

**Bündnis 90/Die Grünen's Rightward Shift:  
Explaining the Party's More Restrictive Positioning on  
Immigration and Integration During the 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

**A Master's Thesis**

Sophie Röhlk (20220650)

Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University

MSc International Relations and Global Development

Global Refugee Studies

Casper Sakstrup

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to gain an understanding of why Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen has taken a more restrictive stance on immigration and integration policy during the 20th legislative period. Downs' (1957) spatial model forms the theoretical basis of the work and underlies the selection of the hypothesised explanatory variables. Using a comparative case study of the 19th and 20th legislative periods of the German Bundestag and a Most Similar Systems Design logic, evidence was found that the poor state election results of the German Green Party during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period represent an explanatory factor. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the participation in a coalition government with two partners with more restrictive positions, who also exerted pressure for change on the Green Party, contributed to the shift to the right. Contrary to theoretical assumptions, the analysis did not provide any evidence that the attitude of the Green electorate or changes in the position of neighbouring parties played a decisive role. In general, this thesis contributes to the broader debate on the determinants of party shifts and provides nuanced insights into the individual factors analysed. It also draws attention to the fact that the interaction effects between the factors discussed in the literature need further research.

## List of Abbreviations

AfD – Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland)

CDU – Christian Democratic Union of Germany (Christliche Demokratische Union Deutschlands)

CSU – Christian Social Union of Bavaria (Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayer)

FDP – Free Democratic Party of Germany (Freie Demokratische Partei Deutschlands)

GLES – German Longitudinal Election Study

Green Party – Alliance 90/ the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen)

Left Party – The Left (Die Linke)

MSSD - Most similar systems design

RRP – Radical right party

SPD – Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)

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## 1. Introduction

In December 2023, six members with a personal history of displacement left the German party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Green Party). They justified their decision by stating that the party had committed a historic betrayal of refugees with its decision to support the reform of the Common European Asylum System and that the party's rhetoric was becoming increasingly hostile towards refugees (Zeit Online, 2023b). However, this headline is just one of many that address the rightward shift of the German Green Party in the area of immigration and integration policy and the internal party dispute about it in the course of the 20th legislative period (Jakob, 2023; Mäurer, 2023; Orde, 2023; Wiedemeyer, 2024). This shift stands in clear contrast to the former party position, as the party has traditionally been known for a very liberal and pro-immigration line, which it also clearly pursued up to the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period (Atzpodien, 2020; Gessler & Hunger, 2022).

While newspapers and talk shows are already eagerly looking for reasons for this shift, the topic has not yet been discussed in academia. This may be primarily due to the topicality of the issue. In addition, previous research projects on the immigration and integration policy positions of German parties have often focussed on the two major mainstream parties, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) (Atzpodien, 2020; Bauer-Blaschkowski, 2022; Handwerker, 2019; Hertner, 2022).

This thesis attempts to close this gap and establish the first evidence-based explanations for the Green Party's shift to the right. More specifically, it will explore the research question: "What factors have driven Bündnis 90/Die Grünen to adopt a more restrictive stance on immigration and integration in the 20th legislative period?". To this end, four possible explanations for the Green Party's shift to the right will be analysed. These include changes in the positioning of the party's electorate, the development of its election results, positional changes of other parties, and governing in a coalition government. All four are fundamentally based on Anthony Down's (1957) spatial model as well as more recent literature that has further developed his approaches. As part of a comparative case study, these four factors are analysed in relation to the Green Party's positioning during the 19th and 20th legislative periods. The evaluation of which factors are actually decisive for the shift is based on the logic of a most similar system design (MSSD).

At a time when anti-immigration parties are gaining strength in Germany, and even formerly immigration-friendly parties are sliding further to the right, understanding the motives behind such position shifts is of great importance. After all, shifts in party positions often also lead to shifts in the policies implemented. For instance, the current government has introduced restrictive reforms that they still opposed a few years ago. The tightening of immigration and integration policies affects the lives of many people who are still on the move and hope to settle

in Germany eventually. However, immigrants who already arrived in Germany are particularly affected by the cuts and restrictive changes as these increase the uncertainty in which they live further.

The Green Party is a very interesting case in which to explore the motivations behind such shifts. This is due to the fact that they have pursued a liberal migration policy for a very long period. The shift in position came very suddenly and was not a gradual process. As it occurred precisely in the 20th legislative period, the period under investigation can be easily narrowed down. In addition, the Green Party has not yet received much attention in the academic world in this regard, so the thesis can contribute significant knowledge.

On the one hand, the analysis examines the explanatory power of Downs' (1957) model for specific policy areas. In addition, the study contributes to the general discourse on why parties change their positions by focusing on a specific area: immigration and integration policy. It also provides deep insights into the Green Party's immigration and integration policy, which is currently lacking in academic discourse, and thus offers a strong basis for further research.

The thesis is structured as follows. The second chapter provides a more detailed description of the restrictive changes of the Green Party based on three exemplary cases. This is followed by a literature analysis in chapter three, which illustrates the current state of knowledge regarding the reasons behind parties changing their positions. In order to establish a strong framework and define the hypothetical explanatory variables, chapter four explains the theoretical background of the thesis in more detail. The focus here lies on Downs' (1957) spatial model, which is underpinned and further developed by current literature. Chapter five will discuss the study's research design, a comparative case study with an adapted MSSD logic. In addition, the selected cases, the 19th and 20th legislative periods, as well as the variables to be analysed are presented and operationalised. The analysis conducted in chapter six is divided into four individual analyses, each focusing on one of the four hypothetical explanatory variables. Evidence is found that the weak election results of the 20th legislative period and participation in a coalition government in which the partners build up pressure for restrictive changes can be possible explanations. Contrary to theoretical expectations, the influence of changes in opinion among Green voters and changes in the positions of the two neighbouring parties can be excluded as explanatory factors. These results are then discussed in chapter seven, and the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis are examined. Finally, chapter eight summarises the most important findings of the thesis.

## **2. Restrictive Changes Regarding Immigration & Integration by the Green Party**

Throughout the current 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period, the Green Party has supported a range of laws that have contributed to a more restrictive immigration and integration policy in Germany. These actions mark a clear departure from their previously liberal and humanitarian approach. In the following, I will illustrate this shift towards restrictiveness with three exemplary cases. This is necessary because, given the recency of the case, no academic studies have yet been conducted that could be referenced in this thesis.

The information used for this illustration is primarily derived from newspaper articles and publications on official government websites. These sources are supplemented with interviews, press statements, the Green Party's election manifesto from 2021, and reports from research institutes and refugee organisations. The sources were all found through extensive desk research during which I mainly consulted the newspaper archives of the most renowned German newspapers, as well as the official government websites. I also used search queries with keywords and filters for specific periods in the most common internet search engines. A wide variety of sources were used to ensure that the illustration is not based on biased data, and particular care was taken to ensure that the newspaper articles came from different publishers.

The three cases described in the following serve as representative examples of the development. However, due to space and time constraints, numerous other legislative measures cannot be examined here. These include the German government's approval of the reform of the Common European Asylum System (Mediendienst Integration, 2024), the introduction of border controls (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2024a), and the adoption of a security package that, among other provisions, excludes individuals obligated to leave Germany under the Dublin Regulation from accessing state benefits (Die Bundesregierung, 2024b).

### **2.1. Improvement of Deportation Procedures**

The Act to Improve Deportation Procedures (Rückführungsverbesserungsgesetz) was adopted by the German Bundestag on 18 January 2024. The primary restrictive changes include, among other measures, an extension of the detention period for individuals awaiting deportation, the authorisation of deportation detention irrespective of asylum application status, and an extension of the maximum detention duration. It further grants authorities permission to enter all rooms in communal accommodation to search for documents required for identity clarification, abolishes the requirement to give notice of deportation (except for families with children under the age of twelve), and extends the period during which asylum



seekers receive the low asylum seeker benefits and not the higher analogue benefits (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024).

While right-wing opposition parties view the law as insufficient to increase the number of deportations in a significant manner and thus deemed inadequate (Hausding & Stoltenberg, 2024), it faces criticism from the left-wing opposition, as well as human rights and refugee organisations for its highly restrictive nature. They state that it is disproportionate and jeopardises fundamental rights like the right to freedom, the general right to privacy and the right to inviolability of the home (Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, 2023).

The approval of the Act stands in clear contrast to former positions of the Green Party. In their 2021 federal election manifesto, the Greens expressed their intention to abolish the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act altogether (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 186). At that time, they also severely criticised detention pending deportation in the absence of criminal offence, describing it as a massive encroachment on individual freedoms (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 187). This stance echoed their position from 2019 when they opposed the “Orderly Return Act” proposed by the Christian conservative party-led interior ministry (Krump, 2019). Although it was communicated that parts of the Act did not align with Green Party principles (Mijatovic, 2024), a large proportion of Green members of parliament ultimately voted in favour of the law. Only a few of them decided to vote against the law due to the restrictive nature of the measure (Gambir, 2024).

## **2.2. Payment Cards**

On 16 May 2024, an amendment to the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz) introduced the option to allocate migrants their financial benefits via a payment card. Although the details of implementation are delegated to the individual federal states, it is anticipated that they will adopt the use of the payment card. The introduction of this measure was primarily justified on the grounds that it would prevent refugees from sending back money to their home countries. The measure was supposed to ensure that the allocated social benefits are spent exclusively in Germany and, at the same time, minimise reasons for migrants to come to Germany (Die Bundesregierung, 2024a).

However, the introduction of the payment card has also been criticised by refugee organisations and research institutes. Dr. Herbert Brücker from the Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research argues that, depending on its design, the card could severely restrict refugees' integration and social participation. He also questions whether it will have the desired effect of reducing immigration to Germany and preventing the retrospective payment of smugglers (Brücker, 2024).

The Green Party also reacted critically when the payment card was first discussed at the federal level. In October 2023, the Green Party expressed explicit opposition to the measure, emphasising bureaucratic concerns as well as the importance of upholding the dignity and rights of refugees (Lange, 2023; Spiegel, 2023a). Even shortly before its implementation, the payment card continued to face criticism from the Greens due to its potential discriminatory consequences (Reich & Voigt, 2024). Ultimately, however, the Green Party decided to support the measure, albeit with some minor modifications (Jaeger & Fuhr, 2024).

### **2.3. Deportations to Afghanistan**

On 30 August 2024, migrants were deported from Germany to Afghanistan for the first time since the Taliban seized power three years ago (Tagesschau, 2024e). The group consisted of 28 convicted persons holding Afghan citizenship and for whom a valid deportation order had been issued. The deportations were not negotiated directly with the Taliban but were made possible with the help of key regional powers. Although the individual federal states are mainly responsible for deportations, the federal government, especially the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of the Interior, actively supported and facilitated the deportations (Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 2024).

The fact that the Greens supported this decision stands in stark contrast to their previous positions. At the beginning of August 2021, after the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, they called for an immediate ban on deportations and strongly criticised the German government at the time for not introducing the measure immediately (Zeit Online, 2021). Their 2021 federal election manifesto also stated that they wanted to enforce a nationwide ban on deportations to Afghanistan (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 187).

At the beginning of their time in government, the Green Party also clearly positioned themselves against deportations to Afghanistan. In March 2023, Filiz Polat, responsible for reporting on immigration for the Green Party, warned of the grave human rights violations that await migrants who are deported to Afghanistan and emphasised the necessity of the current deportation ban (Kade, 2023). Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock also clearly opposed deportations to Afghanistan in June 2023, citing the human rights situation on the ground (Zeit Online, 2024b).

In June, opinions on the possible deportation of convicted persons started to divide the party. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock still expressed clear reservations (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). Her stance was supported by Luise Amtsberg, the Green Human Rights Commissioner of the Federal Government, who also clearly warned against such a measure, as it would always mean a certain recognition of the Taliban regime (Zeit Online, 2024c). In contrast, the

Green Vice-Chancellor, Robert Habeck, spoke out in favour of examining the possibility of deporting convicted persons to Afghanistan (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2024a).

