drive the organizational expansion of new parties on the local level. This is important for scholars who analyze the effect of the contestation and success of new parties in municipality elections. Given the relevance of elites in this context, my results caution against an uncritical interpretation of, for instance, the AfD's local presence as an expression of the political leaning of local communities. While such a presence can shift the attitudes of local communities over time (see Loxbo, 2025), this does not need to be the case initially.

Second, these results underscore my larger argument given the heterogeneity in elites' empirical link to local organization building. High-SES elites may be particularly important for parties that build on electoral demand among a high-SES electorate. However, for far-right parties, high-SES elites alone may fail to act as key organizers on the ground. Taken together, organizational weakness of new parties may not only come as the result of failed recruitment but also due to misfits between local party elites and the contexts they are becoming active in.

Third, these results also highlight the role of locally rooted party elites given that they appear to be useful for far-right parties to expand organizational reach in rural areas and communities characterized by the importance of local political actors. Thus, research should not only consider the quality of high-SES party elites (Art, 2011) but also how locally rooted individuals help to further propel a new party's message in local communities.

8 Conclusion

Younger cohorts, it appears, are more open to support new parties (Weber, 2017, p. 21). This is not only evidenced by new parties in Europe that have been founded with the explicit goal of advancing young people's political priorities (see Weber, 2017, p. 48f.), but also by more recent electoral results. The German case serves as an illustrative example: in all federal elections since 2009, more than 10% of young voters between the age of 18 and 24 have voted for small and marginal parties who did not enter parliament (Faas, 2025). This increasing dealignment process and the weakening links between political parties and voters reinforce the need to understand the emergence of new political parties.

This thesis has centered around the question how local party elites help new parties in the critical phase of emergence by attracting voters and expand parties' organizational reach on the ground. Previous scholarship has examined the success of new parties and the link between local elites and electoral and organizational outcomes. However, few studies have linked these two strands in the literature and systematically explored which type of elites enable new parties to overcome the challenges in their emergence period. One reason for this is data availability. It is difficult to gather data on local elites in the first place (see Wegschaider, Gross and Schmid, 2022). Sub-setting then to new parties can often reduce an already small sample making it difficult to study e.g. contextual variation. To advance this literature, this thesis has introduced a new comprehensive dataset of over 400,000 candidates

in local elections allowing me to study new party elites and across contexts.

Building on this novel dataset, I have provided evidence for the electoral and organizational benefits that locally rooted and high-SES party elites can provide to the new parties. In broad patterns, parties profit especially electorally from high-SES elites in their emergence period while their organizational impact is rather negligible. In contrast, the electoral and organizational benefits of locally rooted elites are more conditional on the context they are embedded in.

More specifically, I have examined the rural-urban environment and the structure of political competition as key factors that moderate how local party elites influence organizational and electoral outcomes. Smaller communities are generally harder for new parties to penetrate because dense social networks, limited anonymity, and strong local norms can discourage behavior perceived as unusual, such as campaigning for a new party. In these settings, locally rooted elites are better positioned to appeal to voters and build organizational infrastructure. This is because they possess longstanding social reputation that can substitute for the uncertainty around new parties' legitimacy. However, relating locally rooted elites to organizational and electoral outcomes also demonstrates that these benefits are unequally distributed across new parties. The findings suggest that especially far-right parties like the AfD can profit from leveraging these local roots to gain a foothold in rural communities. In contrast, locally rooted elites appear to have played a rather marginal role in attracting voters and building local organizations in the emergence of the Green Party.

Beyond the rural-urban environment, I have also scrutinized the role of local political competition because political elites do not enter the (local) political arena in a vacuum. Instead, they face competition from other party elites, even in their hometowns. Understanding the structure of this competition is crucial to understanding their electoral impact. High-SES elites receive more votes in places with more high-SES elites competing. In these settings, voters appear to be more receptive to signals of their competence. By contrast, lo-

cally rooted elites do better in places with less competition from rival elites with local roots. This is because their electoral performance is partly driven by the mobilization of personal networks. In contexts with more competition within these networks, mobilization becomes more difficult. Rival elites also affect organizational outcomes and generally deter the establishment of new party chapters. The pattern appears to be driven chiefly by the presence of mainstream parties, which depresses the likelihood that new parties establish local branches. This deterrent effect is attenuated when new parties field high-SES elites but amplified when they field locally rooted elites. Locally rooted elites are more likely to be associated with local branch formation in areas with more competing elites in non-mainstream parties. Elites from small parties and local voter groups may not only constitute promising recruits, but also signal a politically dynamic environment characterized by weaker mainstream party dominance.

One implication from these results is that there is no one-fits-all blueprint to party building as different types of party elites bring different advantages to emerging party organizations. Instead of focusing on specific types of elites, scholars have to consider to what extent parties actually depend on recruiting certain types of elites and to what extent they are able to substitute elite types. In my case, the AfD has struggled to recruit high-SES candidates over time. However, I argue that the far-right parties like the AfD can also substitute high-SES candidates with locally rooted candidates. Locally rooted elites are associated with electoral and organizational benefits in rural areas which in most countries provide important voter potential for far-right parties. On the other hand, Green Parties who rely on high-SES voters may also have difficulties to substitute high-SES elites locally.

Importantly, my results suggest that this form of substitution may operate effectively at the local level. At the national level, however, the situation may be different. National party organizations must not only make strategic decisions but also develop coherent policy proposals. In this context, high-SES elites likely play a crucial role in ensuring that these proposals are credible and that the party's strategic direction is not undermined by

162

inexperience or a lack of expertise.

While my research focuses on the blank spot of local party elites in new parties, there are several ways in which this thesis faces limitations: first, my analyses have provided correlational evidence. This means that causal directions and mechanisms are difficult to entangle. For instance, the organizational effects may be driven by elites' actions but they may also stem from the organic emergence of these elites from organically growing branches. While anecdotal evidence and the expertise of interviewed organizers give preference to the former explanation, they cannot rule out the latter. Second, I only examine two successful parties, i.e. parties that not only entered the national parliament repeatedly but also, at the time of writing, appear to have established themselves firmly in the German party system. This, of course, raises the question of the extent to which my findings apply to failed new parties. More specifically, it prompts us to ask whether such parties fail because they are unable to recruit high-SES and locally rooted elites, because they fail to attract them in contexts where they are most effective, or whether entirely different mechanisms are at play. Third, I focus on a single country, Germany, raising the question to what extent my findings generalize across other countries. The German party system had long been exceptional in Europe given the lack of a far-right party. With the arrival of the AfD, the German has become more similar to other European countries featuring Green Parties alongside far-right ones. Still, the configuration of the national political arena and local ones is different in countries like the Netherlands and Switzerland. This warrants further research on the organizational evolvement of new parties within and across such contexts.

This thesis can serve as a starting point for future research on elites in party organizations to build on and develop further. In particular, I see four ways that further work could address to overcome limitations of this thesis: first, future research may be better able to establish causal connections between the types of local party elites and electoral and organizational outcomes. While, for instance, field experiments have provided strong evidence for the important role of party gatekeepers (Eriksson and Vernby, 2021; Gulzar et al., 2025), future

research may also tap into how profiles of such gatekeepers en- or discourages participation of different subpopulations by using survey experiments. Furthermore, while this thesis has observationally established to what extent locally rooted and high-SES elites bring tangible electoral benefits, future research could further delve into how individuals perceive such cues in the absence of other e.g. ideological cues.

Second, while there is evidence showing cascading effects of party elites in recruitment (Sells, 2022), we still know little about which people end up being recruited by party elites and through which networks. Future work could link, for instance, more data on those candidates on municipal lists to better understand the intra-party dynamic of recruiting, gatekeeping, and elite emergence.

Third, existing research has provided ample evidence for the crucial role of messaging and communication in the emergence and rise of new parties. Studies in both historical and contemporary contexts show that media outlets wield enormous influence in shaping public perceptions and voters' policy priorities. Many new parties have demonstrated a strong ability to set the political agenda through deliberate provocation and strategic use of media attention. Even at the local level, social media platforms enable parties to communicate directly with their followers. Examining how different types of elites communicate—and how these differences shape the effectiveness of their messages—would deepen our understanding of local party–voter linkages.

Finally, future research could extend this line of inquiry to other countries and to different types of new parties. This would make it possible to assess how various types of elites operate effectively across distinct institutional and social environments. Although collecting such data is resource-intensive, it helps fill important empirical gaps in political science. Compared to our advanced understanding of voters' behavior and attitudes, fueled by progresses in survey research and more easily accessible survey data, we know little about what happens inside party organizations. This is despite a plethora of work that has highlighted the role of

party selectorates in democracies across the world. While recent research has already taken this direction (Fiva, Sørensen and Vøllo, 2020; Sikk and Köker, 2023), I believe that there is still great theoretical and empirical returns from continuing this path.

Appendix

A Appendix to Chapter 3

A.1 Interviews

To complement my quantitative insights with qualitative data, I conducted six interviews with local organizers and ordinary members that were active in the Green Party in the 1980s and the AfD following their formation. I selected interviewees based on local newspaper reports and the candidate data I collected for the 1980s and 2010s. Then, I send prospective interviewees e-mails to their party e-mail addresses. In cases where I could find private e-mail addresses online, I used these. While I also sent interview invitations to local AfD organizers from East Germany, only West German AfD organizers accepted my interview requests. Two of my interviewees (Interviews *1, 3*) had also experience in higher-level politics, either through the perspective of the party executive or elected, higher-level office. All interviewee were male. The youngest interviewee was in his 40s, the oldest interviewee was older than 80 (I do not include age in the table to prevent de-anonymization). To conduct interviews, I received IRB approval from the Princeton University Institutional Review Board (IRB # 17116).