When the deportations were carried out in August, both Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck and the co-chair of the Greens, Omid Nouripour, spoke out in favour of it. Although they indicated that this did not mean that they were generally in favour of deportations to Afghanistan, they considered it the right decision for these convicted persons (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2024b). Additionally, no loud criticism was heard from other Green politicians who had previously spoken out against the deportations (Eikmanns, 2024).

## **2.4. Summary**

To summarise, the exemplary cases discussed here paint a clear picture. In the 20th legislative period, the Green Party repeatedly supported legislative initiatives that led to a more restrictive development of Germany's immigration and integration policies. Although there was some criticism within the party during the consultation periods, large sections ultimately voted in favour of the laws. Even though it was occasionally emphasised that these decisions were not taken lightly, they ultimately contributed to a more restrictive immigration and integration system. This shows how far the Greens have moved away from their former position and presents evidence of a rightward shift in the area of immigration and integration policy.

### 3. Literature Review

There is a broad discussion in the literature about the factors that cause parties to change their positioning. In the following chapter, I will first discuss different underlying theoretical approaches. Afterwards, I will address the individual factors that play an important role in current research.

#### 3.1. Theoretical Approaches

Following Fagerholm (2016), previous theories on the motives behind shifts in party positions can be categorised into two groups. On the one hand, there is the work of Downs (1957) and, building on his work, that of Budge (1994). On the other hand, there is the work of Harmel and Janda (1994).

In his influential book “An Economic Theory of Democracy” Anthony Downs (1957) introduced his spatial model of party competition. His book provides a foundational framework for understanding the political behaviour of rational voters and vote-seeking political parties within an uncertain world. However, most important in the context of this thesis are his theoretical assumptions regarding the strategic positioning of parties and their motivations for change. According to Downs (1957), all parties try to win as many votes as possible. Operating in an uncertain world, they choose an ideology that seems most promising to achieve this goal. They generally remain committed to this ideology and choose their positioning accordingly, as major changes can lead to a decline in trust and a possible loss of voters. However, according to Downs (1957), some factors encourage parties to take the risk of changing their position. These include changes in the positioning of the electorate, heavy losses in elections, changes in the positioning of other parties and governing within a coalition.

Budge (1994) based his work on Down's theory. He also assumes that parties adopt an ideology in an uncertain world. They base their positioning on this ideology and never cross the boundaries set by it (Budge, 1994, p. 446). This also implies that they never leapfrog another party (Budge, 1994, p. 448). Based on these basic assumptions, he developed five different models for parties' behaviour. First, there is the “Stay Put Model”, in which the party always advocates exactly the same positions at every election (Budge, 1994, p. 461). The second is the “Alternation Model”, in which the parties change their positioning slightly from election to election, constantly in the area of tension between the desire to win new voters and remain committed to their ideology (Budge, 1994, pp. 452–453). The third model is the “Past Results Model”. Here, a party remains consistent with its position or shifts it even further to the extreme if it won in the last election. However, if the party lost in the last election, it changes direction (Budge, 1994, p. 461). In the “Rational Expectations Model”, parties vary their

positioning based on their assumption about the competitiveness of the upcoming elections (Budge, 1994, pp. 451–452). If they think it will be very competitive, they move further towards the centre, if not further towards the extremes. The fifth model is the “Marker Party Model”, in which parties choose their position dependent on that of their competitors (Budge, 1994, p. 454).

Their work stands opposite of Harmel and Janda (1994). In contrast to the two authors just discussed, they do not assume that all parties are necessarily vote maximising. According to them, parties can also have other primary goals, including participation in government, promoting their policies, or maintaining a democratic and participatory party culture (Harmel & Janda, 1994, pp. 272–273). However, there is agreement, at least with Downs (1957), on the assumption that parties are fundamentally conversational organisations that are reluctant to change their positioning. They separate the reasons why parties nevertheless change their positions into two categories. First, internal changes, such as changes in the party's leadership or dominant faction, that often result in slower changes (Harmel & Janda, 1994, pp. 266–267). On the other hand, external shocks that influence their primary motivation, which can lead to abrupt shifts in position. Since parties have different primary motivations, external stimuli affect them differently (Harmel & Janda, 1994, p. 268). For example, poor election results are particularly decisive for vote maximisers. Meanwhile, for office maximisers, a decisive shock is when other possible coalition partners rule out joint work or collapse. For ideologically motivated parties, it can be a decisive shock when external circumstances change in such a way that fundamental values suddenly have to be questioned and revised. For parties that prioritise internal democratic structures, strong growth or shrinkage in membership can be decisive (Harmel & Janda, 1994, pp. 269–271). The perfect conditions for change are when a relevant external shock occurs at the same time as or triggers an internal shock (Harmel & Janda, 1994, p. 267).

### **3.2. Factors for Position Changes**

Building on these theoretical models, much empirical work has been carried out in recent years. With the help of this, finding evidence for some of the theoretical assumptions has been possible, while there is still insufficient evidence for others. Additionally, new factors have also been discovered. In the following, I will provide an overview of the various factors.

One of the most prominent factors is that of changes in public opinion. In their study, Adams et al. (2004) showed that parties adapt their positions to those of the public if the latter moves further away from their own positioning. Their findings were later extended by the insight that such a pattern of behaviour only applies to mainstream parties. In contrast, niche parties pay

particular attention to the opinions of their electorate and are not susceptible to shifts in opinion across the population as a whole (Adams et al., 2006; Bischof & Wagner, 2020; Ezrow et al., 2011).

Schumacher (2015) contradicts these findings. According to him, whether a party is a mainstream or niche party is not relevant, but instead, whether it is leadership or activist-dominated (Schumacher, 2015, p. 76). While party leaders are mainly interested in governing to gain material and status-related benefits for themselves, party activists are primarily interested in implementing the party's policy ideas (Schumacher et al., 2013, p. 465). For this reason, more leadership-dominated parties change their positioning depending on how the overall electorate positions itself. In contrast, activist-dominated parties position themselves according to how their electorate positions itself. Additionally, he also finds that leadership-dominated parties also change their position after losing elections to improve their chances for the next one (Schumacher et al., 2013, pp. 473–474).

Many studies in the literature show that the success of radical right parties (RRPs) shifts the positioning of other parties in the system concerning immigration and multiculturalism further to the right (Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2020). While all parties are generally affected, some factors, such as poor election results, being part of the opposition, a rightward shift within their electorate, or a generally more right-wing political orientation, make parties even more vulnerable (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Han, 2015; van Spanje, 2010).

According to current research, whether a party is in government or opposition is also very relevant regarding its willingness to change its positions. Both Klüver and Spoon (2016) and Reomeijni (2018) have found that governing parties are much less receptive to opinion changes within the population than opposition parties. According to van Spanje (2010), they are also less susceptible to RRP. Other researchers have also found that the type of government is also influential. For example, Atzpodien (2020) shows that parties in coalition governments often shift their positions in order to find a compromise with their government partners.

Another factor discussed in the literature is the party's last election results. It has been demonstrated that the parties that performed well in the previous election see their positioning confirmed and, consequently, maintain it. However, if they have performed poorly, this may indicate that their positioning has not resonated with the electorate and that they should reconsider it (Janda et al., 1995). However, Somer-Topcu (2009) finds an important limitation to the influence of this factor. Her research shows that the link between election results and changes in party positions diminishes the more time has passed since the election. After 32 months, no detectable correlation remains.

The potential influence of changes in other parties' positions is also often discussed. Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) show in their study that parties respond to the changing positions of other parties, especially if they come from the same party family. Williams (2015) also finds evidence that parties react to the shifting positions of others, especially if they are ideologically close to one another.

Global economic changes are another factor. Adams et al. (2009) show in their study that globalisation-related changes to economic conditions cause centre and right-wing parties to change their positions. They turn to the left when capital flows increase and to the right when foreign direct investment increases. In contrast, left parties are not susceptible (Adams et al., 2009, p. 626). The results of Haupt's (2010) study are consistent with those of Adams et al. (2009) on the point that global economic changes in the area of globalisation cause parties to change their positioning (p. 14). They also agree that different variables lead to either right or left shifts. According to her, increasing imports and capital mobility lead to leftward shifts, and increasing exports lead to rightward shifts (Haupt, 2010, p. 15). However, there is a crucial difference between the two studies. Haupt finds that not only centre and right-wing but also left-wing parties are affected (Haupt, 2010, p. 16).

For the two factors, change in party leadership and the change of the dominant faction in the party, as derived from Harmel and Janda (1994), no studies have found sufficient evidence that they are necessary factors for party change (Fagerholm, 2016, pp. 503–504; Harmel & Tan, 2003, p. 421).

### **3.3. Summary**

To summarise, there is a broad spectrum of explanations for the shifting positions of parties. The two most important theoretical approaches differ primarily with regard to the parties' primary motivations. While Downs (1957) and Budge (1994) assume that all parties are vote-maximisers, Harmel and Janda (1994) suggest that parties have different motivations, such as attaining political power or implementing their own policies.

Building on these foundational theories, much empirical research has been done. As a result, there exists a long list of factors that are said to cause parties to change their positioning. However, it is important to note in this context that these are often quantitative analyses that include a wide range of countries and parties. In addition, the studies often focus on mainstream parties and exclude niche parties such as the Green Party. This illustrates the gap in the literature; there is a lack of work focussing on individual cases and thus putting the explanatory approaches to the test within a very detailed study.

#### 4. Theoretical Background

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the thesis, drawing on Anthony Downs' (1957) seminal spatial model of party competition as its core framework. His model is pivotal in understanding how political parties position themselves and adapt to changes. Over time, scholars have built upon his work to account for contemporary phenomena. By exploring both the original model and further developments, this chapter identifies the key factors that drive shifts in party positioning in multi-party systems in the light of Downs' (1957) model. These factors are crucial for this thesis as they will represent the hypothesised explanatory variables within the analysis.

This theoretical focus has been selected for a variety of reasons. The literature review has demonstrated the numerous factors recognised in the literature as important for position changes of parties. However, the case analysed in this thesis is a very recent one. As a result, very little existing case-related knowledge is available. Accordingly, the amount of work required to work out the individual characteristics of the variables will be extensive. For this reason, the possible explanatory variables had to be limited from the outset. To make this possible, I will concentrate on Downs' (1957) spatial model and the four possible explanatory approaches derived from it.

As described above, Downs' (1957) theory is one of the most established and important theories regarding how parties position themselves and why they change their positions. His book "An Economic Theory of Democracy" provides deep insights into his theory and thus enables a good understanding of it and detailed information about the individual variables. In addition, the literature review has shown that the four variables derived from Down's model are among the most widely discussed and recognised in the literature. The fact that several studies have already found significant evidence for their relevance increases the likelihood that some of them can help explain the shift of the Green Party. In addition, the theory has not only been reviewed by other scholars but has also been further developed through additions such as those of the niche parties. This ensures that the theory remains relevant and suitable for current cases.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I will present the underlying concept and assumptions of Downs' (1957) model. Secondly, I will introduce his two-party and multi-party models. Afterwards, I will explain the main factors influencing parties to change their positions in his multi-party model. These factors are then discussed further in the light of new research. Lastly, I will discuss the critique of Downs' (1957) model relevant to the thesis.



#### **4.1. Underlying Concepts and Assumptions of Downs' Model**

In the following section, I will introduce the main assumptions and concepts that Downs' (1957) model is based on. These include the existence of a left-right scale, the vote-seeking nature of parties, the rationality of voters, prevailing uncertainty, the emergence of ideologies, and the ideological immobility of parties.

According to Downs (1957), both voter preferences and party positions can be placed on a left-to-right scale ranging between zero and 100 (p. 115). A party's position on that scale is based on "a weighted average of the positions of all the particular policies it upholds" (Downs, 1957, p. 132). However, the parties' positioning cannot be broken down to exactly one point; instead, it can be described as the segment of the left-right scale that is covered. This segment can also be described as a vector. Importantly, each voter may interpret a party's position differently based on their own weighting of individual policies. This can lead to varied interpretations of the party's exact position on the scale. However, these differences are not too great and, therefore, still allow a general cohesive classification of the parties (Downs, 1957, p. 133).

Downs' (1957) model also operates under the assumption that the main objective of political parties is to win as many votes as possible in order to win office. They do this in order to acquire the associated benefits such as power, prestige and high incomes. They are not interested in governing as a means to implement specific policies. Instead, they formulate policies to gain the voters' approval and thereby win elections (Downs, 1957, p. 18).

Another cornerstone of his theory is the rationality of voters. It is assumed that voters will vote for the party they believe will benefit them the most in the following legislative period. Their calculation is mainly based on a comparison of the current and expected benefits from each party (Downs, 1957, pp. 38–40). Voters modify it by factoring in recent trends and assessing if the current government is performing as well as past administrations (Downs, 1957, p. 41). In multi-party systems, voters may also vote strategically, considering not only their preferred party but also which party has a realistic chance of winning (Downs, 1957, pp. 47–48).

However, making rational decisions is more difficult because of the uncertainty that prevails. Downs (1957) defines it as "any lack of sure knowledge about the course of past, present, future, or hypothetical events" (p. 77). Voters often do not have an exact overview of all government decisions and their consequences, nor can they predict future challenges and the parties' reactions (Downs, 1957, p. 98). Consequently, it is impossible for voters to know with certainty which party actually is most favourable to them (Downs, 1957, pp. 45–46). Not only voters are affected by this, but also parties are impaired in their actions by the prevailing uncertainty. For instance, they do not know with certainty what stances the other parties will

take, how politically informed voters are, or how passed laws are subjectively perceived by voters (Downs, 1957, p. 80).

In this uncertain world, ideologies serve a significant role. Downs (1957) defines them as “a verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society” (p. 96). Due to the prevailing uncertainty, voters often find it difficult to determine with certainty which party will benefit them the most. Ideologies are useful for them as they can help to shorten the decision-making process. Voters can simply decide to vote for the party that is ideologically closest to them and thus do not have to weigh up all the individual government decisions and the counterproposals of the opposition parties against each other. Furthermore, ideologies make it easier to differentiate between the parties, as they make it possible to focus on the essential fundamental differences (Downs, 1957, pp. 98–99). As already outlined earlier, parties do not actually have an ideological motivation but instead focus on gaining votes. Nevertheless, they utilise the knowledge that many voters make their voting decisions based on ideologies and pay less attention to single policies, and therefore offer voters ideologies. Here, they decide in favour of an ideology they assume will attract the largest possible share of voters (Downs, 1957, p. 100). The prevailing uncertainty is also the reason why parties opt for very different ideologies; they cannot be certain which ideology will appeal to most voters (Downs, 1957, p. 101).

In general, parties tend to stick to their ideologies even though they choose them for tactical reasons and not out of political conviction. This also means that they generally keep their place on the right-left scale and do not overtake the spaces occupied by the other parties (Downs, 1957, p. 122). This adherence to their ideology is mainly due to two factors: reliability and responsibility. According to Downs (1957), a “party is reliable if its policy statements at the beginning of an election period [...] can be used to make accurate predictions of its behaviour (or its statements if it is not elected) during the period.” (pp. 104-105). He defines a responsible party as one whose “policies in one period are consistent with its actions (or statements) in the preceding period [...]” (Downs, 1957, p. 105). It is essential for parties to come across as reliable and responsible because rational voters pay much attention to this when making their voting decisions. They would rather vote for a party sure to keep its word than one particularly close to their position (Downs, 1957, pp. 107–108).

## **4.2. Downs' Model**

In the next two subchapters, I will present Downs' (1957) spatial model, which builds on the above-mentioned concepts. His primary model is based on a two-party system. In a subsequent step, he also adapts it to a multi-party system. Even though Downs' (1957) theory

is primarily known for the model of two-party systems, I will also introduce his multi-party model. This is due to the fact that the Green Party is situated in a multi-party system, and the conclusions drawn from this model are, therefore, of great significance for the thesis.

#### **4.2.1. Two-Party Systems**

In a two-party system, the distribution of the electorate on the left-right scale is essential to predict how parties will behave in relation to each other. A common scenario is that the electorate gathers in a bell shape around the centre of the scale, meaning that the parties will be able to reach a large proportion of voters in the middle, and only a small proportion will be persuaded by more extreme positions. Consequently, the parties will both move closer and closer to the centre and thus converge ideologically (Downs, 1957, pp. 117–118). Nevertheless, they will make sure that they stay at least slightly different from each other so that they can continue to claim the voters at the extreme ends of the scale for themselves and prevent them from no longer voting (Downs, 1957, pp. 119–120). This system is likely to be very stable because the parties are so close ideologically that no matter which of them governs, they will implement policies that appeal to the majority of the electorate (Downs, 1957, p. 122).

However, if the majority of the electorate is located on the two more extreme sides of the scale and the centre is only weakly occupied, the behaviour of the two parties changes considerably. The two parties will each claim one side of the two poles and diverge greatly from each other ideologically. The ruling party will pursue policies that mainly satisfy the needs of one group of voters. However, as the electorate is so strongly divided, the other side will be highly dissatisfied with the policies. Such a system will be very unstable and entail a high risk of revolutions (Downs, 1957, p. 120).

In the two-party system, the two parties compete for all voters. Therefore, they position themselves as broadly as possible politically, resulting in a large vector on the right-left scale (Downs, 1957, p. 133). It also happens that the parties begin to overlap with each other on certain issues in order to win votes from their opponent (Downs, 1957, p. 135).

#### **4.2.2. Multi-Party Systems**

In Downs' (1957) model of multi-party systems, the electorate is well distributed across the entire left-right scale, resulting in a situation where votes can be won at multiple sections of the scale (p. 122). For this reason, the parties have located themselves all along the spectrum. None of the parties can make big gains by majorly shifting their position to the left or right because the majority of them is framed by two other parties. As soon as a party moves

significantly closer to one competitor and takes some of its votes, it risks losing votes to the opposing party on the other side. For these reasons, parties in a multi-party system often remain consistent within their positions and try to clearly differentiate themselves from one another (Downs, 1957, p. 126). They attempt to cover only a small area of the right-left scale and do not overlap their policies with those of other parties (Downs, 1957, pp. 133–134).

An important characteristic of the multi-party system is that coalition governments are often formed because none of the parties has received enough votes to govern alone. This has two decisive effects on voters. First, the party they vote for will have to make compromises if it becomes part of the government and may deviate more than expected from the voters' preferences. Secondly, they cannot cast their vote for the entire government but only elect part of it (Downs, 1957, pp. 146–147). Due to the many possible outcomes of an election in the multi-party system, it is also much more difficult for voters to make rational voting decisions (Downs, 1957, pp. 148–150).

#### **4.3. Reasons for Parties to Change Their Positions Following Downs**

Even though there are strong incentives for parties in multi-party systems to remain consistent in their positions, certain factors can prompt them to alter their stance. In the following, I will present the main ones according to Downs (1957). These include changes in public opinion, past election results, positional changes of other parties, and governing in a coalition government. These factors will form the basis of my analysis.

An important reason for a party to shift its position can be a change in public opinion. In Downs' (1957) model, all parties try to maximise their votes and situate themselves accordingly on the left-right spectrum (p. 100). Shifts in public opinion result in a new voter distribution along the left-right spectrum. If this change results in a party not being able to attract as many voters as before, it motivates this party to change its position in alignment with the new distribution. It has been established that this change can have negative implications for a party. However, Downs (1957) states that for parties, "[it] is irrational to hold rigidly to the same policies when new situations arise" (p. 111). It can thus be concluded that a disadvantageous shift in public opinion causes parties to change their position and align it with the electorate's preferences.

The results of past elections also influence parties' positions. According to Downs (1957), parties are mainly voter-seeking (p. 18). The results they achieve in elections are thus highly relevant for them as they give an insight into the success of the party in achieving its primary goal. If parties are re-elected, it shows them that their policies have been well received by voters. They, therefore, have every reason to continue on this path. However, if parties have performed poorly in the election, it indicates that their position has not resonated with a large

share of the electorate. This can motivate them to completely reorganise themselves and change their positioning. Yet, in doing so, they must bear in mind that if parties often change their positioning and thus behave irresponsibly, voters assume that they are not capable of governing well and will not vote for them in the next election. Consequently, parties will only decide to take this step if they have incurred very heavy losses and the risk seems worthwhile (Downs, 1957, p. 109).

A change in one party's position also affects the other parties and leads them to reconsider their position. In Downs' (1957) multi-party model, the parties are ideally positioned across the left-right spectrum in such a way that they are evenly spaced, maintaining equal distancing between all parties and their neighbouring parties (p. 126). However, this even distribution may be disrupted when a party adjusts its position for one of the other reasons outlined above. By moving closer to a neighbour's ideological space, the shifting party reduces the potential voter pool of that neighbour, encouraging it to reposition itself to regain lost ground. Similarly, the party on the opposite side of the initially shifting party benefits from the newly opened space, creating an incentive to move in that direction to attract new voters. Since parties generally avoid leapfrogging their neighbours (Downs, 1957, p. 122), their positional influence remains confined to their neighbouring parties. Nevertheless, the ripple effects of these shifts can spread across the ideological spectrum, resulting in widespread repositioning.

Additionally, governing in a coalition can prompt parties to change their positions. Within the coalition, parties are under pressure from various and often conflicting factors when deciding which policies to adopt. First, each governing party wants to be as dominant as possible in the coalition. To achieve this end, they try to win over as many voters as possible. If they expect that they can win voters mainly at the extremes, they will move further apart on the left-right scale. However, if they believe they can win voters in the centre, they will all move towards the middle, which makes it easier to work together (Downs, 1957, pp. 157–158). Another factor that brings the parties within the coalition closer together is that all of the parties have the motivation to work well with the others in order to be able to respond to the needs of the population and demonstrate their governing capabilities (Downs, 1957, p. 157). Thirdly, parties often want the whole coalition to be re-elected because this would allow them to govern for another term. In order to achieve that goal, all the coalition members will try to position themselves far away from each other to cover a wide part of the scale and thus attract as many voters as possible (Downs, 1957, p. 158). Ultimately, however, the primary motivation of all parties is to win as many votes as possible. They will, therefore, do whatever they think will enable them to achieve their goal in the best possible way, even if that is not in the best interest of the whole coalition (Downs, 1957, p. 159). In summary, being part of a coalition government

can significantly affect a party's positioning. It can motivate them to shift more towards the centre or the extreme ends of the scale.

#### **4.4. Further Development of the Theory**

Downs' (1957) spatial model for party competition has since been taken up and developed further by other academics. In the following chapter, I will focus on the contributions to his four main reasons why parties in multi-party systems change their positions.

##### **4.4.1. Changes in Voters' Opinion**

In Downs' (1957) spatial model, the parties try to attract as many votes as possible in order to gain power. Accordingly, they position themselves politically in a way that they assume would attract the largest possible group of voters. Following this logic, it makes sense for them to adjust their positions if the majority of voters change theirs in a disadvantageous direction.

In their study, Adams et al. (2004) show that parties do not adapt their positions to the changing attitudes of voters generally. For this to happen, the change in positioning must be negative for them (Adams et al., 2004, pp. 601–603). They explain this by arguing that the parties only feel pressure to act if the position of the population shifts further away from them. However, if it moves even closer to their position, it only makes sense for them to maintain their original positioning (Adams et al., 2004, p. 593). This is in line with Downs' (1957) reasoning, since according to him parties always try to collect as many votes as possible in order to come to power. They, therefore, only react when this goal is in jeopardy.

Generally, a broad consensus exists that parties adjust their positions when public opinion shifts. However, over the years, scholars have identified several limitations to this pattern (Adams, 2012, pp. 405–406). One key restriction relevant to this thesis and still in line with Downs' (1957) model is the distinction between niche and mainstream parties. Although Downs (1957) does not explicitly address different party types in his theory, the concept of niche parties aligns well with his foundational ideas. Nicheness can be interpreted as a specific form of ideology. These parties deliberately select a niche ideology, assuming that this focus will most effectively secure voter loyalty within their section of the left-right spectrum.