Table A.1: Local election years across German states

Interview Number	Interviewee Description	Gender	Origin
Interview 1	Local AfD organizer, local office holder, held previously position in higher-level party executive	Male	West Germany
Interview 2	Local AfD organizer, local office holder	Male	West Germany
Interview 3	Former local AfD organizer, former local office holder, held previously position in higher-level party executive	Male	West Germany
Interview 5	Local Green organizer, local office holder	Male	West Germany
Interview 6	Local AfD organizer	Male	West Germany
Interview 7	Former local Green Party member and candidate (1980s), later local Green Party organizer	Male	West Germany

A.2 Sample Representativeness

To explore how counties in the sample differ from counties not included in my data, I merge context data to county identifiers. For the period between 1976 and 1994, I use data from the Bundesforschungsanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumordnung that provides information on regional data in 1986 on the county level[1]. For every election, I then merge counties to this data and add a dummy indicating whether this county is included in the data or

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[1]Bundesforschungsanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumordnung, Bonn - Bad Godesberg (1988). Regionaldaten (Kreise). GESIS Datenarchiv, Köln. ZA1703 Datenfile Version 1.0.0, https://doi.org/10.4232/1.1703.

not. I then regress several outcomes on this dummy variable. For the period from 2008 onwards, I proceed in a similar fashion. However, since data is available for every year, I merge counties to the respective county ID-year observation. I do not include city states like Berlin, Hamburg, or Bremen that were excluded from the data collection. To plot coefficients in the same plot, I normalize all outcome variables.

Figure A.1 visualizees how the counties in the sample differ from counties not included in the data. For the Green emergence period (Panel a), Figure A.1 shows that, overall (black bars), counties in the sample do not significantly differ in terms of logged population, population density, and foreigner share in the population. They do, however, exhibit significantly lower unemployment rates, lower shares of employment in the tertiary sector, and higher shares in the secondary sector. When looking at within-state variation (grey bars) — i.e. comparing counties within each states with eachother —, counties in the sample have significantly larger unemployment rates, higher logged population levels, and a higher population density.

In the AfD emergence period (Panel b in Figure A.1), counties in the sample exhibit overall (black bars) higher logged population numbers, a higher foreigner share, and lower unemployment rates. Looking at the within-state comparison (grey bars), Figure A.1 shows also differences with regard to the share of gross added value of the tertiary sector (lower) and the secondary sector (higher).

Given that data on more recent elections was easier to collect, differences between in- and out-of-sample counties between 2008 and 2024 are more pronounced for the pre-emergence period (2008-2013).

A.3   Missingness
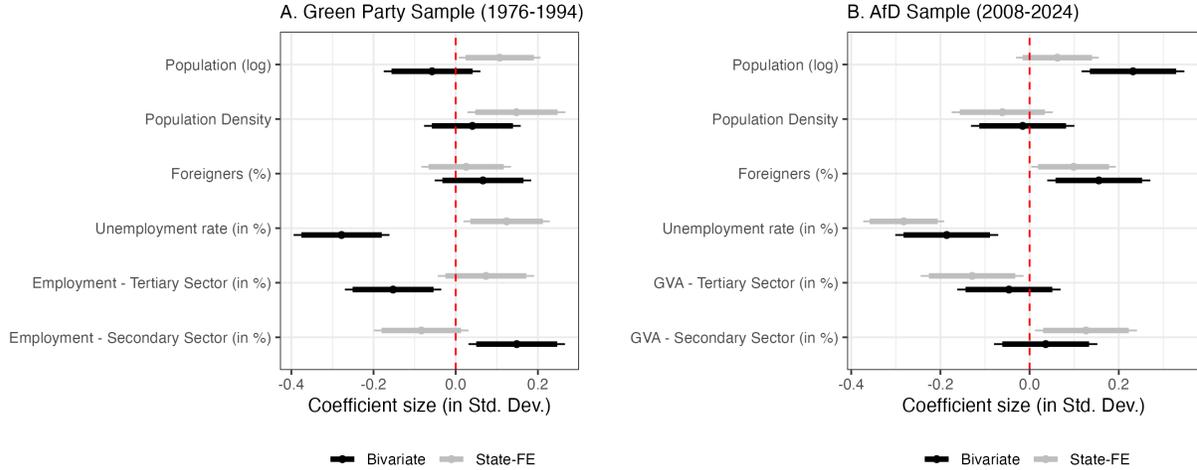
Figure A.1: Differences Between Counties In and Out of Sample

Note: Coefficient depict mean differences between county in and out of the sample. Out-of-sample counties are the reference group in the plot.

Table A.2: Missing Values in Green Party Emergence Period (1976-1994)

	Green Party		Other Parties	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
Sociodemographics				
Female (missing)	11270	0.00	112967	0.00
Age (missing)	11270	0.04	112967	0.08
Local born (missing)	11270	0.68	112967	0.71
Local name (Median) (missing)	11270	0.00	112967	0.00
Local name (IQR) (missing)	11270	0.00	112967	0.00
Occupational Coding				
ISCO (missing)	11270	0.04	112967	0.05
Political experience				
Elected (missing)	11270	0.33	112967	0.37
Elected t-1 (missing)	11270	0.89	112967	0.82
Run t-1 (missing)	11270	0.15	112967	0.29
Run t+1 (missing)	11270	0.19	112967	0.15
Switching t+1 (missing)	11270	0.72	112967	0.63
Switching t-1 (missing)	11270	0.83	112967	0.71

A.4   Local Embeddedness

How do I classify names as local? For my second proxy, I use telephone book entries to calculate the distribution of lastnames across counties. This yields last names-county dyads

Table A.3: Missing Values in AfD Party Emergence Period (2008-2024)

	AfD		Other Parties	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
Sociodemographics				
Female (missing)	16903	0.00	374122	0.00
Age (missing)	16903	0.01	374122	0.01
Local born (missing)	16903	0.74	374122	0.77
Local name (Median) (missing)	16903	0.00	374122	0.00
Local name (IQR) (missing)	16903	0.00	374122	0.00
Occupational Coding				
ISCO (missing)	16903	0.07	374122	0.06
Political experience				
Elected (missing)	16903	0.42	374122	0.48
Elected t-1 (missing)	16903	0.91	374122	0.86
Run t-1 (missing)	16903	0.20	374122	0.27
Run t+1 (missing)	16903	0.59	374122	0.41
Switching t+1 (missing)	16903	0.86	374122	0.73
Switching t-1 (missing)	16903	0.86	374122	0.68

with information on the absolute number of entries for each dyad and the relative number of dyad entries over all entries in a given county. I proceed in several steps to classify a last names-county dyad as local.

Step 1: Remove Non-Local Names

In a first step, I remove non-local names by subsetting to only names that appear in no more than 25% of all counties. The rationale behind this step is that some names like 'Schmidt', 'Müller', or 'Bauer' are so common that they can be found in virtually every county. These names cannot provide a meaningful localness signal and are there are therefore coded as non-local.

Step 2: Code Relative Outliers

The remaining names can be local but the question, of course, remains where they are perceived as local. To address this question, I use the relative appearance, the number of entries with a given last name over all entries in a given county. Then, I inspect outliers in the relative appearance of last names dyads using the interquartile range. More specifically, I first calculate the distance between the first and third quartile:

$$IQR = Q_3 - Q_1$$

I then use this range and multiply it by 1.5 to find upper value outliers:

$$Threshold = Q_3 + IRQ * 1.5$$

If values lie above this threshold, I code this as an outlier for the relative appearance.

Step 3: Code Absolute Outliers

Only relying on the relative value outliers leads to classifications of lastnames as local that might be driven by the characteristics of their places (especially low vs. high population numbers) and not by the distribution of last names. For example, a last names that appears one time in ten counties would be classified as local if one of the ten counties would be very small and all other counties would be rather large even though its absolute appearance is uniformly distributed. To take this into account, I also code absolute outliers. I proceed analogously to Step 2, using and applying the inter-quartile range to identify outliers.

Step 4: Classification of Local Names

In a final step, I combine the two measurements to account for absolute and relative outliers in the distribution of a given last names across counties to code name localness. Only if a last name represents a relative and absolute outlier, I code a name as local. Importantly, I do not code names as local but only name-county dyads, meaning that the same can be local in one county but not in another.

Example: Local Names

To provide an example for the distribution of local names, I use the lastname "Kranzfelder". In the telephone book of 1996, "Kranzfelder" appears in 122 entries across 27 counties. Figure A.2 visualizes the spatial distribution of this lastname. It is clearly visible that the name is most concentrated in the Augsburg region (Landkreis Augsburg) with 0.5 entries among 1,000 entries. It is also relative common in the adjacent city county of Augsburg (Stadt Augsburg) with 0.2 per 1,000 entries.

In two-thirds of these 27 counties, however, the name "Kranzfelder" does appear only one or two times. To visualize the concentration pattern further, I plot the absolute occurrence against the relative appearance to visualize outliers in the distribution of the name "Kranzfelder". In Figure A.3, I show that the concentration in the Augsburg region is an outlier not only in relative but also absolute terms. The red dots indicate that the values are outside of the range calculate in steps 2 and 3. Thus, I code the name "Kranzfelder" as local in these counties.