Ezrow et al. (2011) show that mainstream parties generally react to shifting voters' opinions. Niche parties, on the other hand, do not react to shifts within the general electorate but do respond to changes within their electorate (Ezrow et al., 2011, pp. 283–285). According to the authors, mainstream parties are primarily designed to appeal to a broad section of the population. They, therefore, already cover a broader political spectrum and are prepared to

change their positioning if it benefits them. Niche parties form a clear contrast here. They have a smaller but also clearly defined electorate that has distinct expectations towards the party. If these parties move closer to the mainstream, they run the risk of being punished by their voters and seen as untrustworthy. They are also more closely connected to their voters and have a flatter hierarchy, ensuring that they are well informed about their positioning (Ezrow et al., 2011, pp. 278–279). Their findings are consistent with those of Adams et al. (2006, p. 519) and Bischof and Wagner (2020, p. 396), who also found that niche parties, unlike mainstream parties, do not change their positions when public opinion shifts. However, their results are not unchallenged. Romejin's (2018) study, for instance, finds no evidence that in Germany, mainstream parties mainly cater to the entire electorate, while niche parties are primarily responsive to their voters (p. 432). These differences could potentially be explained by the use of different definitions for niche parties, which complicates the comparability of the results. Adams et al. (2006) also found in their analysis that niche parties are penalised by voters when they shift their position towards the centre. However, a shift to the extremes has no effect. In comparison, mainstream parties do not feel much impact when they change their positions, which makes it easier for them to respond to public opinion shifts (Adams et al., 2006, p. 523). In line with Downs' (1957) theory, it only makes sense for those parties that benefit from it to adapt their positions to the changing positions of the entire electorate.

In conclusion, Downs' (1957) assumption that a disadvantageous change in public opinion motivates parties to adjust their positioning accordingly is supported by further studies. However, this principle must be extended to account for the type of party. While mainstream parties are sensitive to shifts in the preferences of the whole electorate, niche parties mainly focus on changes within their voter base.

#### **4.4.2. Past Election Results**

In Downs' (1957) spatial theory, parties usually stick to their positions because they fear the high costs change can entail. However, severe electoral losses can lead to this risk being considered the lesser of two evils, and the party, therefore, shifting its positions in order to be attractive to voters again.

Like Downs (1957), Janda et al. (1995) recognise that the potential risks of significantly changing positions are an important factor that leads parties to remain true to their party line (p.174). However, they also emphasise that parties are primarily driven by their goal of winning elections. If they fail to do so, thematic restructuring suddenly appears to offer an attractive alternative (Janda et al., 1995, pp. 175–176). Although a lost election alone does not necessarily lead to a shift in the party's positioning, almost all of the changes analysed by the

researchers followed an election defeat. Meanwhile, parties that had done well in the previous election almost always maintained their political stance (Janda et al., 1995, p. 189). Contrary to these results are the findings of Adams et al. (2004). Their study shows no evidence that lost elections have an influence on the positioning of parties (Adams et al., 2004, p. 603).

Somer-Topcu's (2009) article offers a nuanced view of the issue. It shows that parties that lost in the last election change their positions more often than those that won. However, she introduces another important factor: the time distance to the last election. This factor is crucial because the connection between the election results and the position shift fades over time and no longer exists after 32 months (Somer-Topcu, 2009, pp. 243–244). She explains her results by the fact that parties want to win as many votes as possible in the upcoming election but are also aware of the risks that a shift in their positions entails. They are only willing to take that risk if they know where they need to move to align with public opinion. The previous election can serve to assess public opinion better and thus also be able to evaluate the parties' chances (Somer-Topcu, 2009, p. 239). However, the more time passes after the election, the more it loses its explanatory power and, therefore, also its influence (Somer-Topcu, 2009, p. 241). This reasoning aligns well with Downs' (1957) framework, where parties operate in an uncertain environment. Thus, the closer the previous election is in time, the more likely it is that the insights gained from it still reflect current trends. Since many of the elections analysed by Adams et al. (2004) are more than 32 months apart, this approach may also explain why their study found no link between lost elections and positional shifts.

To summarise, just as Downs (1957) described, parties in multi-party systems generally stay true to their positions for fear of the consequences of shifting. However, if they experience a severe electoral defeat, they no longer meet their main motive of winning elections to retain power. Owing to this, the likelihood of a shift in position increases. It is also suggested that parties primarily respond to recently held elections, while the influence of elections that occurred further in the past gradually diminishes over time.

#### **4.4.3. Positional Changes of Other Parties**

In Downs' (1957) spatial model, the parties are distributed on a left-right scale. Through their positioning, they cover a vector from which they collect votes. They can lose votes if one of their neighbouring parties moves into their vector. However, as each party's primary goal is to reach as many voters as possible, it will react by adjusting its position in order to increase its vector again. Since parties do not leapfrog one another, each party is only in direct competition with its two neighbouring parties on the left and right.



Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) demonstrate that parties react to the changing positions of all other parties. More precisely, this means that parties shift their position in the current election in the same direction as other parties have in the previous election. They are particularly sensitive to shifts by parties within the same party family (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009, p. 836). Williams (2015) builds on their research and specifies some of their variables. His study emphasises that the closer a party is ideologically to another party, the more it influences the positional shift of the other (Williams, 2015, pp. 152–153). He explains this by the fact that parties that are ideological neighbours can steal votes from each other and are therefore dependent on whether the other party moves closer or farther away (Williams, 2015, p. 147). The greater the distance between the parties, the less threatening they are to each other and the less influence they exert on each other (Williams, 2015, p. 154). This is in line with Downs' (1957) spatial model.

In conclusion, both Downs (1957) and more current research show that parties' positions will be influenced by shifts in positions of other close parties. This can be attributed to their vote-maximising strategy, which leads them to always position themselves in such a way that they receive as many votes as possible while still remaining true to their underlying ideology.

#### **4.4.4. Governing in a Coalition Government**

According to Downs' (1957) spatial model, the objective of maximising voter support compels both governing and opposition parties to behave reliably and responsibly. By adhering to their ideological principles, parties demonstrate to the electorate that they are trustworthy and, therefore, deserving of their vote. However, an additional factor is present for the governing parties in multi-party systems: governing within a coalition. They have to compromise with the other governing parties to govern effectively while simultaneously trying to remain as true to their position as possible. Downs (1957) again emphasises that even within a coalition, the parties ultimately do what is best for them.

Atzpodien (2020) precisely describes the conflict between a party's own political orientation and the need for a functioning government. Her case study of the German Social Democratic Party during the "refugee crisis" examines how a left-wing social democratic party behaves when in a coalition with a more right-wing conservative party. She demonstrates that, despite their significantly different ideological convictions, the two coalition parties adopt a shared political stance on immigration. Their responsibility in government encourages them to compromise and adapt their positions, particularly in situations characterised by high problem pressure (Atzpodien, 2020, p. 143). In light of Downs' (1957) theory, these results can be explained by the fact that the parties expect to retain power by moving closer together. This

inherently presents no challenge to them, as they have only adapted their ideology for tactical reasons. However, at the same time, these tactical considerations should prevent them from moving too far away from their original positioning in order to remain credible.

To conclude, both Downs' (1957) model and Atzpodien's (2020) case study illustrate that parties in coalition governments must navigate the tensions between ideological integrity and the practical need for compromise. Although adjusting their positioning can help parties maintain power and fulfil their governing duties, they must also maintain enough ideological consistency to stay credible in the eyes of the electorate. While it is unlikely that parties will completely change their positions when governing within a coalition, it is still expected that they will make adjustments in certain areas to align with the positions of their coalition partners.

#### **4.5. Criticism of the Theory**

Even though Down's (1957) model serves as the basis for many spatial models, it has also faced considerable criticism. In the following chapter, I will discuss the most relevant ones for this thesis.

There remains a significant debate over the validity of Downs' (1957) basic assumption that all parties are vote-seeking. In contrast, many other scholars state that parties can also be office-seeking or policy-seeking (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Strom, 1990). Especially the possibility of parties being policy-seeking stands in stark contrast with Downs' theory (1957). Policy-seeking parties are motivated by the aim of implementing specific policies and have adopted their ideology not for strategic purposes but out of genuine conviction. As a result, they are more closely aligned with their positions and less inclined to alter them. This fundamental theoretical distinction has implications for the reasons derived from Downs' (1957) theory on why parties adjust their positions.

For example, policy-oriented parties do not shift their positioning even when public opinion changes. One example of this is the study by Adams et al. (2009), who focused on whether the ideological orientation of the parties influences their accommodation of changes in voter positioning. According to their results, left-wing parties maintain their positions regardless of shifting voter opinion. Meanwhile, social democratic parties show a slight willingness to change their positions and centre and right-wing parties are very responsive to change (Adams et al., 2009, pp. 622–626). According to the authors, the immobility of left-wing parties is due to the fact that they are more ideologically oriented than other party families and therefore do not change their positions easily. They also have particularly strong ties to social groups such as trade unions. These affiliations bind them firmly to their positioning. In addition, they are often

closely connected to their own party members and are not as elite-centred as centre and right-wing parties (Adams et al., 2009, p. 615).

Another point of discussion is the importance of being a governing party or in opposition. Following Downs (1957), both governing and opposition parties are severely restricted by the need to act reliably and responsibly in order to gain voters' trust (p. 107-109). Thus, both party types act similarly. The responsibilities that come with governing are also not discussed in detail in his theory. However, multiple researchers see apparent differences between governing and opposition parties. Klüver and Spoon (2016) focus on the extent to which belonging to the government or the opposition influences the receptiveness of parties to voters' concerns. They suggest that government parties are generally less responsive than opposition parties (Klüver & Spoon, 2016, p. 645). In their opinion, this is mainly due to the fact that regulatory responsibility and the attention that comes with it allows the governing parties less flexibility than the opposition. In addition, the opposition parties have a greater motivation to change, as they did not succeed in gaining power in the last election (Klüver & Spoon, 2016, pp. 637–638). Romeijn (2018) also finds that governing parties are less influenced by public opinion. Nevertheless, they do not lose touch with their voters and remain responsive to them (Romeijn, 2018, p. 433).

Building on the same explanations as Klüver and Spoon (2016), Van Spanje (2010) finds very similar results regarding the vulnerability of mainstream parties to anti-immigration parties. While opposition parties adapt their positioning on immigration in response to their success, government parties are almost entirely unaffected by it (van Spanje, 2010, p. 577).

#### **4.6. Summary**

This chapter explores the theoretical basis of party competition and positional shifts, with Downs' (1957) spatial model at its core. The model conceptualises parties as vote-seeking actors operating on a left-right spectrum. Even though they have adopted their ideologies for purely strategic reasons, they generally remain faithful to them. However, there are several factors that cause parties to change their positioning. These are shifts in public opinion, electoral performance, coalition dynamics, and the changing position of other parties.

The chapter also considers how other scholars have extended Downs' (1957) framework, addressing phenomena like niche party behaviour. These contributions extend his model, adapting it to modern political dynamics and help forming a robust theoretical foundation for the thesis' analysis.

## 5. Research Design

The following chapter will present the research design that will be used to answer the research question, “What factors have driven *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* to adopt a more restrictive stance on immigration and integration in the 20th legislative period?”. First, the method used, namely a comparative case study using a MSSD logic, is outlined. Afterwards, I will provide insights into my decision-making process for this specific method. This is followed by a discussion of the case selection and the operationalisation of the variables.

### 5.1. Comparative Case Studies

The comparative case studies method combines the comparative method with the idea of case study research. It can be defined as “a research approach to formulate or assess generalizations that extend across multiple cases” (Knight, 2001, p. 7039). In the following, I will first give insights into the comparative method. This is followed by a brief discussion of case studies and their application within the comparative method.

#### 5.1.1. The Comparative Method

The comparative method is one of the fundamental methods in political science. It aims “at scientific explanation, which consists of two basic elements: (1) the establishment of general empirical relationships among two or more variables, while (2) all other variables are controlled, that is, held constant” (Lijphart, 1971, p. 683). In order to obtain these explanations, at least two cases are compared to each other in order to identify similarities and differences between them. This serves to identify patterns or principles that explain the relationship between different variables (Pickel, 2015, pp. 25–26). Lijphart (1975) further asserts that the method's main task is to empirically test hypotheses (p. 159).

The comparative method is particularly suitable in scenarios with only limited fitting cases available (Lijphart, 1971, pp. 684–685). This also constitutes the main advantage of the method. As the number of cases is small, researchers can dedicate much time, resources, and attention to a detailed analysis of each case. This allows for a profound understanding of the individual cases. Additionally, it ensures that the cases and concepts used are fitting and have not been distorted during the research process (Lijphart, 1975, pp. 171–172).

However, the small number of cases also leads to the main problem that the method entails, described by Lijphart (1971) as the “many variables, small N problem” (p. 686). This issue arises when the number of variables exceeds the number of cases. It complicates the efforts to isolate causal relationships and to assess the influence of individual variables. Moreover,

the small N often limits the generalisability of the findings, as they are often tied to the cases analysed (Lijphart, 1975, p. 172). To reduce the problem of “many variables, small N”, Lijphart (1971) suggests several possibilities, such as increasing the number of cases as far as possible, focusing on cases that share many constant variables, and limiting the variables to the most important ones (pp. 686-690).

Another challenge within the framework of the comparative method is the selection of suitable cases. It is often difficult to find cases that are suitable for meaningful comparison. However, even if cases are found that are well suited due to their similarity in the control variables, there is often the issue that they may also be too similar across other dimensions. It is, therefore, important to ensure that the variance of the control variables is kept as small as possible while maximising the variance of the operational variables (Lijphart, 1975, p. 163).

### **5.1.2. Case Studies in the Comparative Framework**

Case studies are widely used in political science research. However, a universal academic definition for case studies does not exist (Seha & Müller-Rommel, 2016, p. 422). Nevertheless, two main characteristics have been established: “case studies are intrinsically tied to qualitative methods of scientific inquiry and are set apart from other research strategies by analyzing cases in an in-depth fashion” (Seha & Müller-Rommel, 2016, p. 419). They are especially valued for the latter because this allows for in-depth and context-specific insights into specific phenomena. Additionally, case studies are great tools to study causal relationships. Furthermore, case studies help work with complex cases, as they enable the researcher to identify various possible pathways to the same outcome (Seha & Müller-Rommel, 2016, p. 421).

A significant limitation of case studies is their vulnerability to internal validity issues. This includes challenges such as reverse causality or the possibility of missing important variables that correlate with the dependent and one or multiple independent variables. These can, in turn, decrease the clarity and accuracy of the established causal relations. Case studies are also often criticised for their limited generalisability, given their reliance on one or a small number of cases.

In order to counteract the latter and make the results more reliable, many researchers focus on case studies using a comparative framework (Seha & Müller-Rommel, 2016, p. 419). While the idea of the case study, as a detailed exploration of a limited number of cases, is maintained, the cases are now connected and compared to one another. As outlined in the comparative method, this comparison is used to identify patterns, similarities, and differences and test hypotheses empirically.

### **5.1.3. Most Similar Systems Design**

One of the most well-known comparative case study designs is the MSSD. This research design involves comparing highly similar cases in terms of contextual factors and other relevant characteristics yet differ in the outcome of interest (Seha & Müller-Rommel, 2016, pp. 425–426). Because the cases are so similar, many variables can be held constant and thus excluded as explanatory factors (Anckar, 2008, p. 398). Ideally, only one variable that differs between the cases remains, which can then be identified as the explanation for the differing outcomes (Pickel, 2015, p. 38). This capability to quickly rule out irrelevant variables by keeping them constant constitutes one of the greatest strengths of the method.

Often, however, multiple potential explanatory variables are identified. This is primarily due to the fact that, in the real world, there is a very limited number of cases that are similar enough to qualify for MSSD. As a result, several variables often cannot be held constant, making it unclear which one represents the actual explanatory factor (Anckar, 2008, pp. 389–390). The small number of comparable cases also makes it challenging to identify interaction effects. This limitation arises because the number of cases is often insufficient to test all combinations of possible explanatory variables and establish how they relate to one another. To determine which variables may only operate in combination and which work independently, additional cases would need to be included in the analysis. However, as previously noted, such cases are often missing (Anckar, 2008, p. 398).

While some scholars argue that MSSD can only be used to compare different countries (Anckar, 2008, p. 396), others strongly oppose this view. They emphasise that analysing different time periods within the same country offers notable advantages, as the level of comparability in such cases is particularly high (Lijphart, 1975, pp. 167–168).

### **5.1.4. Adaption of the Most Similar Systems Design**

Within this thesis, I will conduct a comparative case study based on MSSD logic. So far in this chapter, I have already established what this methodology fundamentally entails. However, throughout the thesis, I will not adhere to the strict implementation of the MSSD. I will discuss my motivations behind this decision and what it entails for the application of the method in the following.

In a strict application of the MSSD, it should already be clear at the beginning of the work that most variables can be kept constant. This allows for a clear focus on the variable or variables that vary between the cases, both in the theory section and the analysis. Since the phenomenon examined in this thesis is very recent, there is virtually no data that I can access for many of the possible explanatory variables. This makes it impossible to know which remain

constant and which show different characteristics in the two cases before analysing them in detail. Therefore, all four selected possible explanatory variables are thoroughly discussed theoretically, methodologically, and analytically during the course of my work. Only after I have completed the analysis can I determine which of the variables are explanatory variables based on the logic of the MSSD. However, this procedure entails the risk that after the analysis, either none or all of the selected variables will come into question as explanatory variables.

As there is usually either no data at all or no already analysed data, and my resources are limited within the scope of the master's thesis, I had to keep the number of possible explanatory variables as small as possible from the outset. Two things helped me in this regard. First, as already described in chapter 4, I chose Downs' (1957) model, one of the leading fundamental theories on the positioning of parties, as my theoretical basis. By building on his theory and including further related literature, I was able to establish four possible explanatory variables that I can focus on in my work. These four are widely recognised in the literature and are among the most common reasons why parties change their positioning. Secondly, I selected two cases that are as similar as possible in many background variables. By applying the logic of the MSSD, I was able to exclude these and keep the number of variables small. However, as already described in chapter 3, other explanatory approaches exist in the literature. One of them can be excluded as an explanatory factor using the logic of the MSSD; more on this in chapter 5.4. Unfortunately, the majority of them cannot be considered in the context of this work due to resource constraints.

However, the approach I have chosen offers enough advantages to counterbalance the limitations discussed. On the one hand, the chosen focus enables me to carry out the work in a meaningful way within the intended framework and to devote enough resources to analysing the four variables to allow a detailed examination. Analysing such a current case, in which so much of the data has to be collected or evaluated, is beyond the scope of the thesis. In addition, the variables analysed are very well recognised, so they represent a big part of the existing research on changing party positions.

To summarise, it can be said that no strict MSSD is applied to my comparative case study. However, the logic of the MSSD is used throughout the whole thesis. It fundamentally informs the selection of my two cases. Furthermore, it helps to exclude some variables as explanatory variables thanks to their constancy. In addition, my evaluation of the results to determine whether the analysed variable can be considered an explanatory variable is also based on the logic of the MSSD.

## **5.2. Case Selection**

In the following, I will briefly present the cases I will focus on during my analysis. Additionally, I will explain the rationale behind choosing them.

The first case that will be analysed is that of the German Green Party during the current legislative period, which officially began on 26 October 2021. Due to the break of the coalition government, the legislature will end earlier than anticipated, with new elections scheduled for 23 February 2025 (Tagesschau, 2024e). For the purpose of this thesis, however, the analysis will only focus on the period up to 31 November 2024 due to the submission deadline. This case was mainly selected because it features the shift towards a more restrictive immigration and integration stance by the Green Party, as shown in chapter 2. Because these changes lay at the heart of the thesis, it is essential to examine this period in detail.

The second case is the German Green Party in the 19th legislative period, spanning from 24 October 2017 to 26 October 2021. This case was selected for two main reasons. First, the Green Party did not shift its immigration and integration policy further to the right during this period (Gessler & Hunger, 2022; Vanderwilden, 2023). This is crucial using the MSSD logic, as the cases analysed must have different outcomes, in this case, whether or not a shift to a more restrictive stance on immigration and integration occurred. The second reason is that this case is very well suited to be compared with the former. Since both cases concern the same party in the same country, many variables can be held constant and thus controlled. This is reinforced by the temporal proximity of the two cases, ensuring minimal changes in as many external conditions as possible. Together, these factors provide a solid framework for a compelling comparative case study using the MSSD logic.

## **5.3. Hypothesised Explanatory Variables**

The following sub-chapter will focus on the variables that, based on my theory chapter, are hypothesised to be the explanatory ones. I will present each one briefly and will then proceed to their operationalisation.

### **5.3.1. Change in Voters' Opinions**

The first of the hypothesised explanatory variables is the change in voters' opinions. The Green Party is considered a niche party due to its strong focus on environmental issues (Romeijn, 2018, p. 431). As already discussed in chapter 4.4.1, niche parties are prone to adapt their position in the direction of their voters when it changes in a disadvantageous direction. In the case of the Green Party, which traditionally advocated for a left-wing position on immigration



and integration characterised by humanitarian and liberal principles, such a shift would imply that their voter base is moving further to the right, voicing demands for a more restrictive immigration and integration policy. The data required to determine whether such a shift occurred across the different cases will be drawn from surveys regarding voters' attitudes toward immigration and integration. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring that the surveys differentiate between different voter groups to ensure that the data used specifically reflects the preferences of Green Party voters.

First, I will use the data from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) cross-section study from 2017 and 2021. For the GLES cross-section study from 2017 for the post-election period, around 2.100 persons with German citizenship aged 16 and older, registered in the Federal Republic of Germany at their place of primary residence, were surveyed from mid-September to the end of November. The selection was based on a disproportionately stratified random selection (GLES, 2019). For the GLES cross-section study of 2021 for the post-election period, around 3.400 persons with German citizenship aged 16 and older, registered in the Federal Republic of Germany at their place of primary residence, were surveyed from the end of September to mid-November. The selection was based on the same parameters as in 2017 (GLES, 2023). Both data sets include the question of which party the person voted for in the Bundestag election that had just taken place (2017: q19ba / 2021: q114ba). This allows only the responses of Green voters to be considered for the analysis. Three variables are relevant to this work within the two surveys and occur in both data sets. These are the agreement with the following statements: "Immigrants are generally good for Germany's economy" (2017: q8c / 2021: q125c), "Germany's culture is generally harmed by immigrants" (2017: q8d / 2021: q125d), and "Immigrants increase crime rates in Germany" (2017: q8e / 2021: q125e). All three immigration-related variables are measured on a five-point Likert scale, with one being "Strongly agree" and five being "Strongly disagree". For comparison purposes, the first variable, originally phrased with a favourable sentiment, was reversed to align with the critical framing of the other two variables. Consequently, it is relabelled as "Immigrants are generally bad for Germany's economy" throughout the paper to ensure consistency in interpretation and comparison.

While the GLES is a widely accepted data source for analysing individual preferences and voting behaviour in Germany, it does face some constraints. First and foremost, the data was collected directly in the months following the federal elections and only covers a very small part of the periods analysed. However, there are no freely accessible data sets that have continuously collected the required data over the entire period. For this reason, I have to additionally rely on other sources. First, I will use data from the monthly ARD-DeutschlandTREND, a monthly survey of public opinion in Germany, which is conducted by

infratest dimpap on behalf of ARD. The samples always consist of around 1,300 randomly selected eligible voters in Germany. Thanks to the monthly surveys, it can be ensured that the entire period under investigation is covered sufficiently. However, they did not use the same questionnaire for each of the months, making it more difficult to establish comparability. In addition, often, either no immigration or integration-related questions were asked at all, or the answers were not categorised by party affiliation. Additionally, I will reference a study by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Hirndorf, 2024). Over the course of five years, they conducted five representative surveys with a sample size of 3,000 to 8,000, in which the political attitudes of the German population were surveyed, including the area of immigration and integration. It provides insights into changes in voters' attitudes and allows for reliable comparisons between the individual years. Unfortunately, the data was only collected between 2020 and 2024 and thus does not cover parts of the second case.