A.4.1 Validating localness measure

To validate this localness measure, I proceed in two steps. First, I use birthplace information of a subset of my candidate data. I code whether candidates were born in the county in
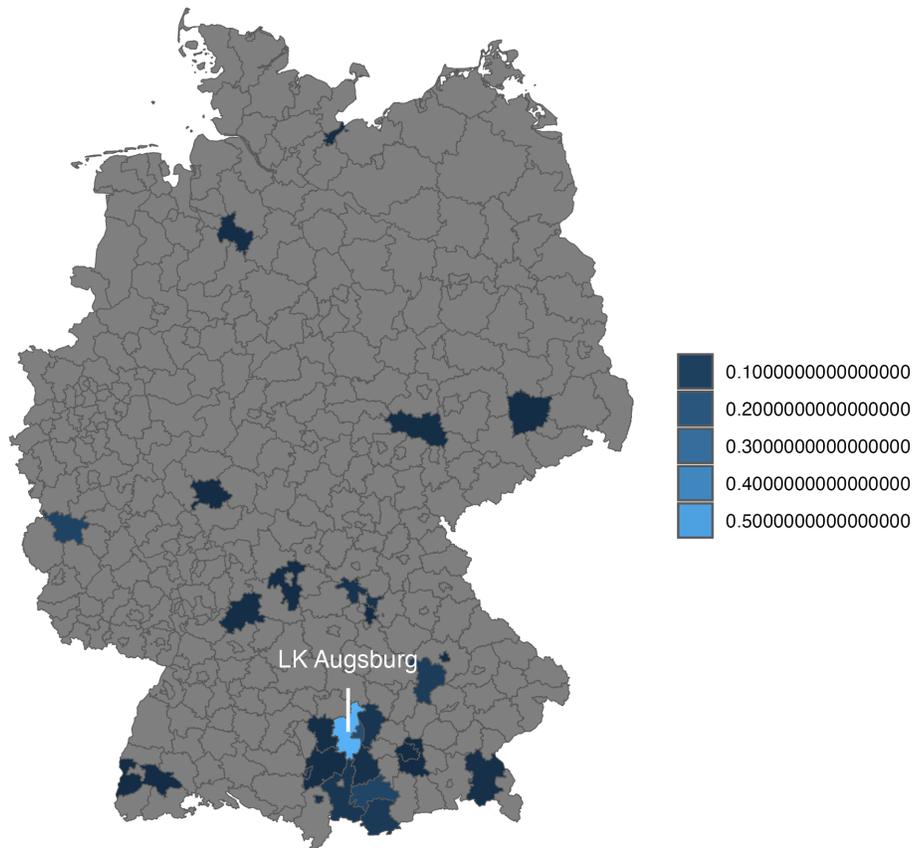
Figure A.2: Distribution of Lastname "Kranzfelder"

Note: Spatial distribution of lastname 'Kranzfelder' in German counties based on telephone book data.
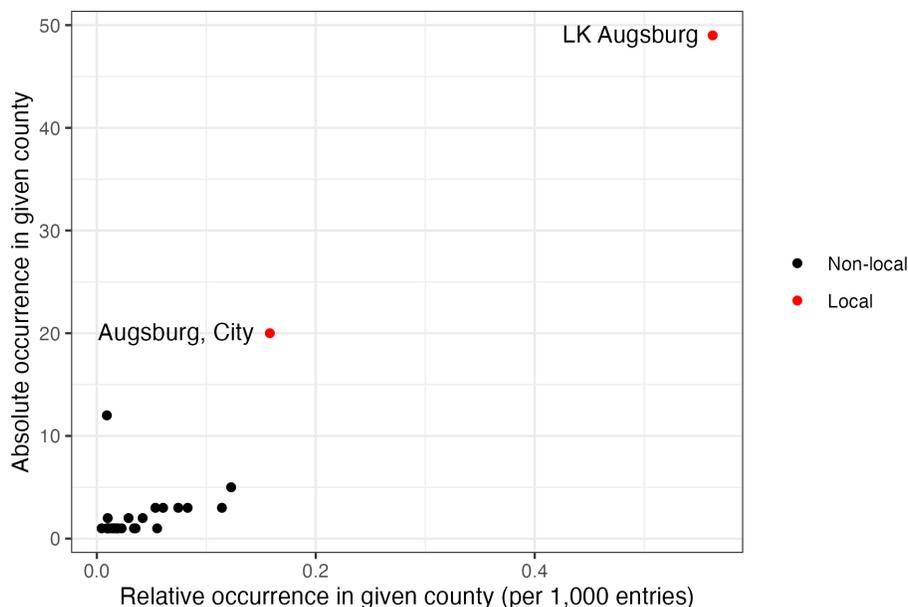
Figure A.3: Classification of Local Names

Note: Absolute (y-axis) and relative frequency (x-axis) of distribution of lastname 'Kranzfelder' in German counties based on telephone book data. Red colored dots depict outliers outside of the interquartile range.

which they stand for election (*Born local*). I then try to predict this *Born local* variable using variation in local names. Table A.4 shows that both local names measures (median split and interquartile range) meaningfully predict whether a candidate was born in the area they are running in.

In a second step, I use data from (Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof, 2024) on the geographic distribution of dialects in German counties. While Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof (2024) use this distribution of dialects to predict AfD voteshares, I argue that it should also be related to the distribution of last names. More peripheral regions should not only have more distinctive dialects but also more distinctive and thus local last names. Thus, I expect that a higher share of local names should positively correlate with the distance from standard German. To test for this correlation, I aggregate my individual-level data to the county-level and calculate for every county the share of candidates with a local names. I then use the measures by Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof (2024) to predict this share. I standardize both measures so

Table A.4: Validation of localness measure using birthplace information

	Born local	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	0.406***	0.398***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Local name (IQR)	0.314***	
	(0.005)	
Local name (median split)		0.222***
		(0.004)
Num.Obs.	149 752	149 752
R2	0.025	0.022

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.
Coefficients estimated based on linear probability models.

that coefficient relate to changes in standard deviation. Figure A.4 shows that counties characterized by more distinct dialects tend to exhibit a higher average share of local names.
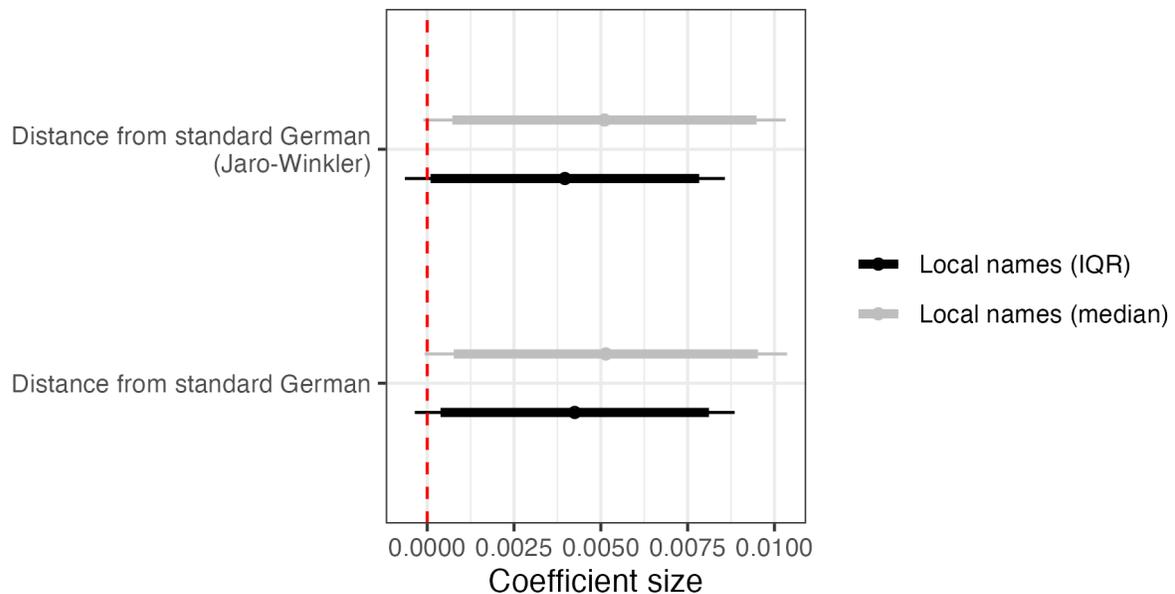
Figure A.4: Relationship Between Prevalence of Local Names and Distance to Standard German

Note: Correlation coefficients between distance in standard German (on the county level) and share of local party elites across all parties who were born in a given county.

A.5   Digitization using TableOCR

To digitize candidate lists, I decided to use a semi-automated workflow and programmed an R Shiny application ("Table OCR") for this purpose. I opted for a semi-automated workflow because *a)* there was no easily accessible training data, *b)* the layout of candidates lists varied over time and across municipalities complicating any automation, and *c)* source material was often of bad scan quality (especially for the 1980s and microfilmed newspapers). The workflow consisted of several steps: After scanning the relevant documents, I used TableOCR to read in each page, pre-process it, and set the table layout. I then transformed pages with line layout to tabular cells, if that was necessary, and clean the tabular data. I go now through each step.

In the first step, I read in scanned documents, either in an image or PDF format. To facilitate the digitization of multipage PDF documents, TableOCR allows user to progress page-by-page. When reading in the documents, the app allows for some degree of pre-processing transforming e.g. each page into a binarized black-and-white image and allowing to correct for the angle of tilted images.

In a second step, I set vertical lines to indicate columns and two horizontal lines to indicate the top and bottom of a table[2]. Figure A.5 shows this for an example table.

In the next step, I used the Google Vision API to detect all words and characters. The result of this scan is visualized in Figure A.6 with green boxes around all recognized words.

In a final step, I used the manually-set table layout to assign each box to a table cell. The result of this process can be seen in Figure A.7.

---

[2]These two horizontal are, however, optional. If not set, TableOCR will use the entire height of a page.

Figure A.5: Setting Columns in TableOCR

Figure A.6: Character Recognition using Google Vision API

Figure A.7: OCR Results

B Appendix to Chapter 4

B.1 Green Party Emergence
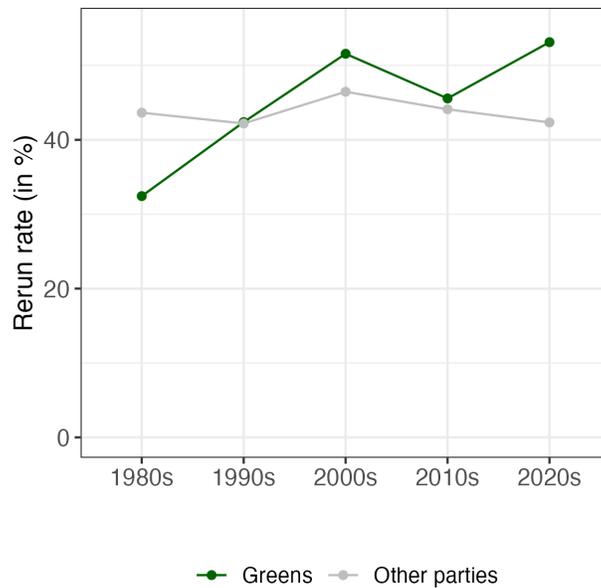
Figure B.1: Rerun Rates of Green Party Candidates Over Time (in %)
Note: Share of county-level candidates who have also run in the previous election.

C Appendix to Chapter 5

Table C.1: Correlation between local organizational strength and electoral performance

	Bivariate	Organization	Organization & Mobilization	Only Europe	After 2000
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Local party office	3.889***	2.300**	2.345***	2.479**	3.247**
	(0.740)	(0.708)	(0.692)	(0.752)	(1.067)
Local party organizational strength	6.407***	2.939***	2.842***	2.615***	4.150***
	(0.654)	(0.622)	(0.633)	(0.538)	(0.901)
Candidate nomination		-1.301**	-1.190**	0.097	-0.102
		(0.443)	(0.447)	(0.527)	(0.589)
Personalization of party		2.168***	1.951***	2.197***	1.521**
		(0.338)	(0.349)	(0.434)	(0.538)
Formal state subsidies		0.263	0.265	-0.090	-0.310
		(1.272)	(1.251)	(1.559)	(1.834)
Large-scale individual donations		0.982	0.541	-2.033	1.928
		(1.885)	(1.919)	(2.264)	(2.305)
Large-scale corporate donations		-3.243*	-3.052*	3.115*	-0.124
		(1.517)	(1.498)	(1.409)	(2.131)
Large-scale civil society donations		-2.987	-2.860	-1.047	1.549
		(2.158)	(2.134)	(2.057)	(3.164)
Membership fees		-2.231+	-2.711*	-1.604	-0.448
		(1.301)	(1.289)	(1.358)	(2.583)
Informal use of state resources		9.037***	8.932***	-0.078	4.998*
		(1.567)	(1.598)	(1.820)	(2.036)
Funds of party leader		-6.713**	-5.904*	-2.458	-1.448
		(2.457)	(2.559)	(3.733)	(2.784)
Funds of candidates		-6.984***	-5.841**	-2.006	-3.030
		(1.980)	(1.949)	(2.379)	(2.534)
Party cohesion		1.754***	1.812***	1.440***	1.118***
		(0.226)	(0.228)	(0.245)	(0.269)
Economic left-right orientation		0.212	0.500	0.809	0.269
		(0.667)	(0.682)	(0.583)	(0.722)
N	4413	4403	4403	1833	1940
R²	0.86	0.88	0.88	0.89	0.91
Adj. R²	0.82	0.85	0.85	0.86	0.87

Table C.2: Correlation Between Number of AfD Candidates and Electoral Performance

	DV: Local AfD vote share			DV: Federal AfD vote share		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
# AfD cand. / total seats	0.090	0.138	-0.411*	0.033**	0.004	-0.000
	(0.125)	(0.128)	(0.179)	(0.012)	(0.005)	(0.007)
Small AfD list (1/0)	-0.356***	-0.252**	-0.251**	0.020*	0.004	0.004
	(0.090)	(0.092)	(0.091)	(0.008)	(0.004)	(0.004)
# AfD cand. / total seats x Small AfD list	0.822**	0.555*	0.558*	-0.055*	-0.009	-0.009
	(0.277)	(0.278)	(0.274)	(0.026)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Lagged AfD vote in nat. election		2.158***	2.233***		0.920***	0.920***
		(0.526)	(0.519)		(0.021)	(0.021)
Lagged turnout in nat. election		-0.727	-0.589		-0.229***	-0.229***
		(0.446)	(0.440)		(0.018)	(0.018)
Log(Population)		0.125***	0.060+		-0.011***	-0.011***
		(0.022)	(0.034)		(0.001)	(0.001)
Log(# competing elites)			-0.020			-0.001
			(0.033)			(0.001)
# AfD cand. / total seats x Log(# comp. elites)			0.249***			0.002
			(0.058)			(0.002)
N	884	836	836	760	760	760
R²	0.76	0.78	0.78	0.92	0.99	0.99
Adj. R²	0.71	0.74	0.74	0.91	0.98	0.98
County-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. OLS. Table provides full list of coefficients for coefficients displayed in Figure 5.2. Standard errors clustered on municipality level.

Table C.1: Correlation between local organizational strength and electoral performance (Continued)

Party-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mobilization control	No	No	✓	✓	✓

Table C.3: Effect of AfD Local Presence (Alternative Measures) on Reported Campaign Contact

	Contact w/ AfD campaign					
	All (1)	Common (2)	All (3)	Common (4)	All (5)	Common (6)
Local representatives (1/0)	0.030 (0.019)	0.025 (0.021)				
Local AfD Share			0.221 (0.153)	0.120 (0.074)		
Social media presence (1/0)					0.007 (0.040)	0.008 (0.024)
N	17,652	17,652	17,652	17,652	17,652	17,652
R^2	0.060	0.046	0.046	0.060	0.046	0.059
Election-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

D Appendix to Chapter 6

D.1   Which Type of Candidates Matter?

One part of my argument is that new parties profit from high-SES or locally rooted candidates. This implies that over time, as a new party becomes more established this wears off and political parties do not as much as before from such 'high quality' candidate profiles. While the AfD is too young to follow their candidates over time, the Greens were established in 1980s allowing me to observe to what extent candidates effects have declined over time. Figure D.1 reruns analyses from Figure 6.4 in the main text for each decade since the foundation of the Green Party and displays the coefficient for high-SES candidates over time. To hold the benchmark constant, I compare Green Party candidates only with candidates from other mainstream parties who competed throughout the entire timespan (CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP). The figure shows that initially in the 1980s and 1990s, high-SES candidates contributed more to electoral performance on Green Party lists than high-SES candidates on other lists. Over time, however, this has faded and since the 2000s, the performance of Green Party has been similar to that of high-SES candidates in other parties.
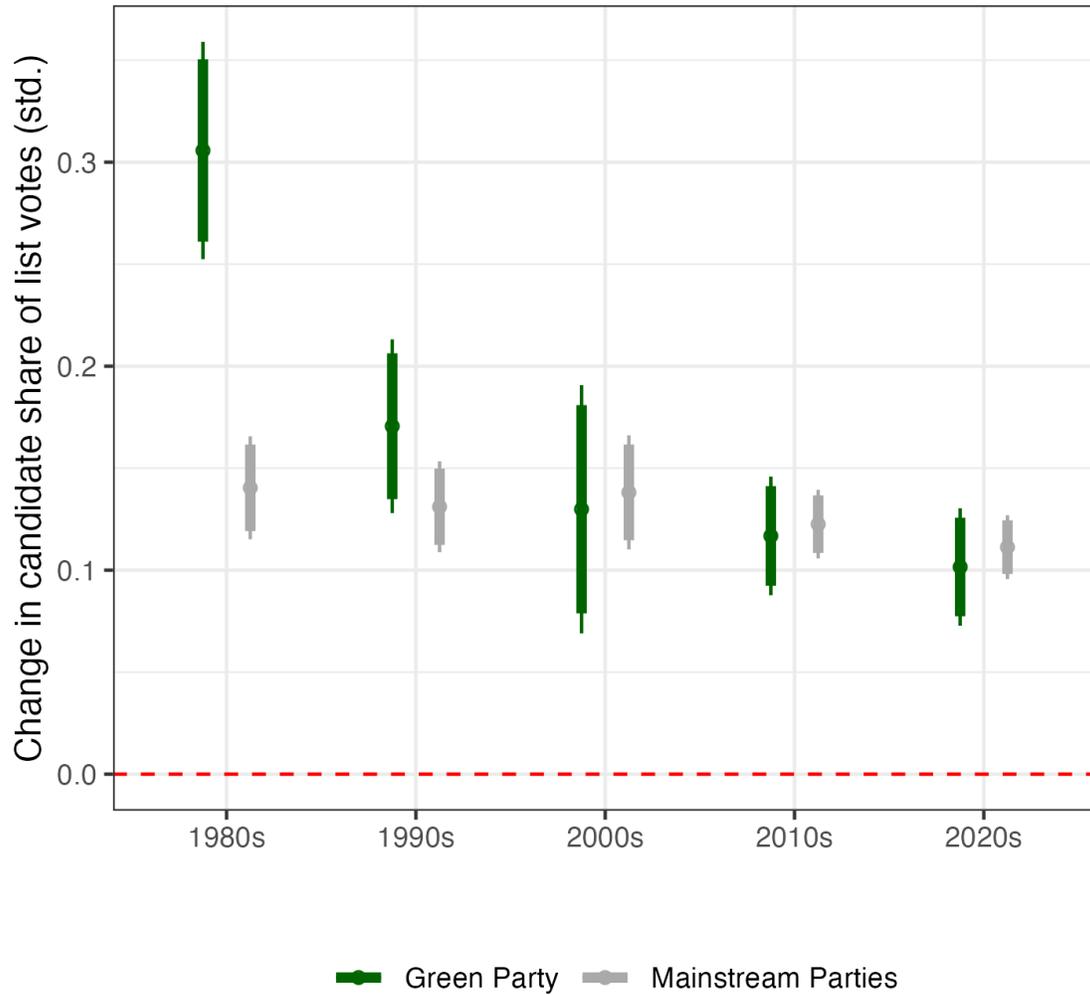
Figure D.1: Electoral Impact of High-SES Green Candidates Over Time

Note: Data based on collected candidate lists over time. Coefficients refer to the regression coefficients of high-SES candidates running on Green and mainstream party lists. Included mainstream parties are CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP.