### **5.3.2. Past Election Results**

Past election results present the second hypothesised explanatory variable. As outlined in chapter 4.4.2, parties tend to shift their positions after performing very poorly in the previous election. It is thus assumed that the Green Party will change its position on immigration and integration when it has lost severely in the last elections. The less time has passed since that election, the stronger the effect. In Germany, elections are not limited to the federal elections held every four years; they also include elections in the individual federal states. While only the federal elections directly influence the national parties and are, therefore, most relevant to them, their long intervals reduce their significance as indicators (Somer-Topcu, 2009).

This gap can be filled by integrating elections in federal states into the analysis. Although they are primarily concerned with regional branches of the parties rather than the national parties themselves, they can still be used as indicators. This is due to the close connection between the federal parties and their regional branches and the tendency of voters to let their views on federal politics influence their choices in elections in the federal states (Seemann, 2008, p. 266). In order to maintain the comparability of the two cases, I will only consider the federal states that had elections within both federal legislative periods. In summary, I will assess this hypothesis by looking at the most recent federal election results and comparing them to the previous ones. Additionally, I will do the same with the election results in the individual federal-state elections.

### **5.3.3. Positional Changes of Other Parties**

Thirdly, the positional changes of other parties are hypothesised as an explanatory variable. Based on chapter 4.4.3, it can be said that the position changes of other parties influence a party's stance. Neighbouring parties, in particular, play a significant role, as they are the closest competitors and most likely to attract voters away. Thus, if the neighbouring parties shift their position on immigration and integration to the right, it is likely that the Green Party will do the same.

For the Green Party, the neighbouring parties are the Left Party and the SPD (Atzpodien, 2020, p. 138). Therefore, my analysis will focus on these two. As there are still no meaningful studies on the shift of the two parties in the two time periods to be analysed, I will examine them myself. In order to do this, I will adopt a similar approach to that used in establishing the position changes of the Green Party in chapter 2. I will examine interviews, press statements, election programmes and supported legislative initiatives to analyse how the positions reflected in these sources have shifted. The sources were all found through extensive desk research using internet search engines and newspaper archives. To do this, I used search queries with keywords and filters for specific time periods. To ensure that the presentation remained as neutral as possible, a variety of sources were used, and special care was taken to ensure that the newspaper articles came from different publishers.

### **5.3.4. Governing in a Coalition Government**

The fourth hypothesised explanatory variable is governing in a coalition government. Chapter 4.4.4 has demonstrated that parties in coalition governments face considerable pressure. While, on the one hand, they seek to enforce and maintain their programmatic line, they are, on the other hand, compelled to compromise in order to enable functioning governance. For these reasons, the Green Party is expected to adjust its positions at least partially to align with those of its coalition partners. If its coalition partners advocate for a more restrictive immigration and integration policy, they pressure the other party to adopt and support this stance.

Measuring the pressure from coalition partners to change a party's position is not straightforward. I will approach this by considering several factors. First, it is important to determine if the Green Party is part of a coalition government in the different cases examined. If this is not the case, it can be automatically assumed that they do not face pressure from coalition partners. However, if they are part of a coalition, the situation becomes more complex. In this case, I will look at three factors for which I will collect the required data in the same way as described in section 5.3.3. First, I will analyse the extent to which the positions of the Green Party are reflected in the coalition agreement. In a second step, I will assess how the coalition

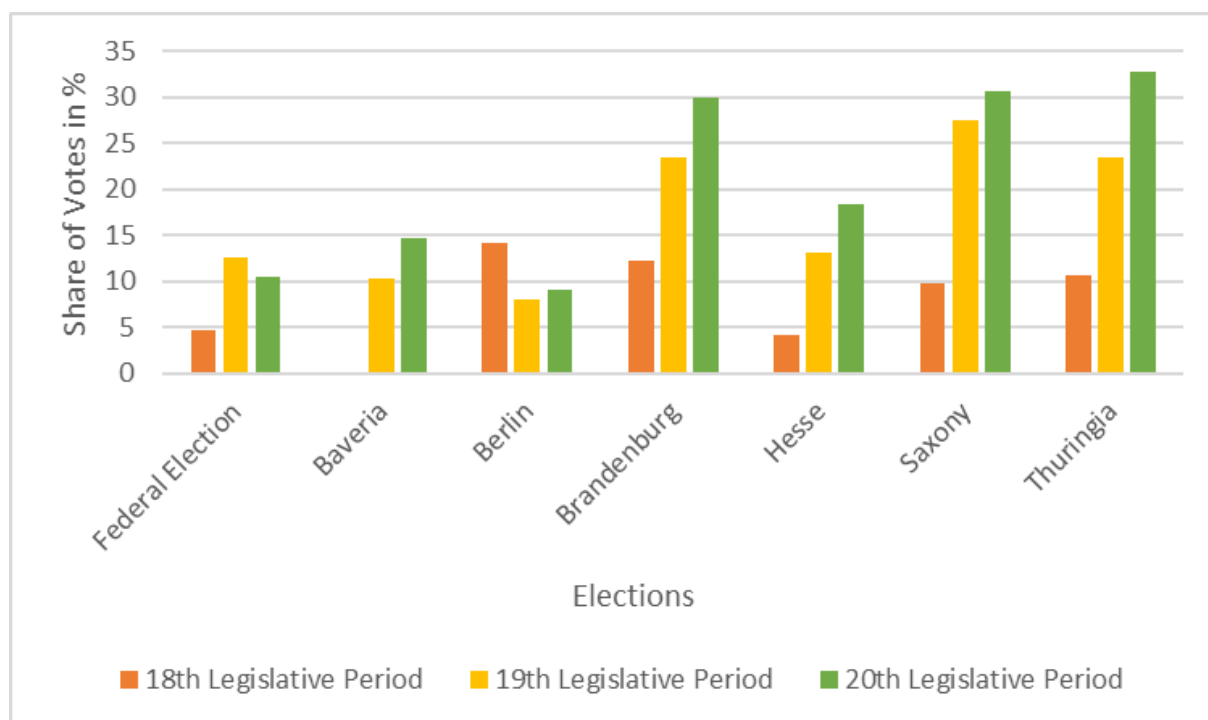
partners position themselves on immigration and integration using party programmes, press statements, and interviews. Additionally, I will specifically search for press statements and interviews where coalition partners actively pressure the Greens to adjust their position on immigration and integration. A combination of these findings will determine the strength of this variable.

#### **5.4. Control Variables**

A set of factors can be excluded as explanatory variables since they remain constant across the two cases under investigation. Most of these factors are very elementary and relate primarily to the structures within which the Green Party operates. These entail, among others, the political system, including the electoral and the parliamentary system, which is identical across both cases. Additionally, the external context does not change. In all the examined cases, Germany is a vital member of the European Union and is thus bound by certain frameworks, such as the Dublin Regulation. Furthermore, Germany is subject to binding international legislation, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, which imposes specific standards.

On the other hand, there are also more specific factors which, according to other theories and researchers, can encourage parties to change their position. A list of these potential factors can be found in the literature review in chapter 3. However, it is unfortunately not possible within the scope of this thesis to consider all the factors discussed there, as there is too little data available to analyse them profitably with the available resources and restrictions.

However, the influence of RRPs is an exception here. Sufficient data is available so that the variable can be included. As discussed in chapter 3.2, the success of RRPs often encourages other parties to become more restrictive regarding immigration and integration. In Germany, one successful RRP exists, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019, pp. 1–3; Dilling, 2018, p. 98). The party has been represented in the German Bundestag since 2017 and in parliaments at the federal-state level since 2014. However, the party succeeded in both the 19th and 20th legislative periods (Figure 1), meaning that the factor can be kept constant. Thanks to the MSSD logic, it can thus be ruled out that the success of the RRP is a decisive factor in the rightward shift of the Green Party in the area of immigration and integration. It can, therefore, act as a control variable.

**Figure 1***Election Results of the AfD*

*Note.* The block diagram shows the election results for the AfD in the last three federal elections. In addition, the election results from all federal states that had an election in each federal legislative period are shown. The data all stems from the Tagesschau election archive (Tagesschau, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2023d, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

## 5.5. Summary

In order to answer the research question: “What factors have driven Bündnis 90/Die Grünen to adopt a more restrictive stance on immigration and integration in the 20th legislative period?” a comparative case study is conducted. The cases to be compared are the Green Party during the 19th and 20th legislative periods.

The analysis is divided into four individual analyses, each of which deals with one of the four hypothetical explanatory variables. For the first one, data from various surveys and studies are used and analysed to determine the attitudes of Green voters towards immigration and integration. For the second analysis concerning the last election results of the Green Party, both the federal elections and the elections in the federal states that had an election in all analysed time windows are included. To determine the extent to which the positioning of the neighbouring parties has changed, the positions of the respective parties on specific policies are compared over time. Interviews, press statements, election programmes and supported legislative initiatives are used for this purpose. In order to analyse whether participation in a coalition government is an explanatory variable, the degree to which Green positions can be

found in the election programme, the extent to which the positions of the coalition partners have changed and whether pressure for change has been exerted on the Green party will be discussed.

The logic of the MSSD is used to determine which of the analysed variables can be considered as an explanatory variable. This means that only those variables whose characteristics differ between the two analysed cases can be considered as possible explanations for the restrictive positioning of the Green Party regarding immigration and integration.

## **6. Analysis**

In the following chapter, I will conduct four analyses, each divided again into the 19th and 20th legislative periods. Each is designed to determine whether the respective hypothesised explanatory variable is significant for explaining the restrictive shift in the Green Party's position regarding immigration and integration during the 20th legislative period. First, I will examine the extent to which the attitudes of Green voters towards immigration and integration have changed. Secondly, I will look at the development of the Greens' election results. This will be followed by an analysis of the shifting positions of the Green Party's two neighbouring parties. Finally, I will analyse the extent to which participation in a coalition government has caused the Greens to change their position.