Table D.1: Candidate attributes and electoral performance

	AfD Emergence	Greens Emergence
	(1)	(2)
Male	0.089***	0.084***
	(0.005)	(0.009)
High SES	0.110***	0.140***
	(0.004)	(0.008)
Age	-0.009***	-0.015***
	(0.001)	(0.002)
Age squared	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Local name	0.119***	0.106***
	(0.008)	(0.012)
log(Listposition)	-0.950***	-0.899***
	(0.003)	(0.005)
Last position	0.225***	0.214***
	(0.008)	(0.017)
Male x New party	0.048*	-0.130***
	(0.020)	(0.023)
High SES x New party	0.139***	0.120***
	(0.021)	(0.022)
Age x New party	-0.010**	0.009*
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age squared x New party	-0.000***	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Local name x New party	0.076	0.008
	(0.048)	(0.046)
log(List position) x New party	0.001	-0.054***
	(0.016)	(0.016)
Last position x New party	-0.297***	-0.078+
	(0.040)	(0.047)
N	131178	44713
R^2	0.62	0.64
Adj. R^2	0.58	0.63
List-FE	✓	✓
Party-FE	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓
Clustered-SE	List	List

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. OLS Regression results. Dependent variable is vote share of candidate relative to total vote share of party list. 'New Party' refers to AfD in Column (1) and the Green Party in Column (2).

186

Table D.2: Candidate attributes and electoral performance

	AfD Emergence	Greens Emergence
	(1)	(2)
High SES	0.109***	0.148***
	(0.004)	(0.008)
Local name	0.115***	0.133***
	(0.010)	(0.012)
High SES x New party	0.151***	0.092***
	(0.022)	(0.021)
Local name x New party	0.040	-0.035
	(0.053)	(0.047)
High SES x Local name	0.010	-0.077**
	(0.017)	(0.024)
High SES x Local name x New party	0.156	0.155
	(0.130)	(0.134)
Male	0.093***	0.064***
	(0.004)	(0.009)
Age	-0.010***	-0.013***
	(0.001)	(0.002)
Age squared	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
log(Listposition)	-0.950***	-0.904***
	(0.003)	(0.005)
Last position	0.198***	0.201***
	(0.008)	(0.016)
N	131178	44713
R^2	0.62	0.64
Adj. R^2	0.58	0.63
List-FE	✓	✓
Party-FE	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓
Clustered-SE	List	List

Note: $+$ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. OLS Regression results. Dependent variable is vote share of candidate relative to total vote share of party list. 'New Party' refers to AfD in Column (1) and the Green Party in Column (2).

Table D.3: List Placement over time

	DV: Log List Position		DV: Top 3 List Position	
	AfD	Greens	AfD	Greens
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Local Name	-4.540	-56.817	4.338	22.150
	(24.252)	(39.660)	(14.226)	(14.463)
High SES	32.309**	3.693	-21.850***	1.158
	(10.087)	(18.065)	(5.619)	(7.316)
Age	0.029***	0.045***	-0.012***	-0.014***
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age squared	0.000***	0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	-27.274**	-62.001***	11.769*	15.722**
	(9.612)	(14.622)	(5.715)	(5.957)
Male x Election Year	0.013**	0.031***	-0.006*	-0.008**
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.003)
High SES x Election Year	-0.016**	-0.002	0.011***	-0.001
	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Local Name x Election Year	0.002	0.029	-0.002	-0.011
	(0.012)	(0.020)	(0.007)	(0.007)
N	12296	4531	12296	4531
R^2	0.55	0.52	0.38	0.37
Adj. R^2	0.47	0.49	0.28	0.33
List-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
SE Clustered	List	List	List	List

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered on candidate lists. Top 3 list position is a dummy variable equal to one if a given candidate is placed on one of three top positions on a list.

D.2 How Do Different Types of Candidates Matter?

Table D.4: Candidate   traits   and
mobilization   of   local
networks

	(1)
High SES	0.019**
	(0.007)
Local name	0.043***
	(0.011)
Hometown	1.805***
	(0.085)
High SES x Hometown	0.229***
	(0.039)
Local Name x Hometown	0.676***
	(0.079)
Local Name x AfD (1/0)	0.141*
	(0.057)
High SES x AfD (1/0)	0.102*
	(0.041)
Hometown x AfD (1/0)	-1.189***
	(0.116)
High SES x Hometown x AfD	-0.216*
	(0.089)
Local Name x Hometown x AfD	-0.200

Table D.4: Candidate traits and mobilization of local networks (Continued)

	(0.197)
Male	0.012
	(0.009)
Age	-0.000+
	(0.000)
Log(List Position)	-0.324
	(1.109)
Last list position (1/0)	-0.087**
	(0.033)
Num.Obs.	446579
RMSE	0.67

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. This tables provides estimates for marginal effects in Figure 6.5.

Table D.5: Localness and high-SES cues across left- and right-leaning voters

	UK		Australia	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	0.159***	0.145***	0.136***	0.258***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.031)	(0.040)
Local roots	0.033	0.070**		
	(0.021)	(0.022)		
Bachelor degree			0.125*	-0.024
			(0.049)	(0.048)
Postgraduate degree			0.119**	0.005
			(0.045)	(0.050)
Num.Obs.	1378	1095	475	546
R2	0.002	0.008	0.016	0.001
Clustered-SE	Respondent	Respondent	Respondent	Respondent
Sample	Labour Voters	Conservative Voters	Labor Voters	Liberal Voters

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. OLS Regression results. Dependent variable is binary forced choice in conjoints. Sample refers to the group of respondents included in the analyses. Analyses only included responses in which voters were exposed to two out-party candidates. Local roots defined as living in the year for entire life/ 20 years (ref. category: Lives elsewhere/ 5 years of residence). Reference category for education variables is High school certificate.

D.3   Where Do Different Types of Candidates Matter?

Table D.6: Performance of Candidates Across Contexts

	Greens Emergence	AfD Emergence
	(1)	(2)
Male	-0.063*	0.114***
	(0.031)	(0.025)
High SES	-0.350*	-0.393+
	(0.154)	(0.202)
Local name (IQR)	0.654	1.119*
	(0.566)	(0.471)
Age	-0.004	-0.018***
	(0.004)	(0.005)
Age squared	-0.000	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
log(Listposition)	-0.966***	-0.948***
	(0.021)	(0.020)
Last position	0.133*	-0.119*
	(0.054)	(0.059)
Electorate: High SES x High % Qual./Educ.	0.009	-0.036
	(0.031)	(0.030)
Electorate: Local Name x Distance std. German	-0.086	0.178*
	(0.119)	(0.083)
Electorate: Local Name x High % Qual./Educ.	-0.006	0.015
	(0.071)	(0.050)
Pop. Density: High SES x High Pop. Density	-0.074	0.025
	(0.080)	(0.066)
Pop. Density: Local Name x High Pop. Density	0.196	-0.511**
	(0.174)	(0.177)
Competing Supply: High SES x % High SES supply	1.694***	1.147**
	(0.397)	(0.415)
Competing Supply: High SES x % Local name supply	-0.016	0.862
	(0.623)	(0.857)
Competing Supply: Local Name x % High SES supply	-1.235	-0.849
	(1.274)	(0.923)
Competing Supply: Local Name x % Local name supply	0.091	-4.452**
	(1.429)	(1.667)
Elect. Demand: Local Name x Vote share in prev. federal election	-0.096	-0.039
	(0.087)	(0.059)
Elect. Demand: High SES x Vote share in prev. federal election	-0.000	0.015
	(0.031)	(0.024)
N	2846	4661
R²	0.68	0.62
Adj. R²	0.64	0.56
List-FE	✓	✓
Party-FE	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓
Clustered-SE	List	List

Note: $+ \; p < 0.1$, $* \; p < 0.05$, $** \; p < 0.01$, $*** \; p < 0.001$. OLS Regression results. Dependent variable is vote share of candidate relative to total vote share of party list. 'High % Qual./Educ.' refers to high share of qualified employees in Green Emergence Periods and share of school leavers with university level entrance for AfD period. Competing supply refers to the share of local party elites with high SES or local names in competing parties in the same county, in the same election year. High population density indicates an above median population density. 'Distance std. German' refers to a measure by Ziblatt, Hilbig and Bischof (2024) indicating the local dialect's distance to standard German.

Table D.7: Candidate attributes and electoral performance in rural vs. urban places (continuous population density)

	AfD Emergence	Greens Emergence
	(1)	(2)
Male	0.208*	0.086
	(0.102)	(0.101)
High skill	0.298**	0.254*
	(0.107)	(0.113)
Age	-0.038*	0.006
	(0.017)	(0.018)
Age squared	-0.000**	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Local name (IQR)	0.699**	-0.199
	(0.257)	(0.238)
log(Listposition)	-0.945***	-0.955***
	(0.017)	(0.013)
Last position	-0.069+	0.145**
	(0.039)	(0.044)
Male x log(Pop. Density)	-0.012	-0.024
	(0.017)	(0.017)
High skill x log(Pop. Density)	-0.008	0.001
	(0.018)	(0.020)
Age x log(Pop. Density)	0.003	-0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age squared x log(Pop. Density)	0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Local name x log(Pop. Density)	-0.096*	0.060
	(0.048)	(0.047)
Num.Obs.	7007	4492
R2	0.624	0.717
List-FE	✓	✓
Party-FE	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓
Clustered-SE	List	List

Note: $+$ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. OLS Regression results. Dependent variable is vote share of candidate relative to total vote share of party list.

E Appendix to Chapter 7

E.1 Candidate recruitment

Why does the number of candidates on municipality lists provide a useful proxy for the capacity of local branches? I argue that a party's ability to recruit and field candidates provides a meaningful proxy for its organizational capacity at the local level. Especially in municipal elections, parties frequently struggle to fill their lists completely, making recruitment success a telling sign of their local organizational presence and effectiveness (Alizade et al., 2025). This is also in line with previous research (Loxbo, 2025). For the German case and only including municipalities in which the AfD actually managed to field candidates for the municipal council, AfD organizers were able to fill only 30.2% of all possible positions on municipality lists (measured by the maximum number that any party has fielded in a given election).

Where does the data come from? This dataset captures the number of candidates each party fielded in a given municipality, often disaggregated by gender. It is collected by some but not all State Statistical Offices. In cases, where no official information was available, I coded cases per hand. For this purpose, I subsetted my search set to only municipalities where the AfD ran municipality council candidates for the first time. I then searched online for information on the number of candidates.

E.2 Requirement for contesting local races

To field candidate lists in municipal elections, parties have to fulfill several requirements. These requirements are mandated by state law which regulates local electoral rules. As a results, requirements vary across states. In Bavaria, for instance, parties must provides signatures of ten voters that are not themselves candidates on the list (Gemeinde- und Landkreiswahlgesetz (GLKrWG) Abschnitt II Art. 25 Satz 1)[1]. If parties have not entered local, state or national parliament before, they have provide additional signatures from supporters (GLKrWG Abschnitt II Art. 27). The nomination process is also strictly regulated and requires (intra-party) democratic procedures (GLKrWG Abschnitt II Art. 29). While especially the latter point applies to all other German states, the provision of signatures varies across states. States like North Rhine-Westphalia, for instance, do not require such signatures.

While theoretically, empirical designs could use the existence of higher costs for the submission of municipal lists, there is a practical problem. Again Bavaria serves as illustrative example:by 2020, when the AfD began to grow roots in Bavaria, the party had already entered the Bundestag and was therefore not required to hand in additional signatures. The preceding local elections in Bavaria were held in March 2014, at a time, during which the AfD had invested time and energy to field candidates for the federal election in autumn 2013 and prepared for the European elections in May 2014.

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[1]Gemeinde- und Landkreiswahlgesetz (GLKrWG) in the version published on November 7, 2006 (GVBl. S. 834, BayRS 2021-1/2-I), last amended by Section 1 of the Act of July 24, 2023 (GVBl. S. 385).

E.3   Robustness Checks & Detailed results

E.3.1   Contextual Predictors of New Parties' Organizational Expansion

Table E.1: Correlation Between Contextual Factors and Organizational Expansion

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log(# New Party Elites)	0.171***	0.176***	0.228***	0.221***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Log(# Competing Elites)	-0.027***	-0.028***	-0.003	-0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Lagged std. new party voteshare (nat. election)	0.013*	0.012*	0.002	0.004
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Lagged turnout (nat. election)	-0.001	-0.001	0.019	0.019
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Diff. in turnout (nat.-local election)	0.002+	0.002*	-0.194***	-0.178***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Log(Population)	0.076***	0.081***	0.030***	0.029***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}	-0.040	-0.046	0.048	0.052
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.037)	(0.037)
University (1/0)	-0.079	0.080	0.015	-0.014
	(0.071)	(0.091)	(0.027)	(0.036)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.015*	-0.016*		
	(0.007)	(0.007)		
% unempl. foreigners			-0.003	-0.027*
			(0.014)	(0.012)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			0.011	0.028*
			(0.014)	(0.011)
Contested local election in $t-1$	0.366***	0.367***	0.350***	0.426***
	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.030)	(0.038)
N	3553	3466	11969	11648
R²	0.48	0.44	0.42	0.35
Adj. R²	0.48	0.44	0.42	0.35
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sample	All	Small communities	All	Small communities

Note: $+ \ p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Linear probability models with the contestation of local elections as outcome. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Table E.2 in the Appendix also includes the lagged vote shares of mainstream parties in national elections as additional controls.

Table E.2: Correlation between contextual factors and organizational expansion (robustness check)

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log(# New Party Elites)	0.167***	0.171***	0.225***	0.218***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Log(# Competing Elites)	-0.030***	-0.031***	-0.002	-0.001
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Lagged std. new party voteshare (nat. election)	0.010	0.009	-0.003	0.000
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Lagged turnout (nat. election)	-0.001	-0.001	0.084*	0.086*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.034)	(0.033)
Diff. in turnout (nat.-local election)	0.002	0.002+	-0.189***	-0.173***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Log(Population)	0.076***	0.081***	0.031***	0.029***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}	-0.073+	-0.084+	0.055	0.059
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.037)	(0.037)
University (1/0)	-0.085	0.060	0.020	-0.013
	(0.072)	(0.098)	(0.027)	(0.036)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.016*	-0.016*		
	(0.007)	(0.007)		
% unempl. foreigners			-0.003	-0.027*
			(0.014)	(0.012)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			0.016	0.034**
			(0.014)	(0.011)
Contested local election in $t-1$	0.359***	0.359***	0.352***	0.427***
	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.030)	(0.038)
Lagged voteshare CDU/CSU (nat. election)	-0.597**	-0.601**	-0.344***	-0.350***
	(0.192)	(0.189)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Lagged voteshare SPD (nat. election)	-0.514**	-0.524**	-0.496***	-0.486***
	(0.189)	(0.185)	(0.056)	(0.055)
Lagged voteshare FDP (nat. election)	-0.263	-0.191	-0.445***	-0.412***
	(0.298)	(0.295)	(0.090)	(0.087)
Lagged voteshare Greens (nat. election)			-0.607***	-0.634***
			(0.076)	(0.074)
N	3553	3466	11969	11648
R²	0.48	0.45	0.42	0.36
Adj. R²	0.48	0.44	0.42	0.35
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sample	All	Smaller communities	All	Smaller communities

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Linear probability models with the contestation of local elections as outcome.

Table E.3: Correlation Between Contextual Factors and Organizational Expansion

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log(# New Party Elites)	0.171***	0.175***	0.183***	0.149***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Log(# Competing Elites)	-0.027***	-0.028***	-0.001	-0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Lagged std. new party voteshare	0.013*	0.013*	-0.010*	-0.007+
(nat. election)				
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Lagged turnout (nat. election)	-0.001	-0.002	-0.032	-0.055
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.037)	(0.035)
Diff. in turnout (nat.-local election)	0.002+	0.002+	-0.066*	-0.035
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.027)	(0.025)
Log(Population Density)	0.007	0.012	-0.020***	-0.017***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Log(Population)	0.072***	0.075***	0.019***	0.015***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.003)	(0.003)
$\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$	-0.047	-0.057	0.093*	0.089*
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.043)
University (1/0)	-0.083	0.081	0.093**	-0.005
	(0.071)	(0.088)	(0.034)	(0.044)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.015*	-0.015*		
	(0.007)	(0.007)		
% unempl. foreigners			0.055***	0.029*
			(0.015)	(0.012)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			-0.032*	-0.013
			(0.014)	(0.011)
Contested local election in $t-1$	0.365***	0.365***	0.425***	0.480***
	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.042)	(0.057)
Num.Obs.	3553	3466	7719	7490
RMSE	0.25	0.25	0.16	0.15
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sample	All	Smaller communities	All	Smaller communities

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Linear probability models with the contestation of local elections as outcome. Standard errors clustered on municipalities.

E.3.2 Which Party Elites Matter

Table E.4: Correlation between contextual factors and organizational expansion (Green Party)

	DV: Contestation of local elections (1/0)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
High SES	0.016	0.020	0.039*	0.013	0.017	0.043*
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.018)
Local Name	-0.027	-0.016	0.005	-0.041	-0.032	0.020
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.039)
Age		-0.005	-0.006		-0.005	-0.006
		(0.003)	(0.004)		(0.003)	(0.004)
Age squared		0.000	0.000+		0.000	0.000+
		(0.000)	(0.000)		(0.000)	(0.000)
Male		0.029*	0.028*		0.029*	0.028*
		(0.012)	(0.013)		(0.012)	(0.013)
Lagged turnout (nat. election)			-0.003			-0.003
			(0.004)			(0.004)
Diff. in turnout (nat.-local election)			0.012*			0.012*
			(0.005)			(0.005)
Lagged std. new party voteshare (nat. election)			0.020			0.020
			(0.029)			(0.029)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)			-0.039			-0.040
			(0.028)			(0.028)
Log(# Competing Elites)			-0.117***			-0.117***
			(0.034)			(0.034)
Log(Population)			0.175***			0.175***
			(0.036)			(0.036)
High SES:Local Name				0.051	0.053	-0.070
				(0.060)	(0.061)	(0.082)
N	4398	4062	2585	4398	4062	2585
R²	0.32	0.33	0.45	0.32	0.33	0.45
Adj. R²	0.31	0.32	0.44	0.31	0.32	0.44
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Table E.5: Correlation between contextual factors and organizational expansion (AfD)

	DV: Contestation of local elections (1/0)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
High SES	0.007	0.008	0.007	0.001	0.001	0.003
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.016)
Local Name	0.009	0.008	0.031	-0.025	-0.026	0.008
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.027)
Age		0.003	0.001		0.003	0.001
		(0.002)	(0.003)		(0.002)	(0.003)
Age squared		-0.000+	-0.000		-0.000+	-0.000
		(0.000)	(0.000)		(0.000)	(0.000)
Male		0.028*	0.013		0.028*	0.013
		(0.012)	(0.017)		(0.012)	(0.017)
Lagged turnout (nat. election)			0.081			0.082
			(0.283)			(0.283)
Diff. in turnout (nat.-local election)			0.220			0.222
			(0.302)			(0.302)
Lagged std. new party voteshare (nat. election)			1.757***			1.749***
			(0.298)			(0.297)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			-0.048			-0.047
			(0.090)			(0.090)
% unempl. foreigners			0.088			0.087
			(0.062)			(0.062)
Log(# Competing Elites)			0.005			0.005
			(0.025)			(0.025)
Log(Population)			0.065*			0.065*
			(0.026)			(0.026)
High SES:Local Name				0.151**	0.147**	0.083
				(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.056)
N	8442	8410	5106	8442	8410	5106
R²	0.45	0.45	0.51	0.45	0.45	0.51
Adj. R²	0.45	0.45	0.51	0.45	0.45	0.51
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Figure E.1: Correlation Between Local Elite Characteristics and Local Branch Formation (Restricted to Municipalities With One or Two New Party Elites)
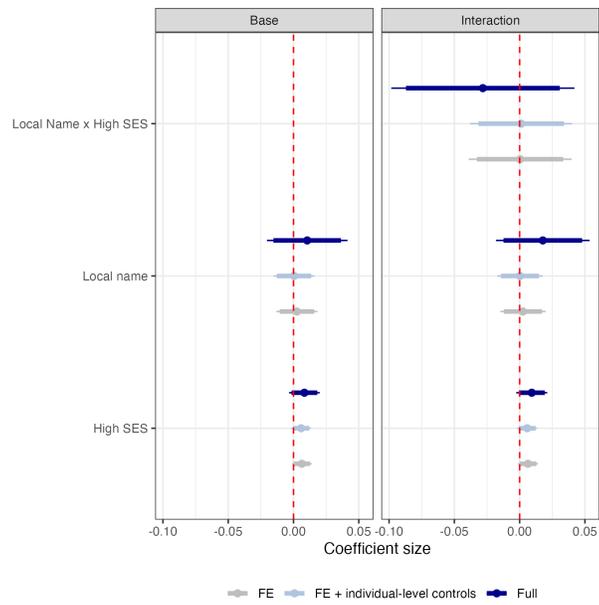
Figure E.2: Correlation Between Local Elite Characteristics and Local Branch Strength (AfD)