### **6.1. Changes in Voters' Opinion**

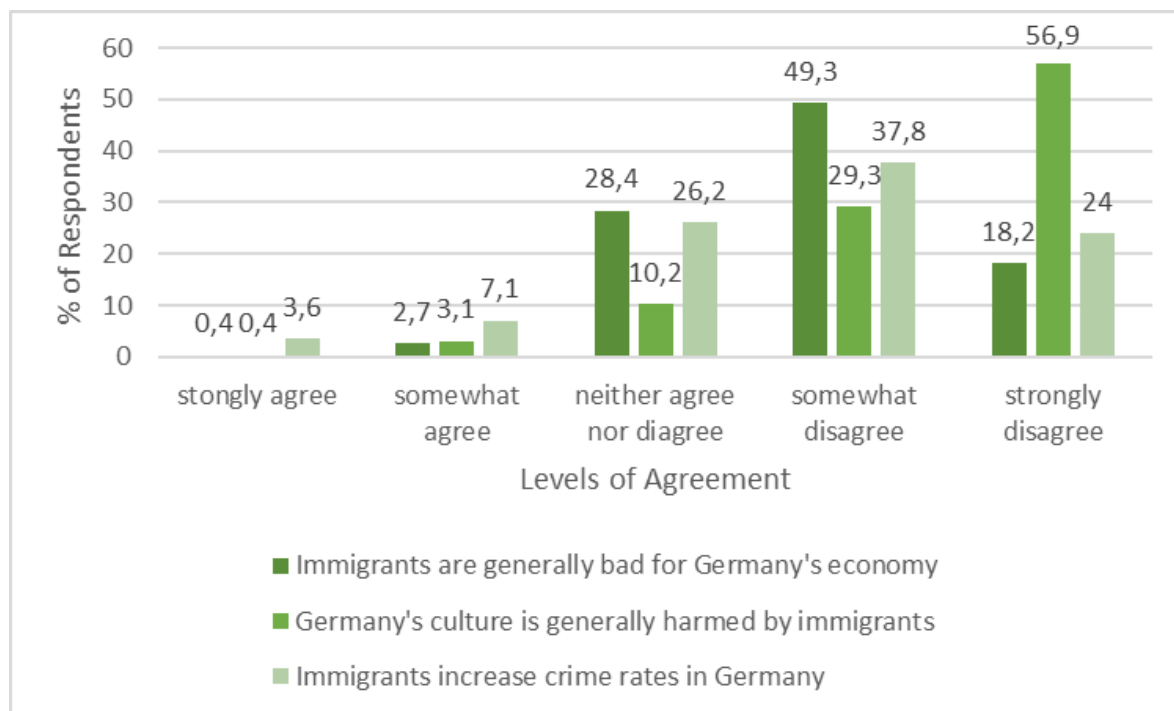
The following sub-chapter focuses on the attitudes of Green voters towards immigration and integration. As already discussed in chapter 5.3.1, I will use data from the GLES cross-section study from 2017 and 2021, the ARD-DeutschlandTRENDS and a study by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

#### **6.1.1. 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

The GLES cross-section study from the months following the 2017 federal election generally shows that the Green electorate is immigration-friendly and does not see immigration as a significant threat in terms of economy, culture, or security (Figure 2). The favourable attitude towards immigration and integration is particularly evident when it comes to the question of whether immigrants are harmful to German culture. 86.2 per cent of Green voters surveyed stated that they disagreed with the statement to at least some extent, and only 3.5 per cent agreed with the statement at least to some extent (Figure 2). A majority of 67.5 per cent of Green voters also see immigrants as an economic benefit for Germany (Figure 2). The negative influence of immigrants on crime rates in Germany is viewed most critically by Green voters. Here, only 61.8 per cent state that they disagree with the statement, while 26.2 per cent neither agree nor disagree. 7.1 per cent say they partially agree with the statement (Figure 2). However, these figures are also still very immigration-friendly and only stand out compared to the other two variables. In general, an apparent immigration-friendly attitude can be observed among Green voters shortly after the 2017 federal election.

**Figure 2**

*Attitudes of Green voters towards immigration and integration in 2017*



*Note.* The data was taken from the GLES cross-section study conducted in 2017 (GLES, 2019).

The various surveys conducted as part of the ARD-DeutschlandTREND provide evidence that the liberal and immigration-friendly attitude of Green voters did not change significantly throughout the 19th legislative period. They are always the group that most strongly agrees with liberal statements and measures regarding immigration and integration and, at the same time, most strongly rejects restrictive demands and statements<sup>1</sup>. In the following, the most relevant questions are discussed. In December 2017, 78 per cent of Green voters stated that the suspended right to family reunification for civil war refugees should be reinstated. This represents a difference of 30 percentage points compared to the entire German electorate surveyed (infratest dimap, 2017, p. 13). In October 2018, 86 per cent of Green voters were in favour of the planned immigration law, which would make it easier for specific professional groups to enter the German labour market (infratest dimap, 2018f, p. 12). In October 2019, 82 per cent of Green voters stated that they consider Germany's obligation to take in a fixed proportion of migrants rescued from distress at sea in the Mediterranean to be at least somewhat correct. This puts them 24 percentage points above the general electorate (infratest dimap, 2019, p. 8). In March 2020, 75 per cent of Green voters agreed with the statement that

<sup>1</sup> This statement is based on the questions discussed below, as well as other ARD-DeutschlandTrends, which could not be discussed individually for space reasons. They can be found here: infratest dimap (2018a, p. 4, 2018b, p. 5, 2018c, p. 4, 2018d, p. 14, 2018e, p. 7).



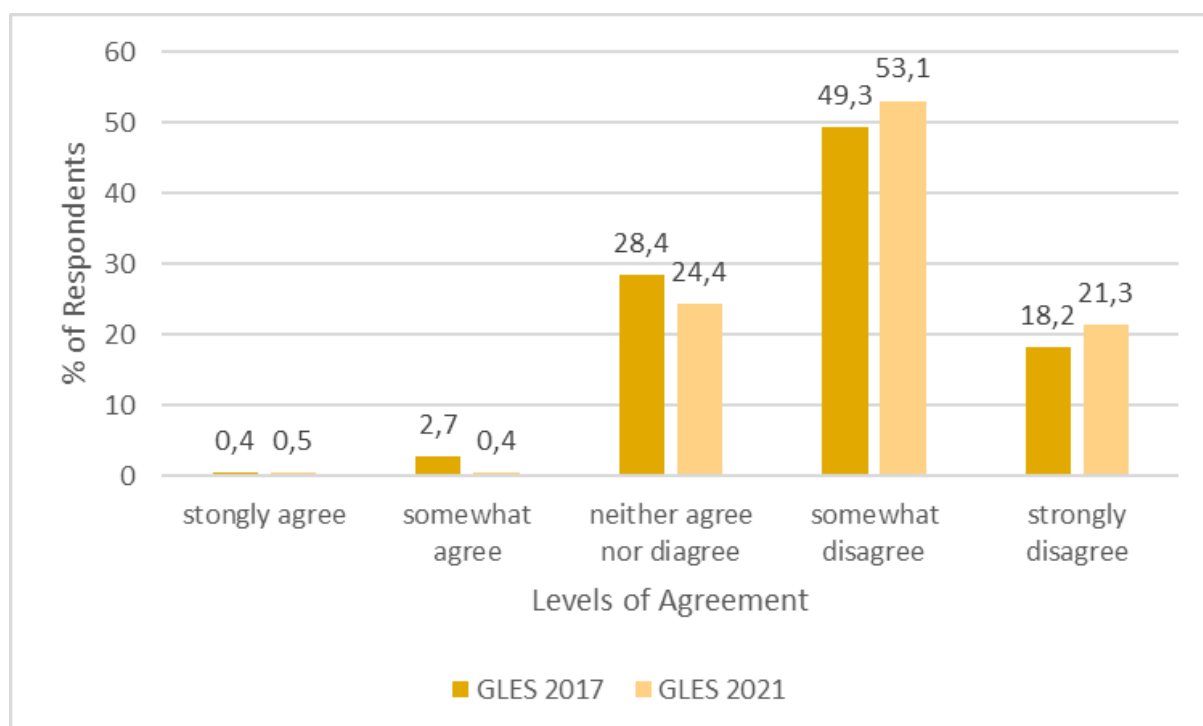
countries such as Germany and France should also take in refugees if other EU countries oppose this, as was the case when several thousand refugees were waiting at the Greek-Turkish border to enter the EU (infratest dimap, 2020, p. 6).

### 6.1.2. 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period

The GLES cross-section study was also conducted after the 2021 federal election and thus shows the attitudes of the Green electorate at the beginning of the 20th legislative period. In addition, the same three questions that were already discussed in chapter 5.3.1. were asked again so that a comparison between 2017 and 2021 can be drawn. With regard to the question of the extent to which immigrants harm the German economy, there are no major differences between 2017 and 2021. The attitude of Green voters has merely become slightly less critical. While 2.9 per cent agreed with the statement at least partially in 2017, only 0.8 per cent do in 2021. Moreover, while fewer people stated that they were undecided, rejection of the statement increased by 6.9 percentage points (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Immigrants are generally bad for Germany's economy*

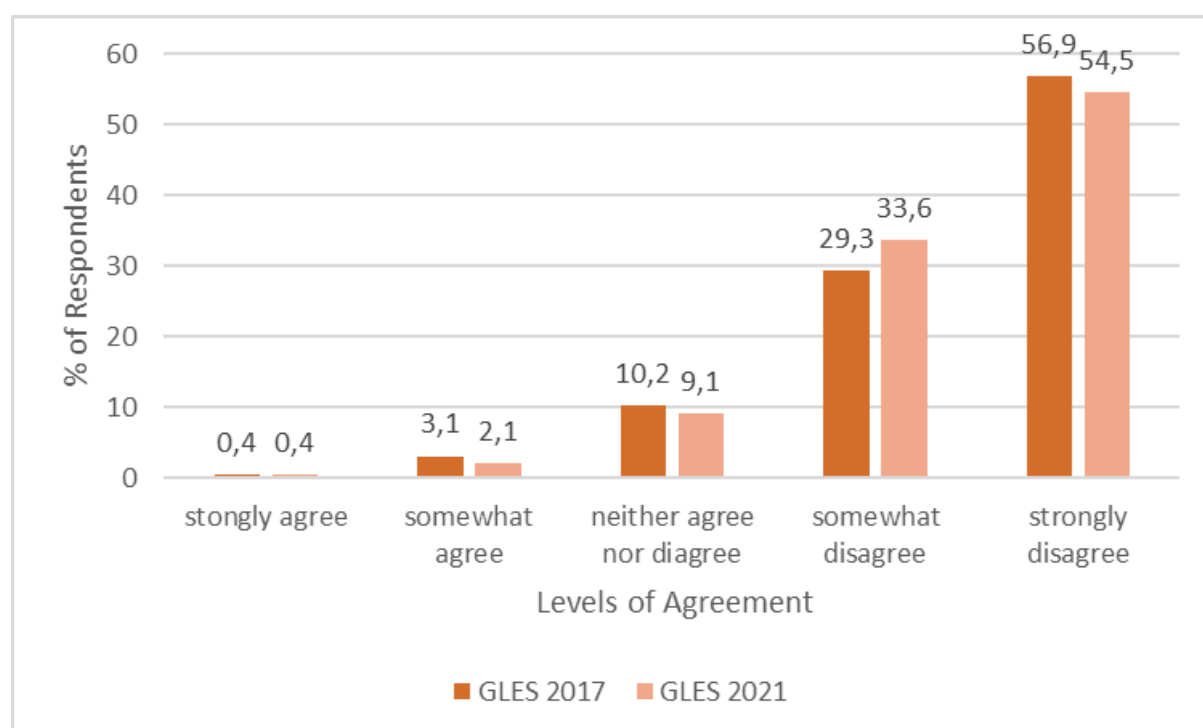


*Note.* The bar chart shows the approval ratings for the statement: Immigrants are generally bad for Germany's economy. Only people who stated that they voted for the Green Party in the last Bundestag election are included. The data is taken from the GLES cross-section studies from 2017 and 2021 (GLES, 2019, 2023).