E.3.3 Placing Elites In Context

Table E.6: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (full table)

	DV: Contestation of local elections (1/0)					
	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Local name	0.172+	0.156*	0.010	0.014	0.118	0.224**
	(0.097)	(0.077)	(0.052)	(0.040)	(0.093)	(0.073)
High SES	-0.111*	-0.043	-0.026	-0.005	-0.086+	-0.068
	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.035)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.057)
Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.006	-0.002				
	(0.026)	(0.027)				
Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.017	0.004
					(0.030)	(0.016)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.132***	-0.021
					(0.040)	(0.028)
Log(High SES elites in other parties)			-0.080*	-0.034		
			(0.037)	(0.025)		
Log(Local Elites in other parties)			-0.024	0.019		
			(0.036)	(0.022)		
High SES x Log(Elites in other parties)	0.061**	0.014				
	(0.023)	(0.019)				
Local Name x Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.071+	-0.052*				
	(0.040)	(0.026)				
High SES x Log(High SES elites in other parties)			0.047*	0.003		
			(0.023)	(0.020)		
Local Name x Log(Local elites in other parties)			-0.015	-0.015		
			(0.055)	(0.030)		
High SES x Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.007	-0.032
					(0.029)	(0.024)
High SES x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					0.072*	0.043+
					(0.030)	(0.025)
Local Name x Log(Elites in SMPs)					0.037	0.076*
					(0.044)	(0.036)
Local Name x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.091+	-0.126***
					(0.047)	(0.037)
Age	-0.006	0.002	-0.006	0.002	-0.004	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Age squared	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

Table E.6: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (full table) (Continued)

Male (1/0)	0.026+	0.023	0.026+	0.023	0.026+	0.024
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Log(Population)		0.073**	0.159***	0.087***	0.191***	0.086**
		(0.028)	(0.038)	(0.026)	(0.037)	(0.028)
$\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$	-0.115	-0.145	-0.142	-0.160	-0.150	-0.160
	(0.225)	(0.177)	(0.220)	(0.186)	(0.221)	(0.176)
New Party Vote	-0.031	1.719***	-0.027	1.914***	-0.027	1.674***
	(0.029)	(0.295)	(0.029)	(0.293)	(0.028)	(0.297)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.002	0.380	-0.004	0.559+	0.000	0.388
	(0.003)	(0.295)	(0.005)	(0.296)	(0.004)	(0.298)
Differential Turnout	0.013**	0.118	0.006	0.125	0.007	0.095
	(0.005)	(0.291)	(0.005)	(0.303)	(0.005)	(0.289)
% unemployed foreigners		0.039		0.062		0.043
		(0.057)		(0.057)		(0.057)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)		0.072		0.099		0.074
		(0.083)		(0.083)		(0.083)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.067*		-0.056+		-0.056*	
	(0.028)		(0.029)		(0.028)	
University (1/0)	-0.002	-0.050	-0.042	-0.043	-0.086	-0.049
	(0.101)	(0.059)	(0.102)	(0.058)	(0.097)	(0.059)
N	2055	3997	2027	3842	2055	3997
R^2	0.33	0.45	0.35	0.46	0.36	0.45
Adj. R^2	0.32	0.44	0.34	0.45	0.35	0.44
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Provides complete results with coefficients for all controls for shortened Table 7.3.

Table E.7: Elite Attributes, the Rural-Urban Environment, and Local Branch Formation (full table)

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High SES	-0.483*	-0.183	-0.252	-0.273
	(0.199)	(0.295)	(0.162)	(0.267)
Local name	0.623+	0.929+	0.494**	0.306
	(0.342)	(0.509)	(0.187)	(0.556)
Age	-0.005	-0.005	0.002	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age squared	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.023	0.025+	0.022	0.022
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}	-0.155	-0.019	-0.157	-0.171
	(0.222)	(0.224)	(0.177)	(0.186)
Log(Population)	0.174***	0.173***	0.078**	0.078**
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Log(Elites in SMPs)	-0.016	-0.016	-0.003	-0.003
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)	-0.116**	-0.115**	-0.012	-0.012
	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.028)	(0.028)
New Party Vote	-0.027	-0.026	1.697***	1.700***
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.296)	(0.297)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.000	-0.000	0.377	0.379
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.299)	(0.298)
Differential Turnout	0.008	0.008	0.078	0.076
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.289)	(0.290)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.057*	-0.057*		
	(0.028)	(0.028)		
High SES x Log(Population)	0.062**	0.062**	0.027	0.027
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Local Name x Log(Population)	-0.073+	-0.073+	-0.053**	-0.053**
	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.020)	(0.020)
High SES x Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}		-0.284		0.025
		(0.204)		(0.240)
Local Name x Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}		-0.290		0.198
		(0.403)		(0.505)
% unemployed foreigners			0.038	0.038
			(0.057)	(0.057)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			0.078	0.077
			(0.083)	(0.083)
N	2055	2055	3997	3997
R²	0.36	0.36	0.45	0.45
Adj. R²	0.35	0.35	0.44	0.44
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Provides complete results with coefficients for all controls for shortened Table 7.2.

Table E.8: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (continuous outcomes)

	DV: # filled positions municipal elections		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Local name	0.029	0.015	0.013
	(0.045)	(0.026)	(0.051)
High SES	-0.010	-0.003	0.004
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.012		
	(0.010)		
Log(Elites in SMPs)			0.004
			(0.006)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)			-0.025*
			(0.012)
Log(High SES elites in other parties)		-0.023*	
		(0.011)	
Log(Local Elites in other parties)		0.014	
		(0.009)	
High SES x Log(Elites in other parties)	0.007		
	(0.005)		
Local Name x Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.005		
	(0.011)		
High SES x Log(High SES elites in other parties)		0.006	
		(0.007)	
Local Name x Log(Local elites in other parties)		-0.004	
		(0.013)	
High SES x Log(Elites in SMPs)			0.016*
			(0.007)
High SES x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)			-0.008
			(0.008)
Local Name x Log(Elites in SMPs)			-0.006
			(0.014)
Local Name x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)			0.003
			(0.021)
Age	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age squared	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.012	0.013	0.011
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Log(Population)	-0.002	-0.000	0.006
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
$\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$	-0.078	-0.075	-0.067
	(0.114)	(0.117)	(0.113)
New Party Vote	0.427*	0.443*	0.432*
	(0.190)	(0.197)	(0.189)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.178	-0.120	-0.162
	(0.138)	(0.142)	(0.137)
Differential Turnout	0.144	0.152	0.130
	(0.140)	(0.163)	(0.142)
% unemployed foreigners	-0.010	-0.007	-0.014
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)	0.004	0.004	0.009
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.035)
University (1/0)	-0.021	-0.020	-0.022
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)
N	2830	2711	2830
R²	0.63	0.63	0.63
Adj. R²	0.62	0.63	0.62
State-FE	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Analyses only include municipalities in the AfD emergence period.

Table E.9: Elite Attributes, the Rural-Urban Environment, and
Local Branch Formation (continuous outcomes)

	DV: # filled positions	
	municipal elections	
	(1)	(2)
High SES	-0.079	-0.041
	(0.055)	(0.107)
Local name	0.076	0.105
	(0.130)	(0.293)
Age	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age squared	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.012	0.013
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}	-0.073	-0.060
	(0.114)	(0.121)
Log(Population)	0.004	0.003
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Log(Elites in SMPs)	0.008	0.008
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)	-0.028*	-0.028*
	(0.012)	(0.012)
New Party Vote	0.422*	0.421*
	(0.189)	(0.188)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.162	-0.161
	(0.137)	(0.137)
Differential Turnout	0.117	0.119
	(0.143)	(0.141)
% unemployed foreigners	-0.011	-0.011
	(0.024)	(0.024)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)	0.008	0.008
	(0.035)	(0.035)
High SES x Log(Population)	0.010+	0.010+
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Local Name x Log(Population)	-0.007	-0.006
	(0.013)	(0.012)
High SES x Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}		-0.045
		(0.097)
Local Name x Pop_t/Pop_{t-10}		-0.037
		(0.246)
N	2830	2830
R^2	0.63	0.63
Adj. R^2	0.62	0.62

Table E.9: Elite Attributes, the Rural-Urban Environment, and Local Branch Formation (continuous outcomes) (Continued)

State-FE	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Standard errors clustered

on municipalities. Analyses only include municipalities in the AfD emergence period.

Table E.10: Interaction between elite traits and local vote share

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High SES	-0.484*	-0.186	-0.086	-0.599+
	(0.198)	(0.295)	(0.127)	(0.329)
Local name	0.607+	0.896+	0.311	-0.404
	(0.342)	(0.512)	(0.192)	(0.824)
Age	-0.005	-0.005	0.001	0.001
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age squared	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.024	0.026+	0.020	0.020
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)
$\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$	-0.167	-0.033	0.012	-0.146
	(0.223)	(0.224)	(0.225)	(0.236)
Log(Population)	0.162***	0.161***	0.097***	0.098***
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Log(Population Density)	0.021	0.021	-0.050*	-0.050*
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Log(Elites in SMPs)	-0.014	-0.014	0.017	0.018
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)	-0.117**	-0.117**	-0.045+	-0.046+
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.026)	(0.026)
New Party Vote	-0.027	-0.026	1.279*	1.284*
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.588)	(0.589)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.000	-0.000	0.779*	0.777*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.359)	(0.358)
Differential Turnout	0.007	0.007	0.188	0.164
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.324)	(0.326)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.054+	-0.054+		
	(0.028)	(0.028)		
High SES x Log(Population)	0.062**	0.062**	0.011	0.008
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Local Name x Log(Population)	-0.071+	-0.071+	-0.034	-0.032
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.021)	(0.022)
High SES x $\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$		-0.281		0.539+
		(0.203)		(0.307)
Local Name x $\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$		-0.274		0.702
		(0.405)		(0.755)
% unemployed foreigners			0.123+	0.124+
			(0.065)	(0.065)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			0.025	0.018
			(0.094)	(0.094)
Num.Obs.	2055	2055	2792	2792
R2	0.360	0.361	0.296	0.297
R2 Adj.	0.350	0.350	0.287	0.287
R2 Within	0.090	0.091	0.043	0.044
R2 Within Adj.	0.082	0.083	0.037	0.038

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Table E.11: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (with population density)

	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD
	DV: Contestation of local elections (1/0)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Local name	0.145	0.072	0.009	0.003	0.114	0.145+
	(0.101)	(0.084)	(0.052)	(0.045)	(0.094)	(0.082)
High SES	-0.107+	-0.018	-0.025	0.003	-0.087+	-0.032
	(0.055)	(0.044)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.046)	(0.042)
Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.024	-0.018				
	(0.027)	(0.025)				
Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.014	0.021
					(0.031)	(0.018)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.134***	-0.049+
					(0.040)	(0.026)
Log(High SES elites in other parties)			-0.083*	-0.018		
			(0.037)	(0.027)		
Log(Local Elites in other parties)			-0.018	0.025		
			(0.037)	(0.025)		
High SES x Log(Elites in other parties)	0.060**	0.011				
	(0.023)	(0.015)				
Local Name x Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.059	-0.025				
	(0.042)	(0.028)				
High SES x Log(High SES elites in other parties)			0.047*	0.006		
			(0.023)	(0.017)		
Local Name x Log(Local elites in other parties)			-0.012	-0.008		
			(0.055)	(0.032)		
High SES x Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.007	-0.026
					(0.029)	(0.020)
High SES x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					0.072*	0.031
					(0.030)	(0.020)
Local Name x Log(Elites in SMPs)					0.037	0.067+
					(0.044)	(0.039)
Local Name x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.088+	-0.092*
					(0.047)	(0.040)
Age	-0.006	0.002	-0.006	0.001	-0.004	0.001
	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Age squared	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.029+	0.022	0.027+	0.021	0.027+	0.022
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Log(Population Density)	0.061*	-0.050*	0.025	-0.043*	0.020	-0.051*
	(0.028)	(0.021)	(0.033)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.021)
Log(Population)		0.087**	0.146***	0.083**	0.180***	0.098***
		(0.027)	(0.041)	(0.028)	(0.041)	(0.027)
$\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$	-0.165	0.023	-0.157	0.052	-0.161	0.013
	(0.223)	(0.224)	(0.222)	(0.238)	(0.222)	(0.224)
New Party Vote	-0.029	1.368*	-0.026	1.514*	-0.027	1.275*
	(0.029)	(0.587)	(0.029)	(0.608)	(0.028)	(0.586)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.003	0.769*	-0.004	0.892*	0.000	0.789*
	(0.003)	(0.359)	(0.005)	(0.362)	(0.004)	(0.359)
Differential Turnout	0.009+	0.157	0.005	0.159	0.007	0.197
	(0.005)	(0.324)	(0.005)	(0.345)	(0.005)	(0.324)
% unemployed foreigners		0.127+		0.119+		0.127+
		(0.065)		(0.065)		(0.065)

Continued on next page

Table E.11: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (with population density) (Continued)

Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)		0.013		0.033		0.021
		(0.094)		(0.094)		(0.094)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.054+		-0.051+		-0.053+	
	(0.029)		(0.029)		(0.028)	
University (1/0)	0.021	-0.051	-0.022	-0.057	-0.071	-0.045
	(0.100)	(0.072)	(0.108)	(0.071)	(0.102)	(0.072)
N	2055	2792	2027	2726	2055	2792
R²	0.34	0.29	0.35	0.30	0.36	0.30
Adj. R²	0.33	0.28	0.34	0.29	0.35	0.29
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Standard errors clustered on municipalities. Provides complete results with coefficients for all controls for shortened Table **??**.

Table E.12: Elite Attributes, the Rural-Urban Environment, and Local Branch Formation (Only Municipalities with One or Two New Party Elites)

	Greens		AfD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High SES	-0.577*	-0.722*	-0.290*	-0.689*
	(0.236)	(0.341)	(0.147)	(0.276)
Local name	-0.211	-0.591	0.530*	0.782
	(0.427)	(0.610)	(0.233)	(0.705)
Age	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age squared	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.007	0.006	0.040*	0.039*
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)
$\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$	-0.073	-0.140	0.020	-0.099
	(0.138)	(0.149)	(0.165)	(0.179)
Log(Population)	0.057+	0.057+	0.087***	0.088***
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Log(Elites in SMPs)	-0.012	-0.012	-0.011	-0.011
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)	-0.024	-0.025	-0.030+	-0.030+
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.018)
New Party Vote	0.016	0.016	1.430***	1.422***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.251)	(0.254)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.006	-0.006	0.069	0.054
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.263)	(0.263)
Differential Turnout	0.010*	0.010*	-0.037	-0.049
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.248)	(0.250)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.056**	-0.056**		
	(0.021)	(0.021)		
High SES x Log(Population)	0.074*	0.075*	0.034*	0.028+
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Local Name x Log(Population)	0.029	0.031	-0.053*	-0.053*
	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.027)	(0.026)
High SES x $\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$		0.129		0.461+
		(0.202)		(0.236)
Local Name x $\text{Pop}_t/\text{Pop}_{t-10}$		0.349		-0.256
		(0.367)		(0.652)
% unemployed foreigners			-0.001	-0.001
			(0.050)	(0.050)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)			0.038	0.037
			(0.080)	(0.080)
N	1106	1106	2336	2336
R²	0.41	0.41	0.46	0.46
Adj. R²	0.39	0.39	0.45	0.45
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: $+ \text{ p} < 0.1$, * $\text{p} < 0.05$, ** $\text{p} < 0.01$, *** $\text{p} < 0.001$. Standard errors clustered on municipalities.

Table E.13: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (Only Municipalities with One or Two New Party Elites)

	DV: Contestation of local elections (1/0)					
	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD	Greens	AfD
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Local name	-0.017	0.173+	-0.036	0.057	-0.051	0.241**
	(0.086)	(0.089)	(0.037)	(0.044)	(0.078)	(0.088)
High SES	-0.103+	-0.084+	-0.034	-0.020	-0.083+	-0.093*
	(0.060)	(0.048)	(0.032)	(0.039)	(0.049)	(0.045)
Log(Elites in other parties)	-0.001	-0.041*				
	(0.019)	(0.019)				
Log(Elites in SMPs)					-0.021	-0.005
					(0.022)	(0.014)
Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					-0.047+	-0.043*
					(0.026)	(0.019)
Log(High SES elites in other parties)			-0.021	-0.027		
			(0.022)	(0.019)		
Log(Local Elites in other parties)			-0.037	0.009		
			(0.024)	(0.018)		
High SES x Log(Elites in other parties)	0.062*	0.037*				
	(0.027)	(0.017)				
Local Name x Log(Elites in other parties)	0.025	-0.044				
	(0.045)	(0.034)				
High SES x Log(High SES elites in other parties)			0.054*	0.022		
			(0.026)	(0.019)		
Local Name x Log(Local elites in other parties)			0.108	-0.000		
			(0.072)	(0.041)		
High SES x Log(Elites in SMPs)					0.015	-0.034+
					(0.029)	(0.020)
High SES x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					0.056+	0.062**
					(0.030)	(0.021)
Local Name x Log(Elites in SMPs)					0.032	0.072
					(0.041)	(0.051)
Local Name x Log(Elites in mainstream parties)					0.025	-0.118*
					(0.046)	(0.053)
Age	0.004	0.005	0.003	0.006+	0.005	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Age squared	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Male (1/0)	0.010	0.040*	0.010	0.043*	0.010	0.041*
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.016)
Log(Population)		0.091***	0.086**	0.076***	0.089**	0.094***
		(0.019)	(0.027)	(0.020)	(0.029)	(0.019)

Continued on next page

Table E.13: Elite Attributes, Supply of Competing Parties, and Local Branch Formation (Only Municipalities with One or Two New Party Elites) (Continued)

Pop$_t$/Pop$_{t-10}$	-0.052	0.023	-0.055	0.018	-0.085	0.014
	(0.137)	(0.164)	(0.138)	(0.178)	(0.137)	(0.165)
New Party Vote	0.016	1.452***	0.016	1.612***	0.016	1.439***
	(0.017)	(0.252)	(0.017)	(0.259)	(0.017)	(0.252)
Turnout (nat. election)	-0.008*	0.085	-0.012***	0.251	-0.005	0.076
	(0.004)	(0.262)	(0.002)	(0.280)	(0.004)	(0.262)
Differential Turnout	0.012**	-0.029	0.009*	-0.016	0.010*	-0.038
	(0.004)	(0.250)	(0.004)	(0.280)	(0.004)	(0.248)
% unemployed foreigners		-0.003		0.012		-0.001
		(0.050)		(0.051)		(0.050)
Δ % unempl. foreigners (rel. to 2010)		0.037		0.044		0.038
		(0.080)		(0.084)		(0.080)
Log(Dist. nuclear power plant)	-0.062**		-0.057**		-0.056**	
	(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.021)	
University (1/0)		0.004		0.009		0.003
		(0.074)		(0.074)		(0.073)
N	1106	2336	1082	2246	1106	2336
R²	0.39	0.45	0.41	0.46	0.40	0.46
Adj. R²	0.38	0.45	0.40	0.45	0.39	0.45
State-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
# New party Elites-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Standard errors clustered on municipalities.

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