There are also no big changes regarding the question of whether German culture is being harmed by immigration. Agreement with this question has fallen by one percentage point. However, slightly fewer people strongly disagree with the statement, and slightly more only partially disagree. However, the fluctuations between the individual levels are never more than around four percentage points (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*“Germany’s culture is generally harmed by immigrants”*

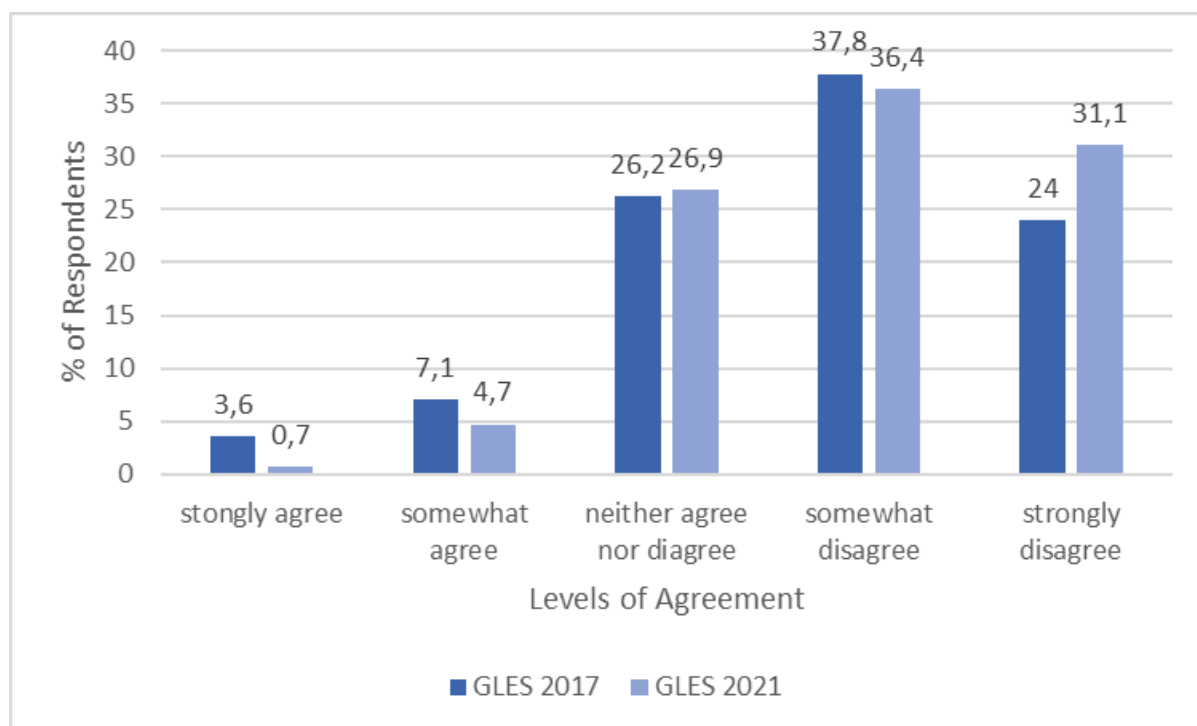


*Note.* The bar chart shows the approval ratings for the statement: “Germany’s culture is generally harmed by immigrants”. Only people who stated that they voted for the Green Party in the last Bundestag election are included. The data is taken from the GLES cross-section studies from 2017 and 2021 (GLES, 2019, 2023).

The most substantial deviations can be seen in the question of whether immigration increases crime rates in Germany. Here, attitudes have become less critical. While in 2017, 10.7 per cent of Green voters still agreed with the statement either strongly or partially, in 2021, the number decreased to 5.4 per cent. In addition, the proportion of respondents who strongly disagree with the statement has risen by 7.1 percentage points (Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*“Immigrants increase crime rates in Germany”*



*Note.* The bar chart shows the approval ratings for the statement: “Immigrants increase crime rates in Germany”. Only people who stated that they voted for the Green Party in the last Bundestag election are included. The data is taken from the GLES cross-section studies from 2017 and 2021 (GLES, 2019, 2023).

To summarise, the GLES cross-section studies show that the Green electorate was still very immigration-friendly at the beginning of the 20th legislative period. Compared to 2017, attitudes have become less critical, if at all. However, the changes are small.

This migration-friendly attitude also does not change significantly over the course of the legislative period, as a study conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2024 shows. It generally focussed on the political attitudes of the German population, and one of the questions asked concerns immigration. The question addresses the desire to facilitate or restrict immigration to Germany. A scale from zero to ten was used to answer the question, with zero being in favour of facilitating immigration and ten being in favour of restricting it. Green voters show only very slight fluctuations of 0.5 points over the period from 2020 to 2024. In 2020, they held the most restrictive stance with 3.5 points and the most liberal stance in the following year with 3.0 points. Between 2022 and 2024, the attitude becomes somewhat more restrictive again and reaches 3.4 points in 2024. Overall, Green voters always hold the most liberal position compared to other party supporters, with one exception in 2024, where voters

of the Left Party position themselves even more liberal. Moreover, they do not follow the overall trend, which is characterised by a permanently growing restrictive attitude. In addition, the Green voters also show the least fluctuation in position, along with the supporters of the SPD (Hirndorf, 2024, pp. 6–7).

A very similar picture can also be observed in the monthly surveys of the ARD-DeutschlandTREND. Over the entire period of the 20th legislative term, Green voters have always been the most critical voting group regarding restrictive measures or statements concerning immigration and integration<sup>2</sup>. They are the most supportive group for all favourable statements and liberal measures. A few of the questions are discussed here as examples. In December 2021, 82 per cent of Green voters stated that they were in favour of the government's planned simplification of naturalisation for migrants (infratest dimap, 2021, p. 6). This figure increased slightly over the following year so that in December 2022, 86 per cent of Green voters stated that they were in favour of the planned measures to facilitate naturalisation (infratest dimap, 2022a, p. 6). The question was not asked in the following two years. However, other questions show that the liberal and humanitarian attitude of Green voters remains unchanged. In May 2023, 68 per cent of Green voters stated that immigration tends to be beneficial for Germany, 35 percentage points above the cross-party average of 33 per cent (infratest dimap, 2023a, p. 5). In February 2024, only 14 per cent of Green voters said they were worried about too many foreigners coming to Germany. This is well below the average for all voters, which is 52 per cent (infratest dimap, 2024b). In October 2024, only 4 per cent of Green voters agreed with the statement that it is good that the AfD wants to limit the influx of foreigners more than other parties. They are 41 percentage points away from the average of all respondents (infratest dimap, 2024e).

In summary, the analysis has shown that Green voters have consistently demonstrated pro-immigration attitudes throughout both periods studied. Although slight fluctuations have occurred over the years, these have not been very pronounced and have often been reversed over time. In addition, they have consistently been the electorate with the most pro-immigration attitudes compared to the other voter groups.

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<sup>2</sup> This statement is based on the questions discussed in the following and other ARD-DeutschlandTrends, which could not be discussed for space reasons. They can be found here: infratest dimap (2022b, p. 3, 2023b, p. 6, 2024a, 2024c, 2024d, 2024f).

## **6.2. Past Election Results**

This sub-chapter will focus on the Green Party's election results during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> legislative periods. For the analysis both the results of Germany's federal elections as well as the individual elections of the federal states will be included.

### **6.2.1. 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

In 2017, the Green Party won 8.9 per cent of the vote in the federal election for the 19<sup>th</sup> legislative period. This represents a slight increase of 0.5 percentage points compared to the previous federal election (Tagesschau, 2021).

The election results in the individual federal states were also mainly in the Green Party's favour. They were able to make significant gains in both elections in 2018. In Bavaria, they gained 9.0 percentage points compared to the last election and became the second-strongest party in the state for the first time with 17.6% (Tagesschau, 2023a). In Hesse, they gained 8.7 percentage points, reaching 19.8% of the vote (Tagesschau, 2023d). In 2019, they made further gains in Brandenburg (+4.6), Bremen (+2.3) and Saxony (+2.9) (Tagesschau, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b). Only Thuringia saw a slight loss in 2019, albeit only by 0.5 percentage points (Tagesschau, 2024c). However, in the Berlin election in 2021, they were again successful, gaining 3.7 percentage points and achieving their strongest local election result with 18.9% (Tagesschau, 2023b).

### **6.2.2. 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

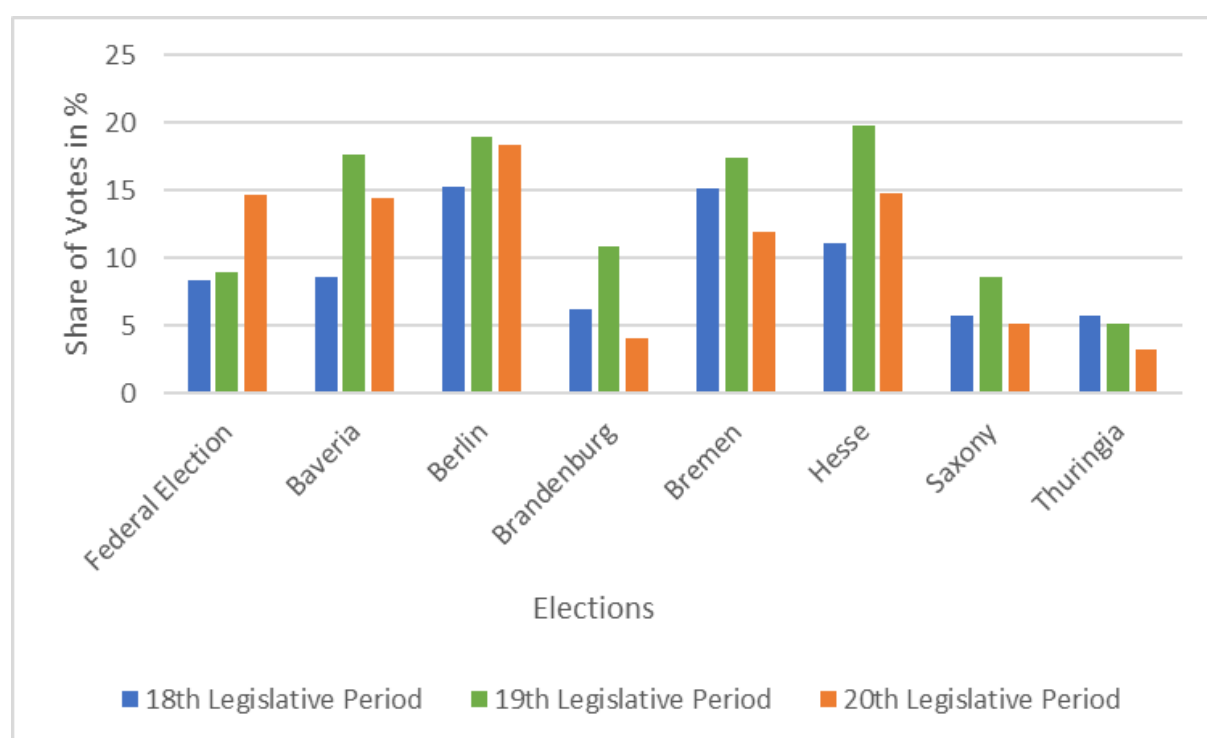
The Green Party's success story continued, at least initially, in the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period. They gained 5.8 percentage points in the 2021 federal election, marking their best result ever at the federal level with 14.7% (Tagesschau, 2021).

However, the federal election is the last successful election of the ones analysed for the Green Party to date. In 2023, they lost in all four analysed elections in the individual federal states. While the loss of 0.5 percentage points in Berlin was still minimal (Tagesschau, 2023b), the other election results were more significant. They lost 3.2 percentage points in Bavaria, 5.0 percentage points in Hesse and 5.5 percentage points in Bremen (Tagesschau, 2023a, 2023c, 2023d). This trend continued throughout 2024. The Green Party lost 2.0 percentage points in Thuringia and 3.5 percentage points in Saxony (Tagesschau, 2024b, 2024c). With a loss of 6.7 percentage points in Brandenburg, the Greens only achieved 4.1% and thus lost their seats in the state parliament, which they had been part of continuously since 2009 (Tagesschau, 2024a).

To summarise, there is a clear difference between the two periods analysed. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> legislative period, the Green Party won in almost all elections, in some cases by very large margins. This trend continued at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period with an increase in voters in the 20<sup>th</sup> federal election. However, the success curve ended after that election. From this point onwards, the Green Party lost in all elections in the federal states analysed without exception. This trend is illustrated very well in Figure 6.

**Figure 6**

*Election Results of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*



*Note.* The block diagram shows the election results of Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen in the last three federal elections. In addition, the election results from all federal states that had an election in each federal legislative period are shown. The data stems from the Tagesschau election archive (Tagesschau, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

### **6.3. Positional Changes of Other Parties**

In this sub-chapter, I will examine how the two neighbouring parties of the Green Party have changed their position on immigration and integration throughout the 19th and 20th legislative periods. The two parties of interest are the Left Party and the SPD. On the left-right scale, the Left Party is situated on the left side of the Green Party, and the SPD is on the right (Atzpodien, 2020, p. 138). The SPD is considered in even more detail, as the insights gained are also very valuable for analysing the party as the coalition partner of the Green Party in chapter 6.4.2.

#### **6.3.1. The Social Democratic Party in the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

The SPD moved its position on immigration and integration further to the right in the course of the 19th legislative period. During this legislative period, it governed as the smaller partner in a coalition with the CDU and the CSU, which are situated further to the right on the right-left scale than the SPD on immigration and integration policy issues (Atzpodien, 2020, p. 138). Together with them, the SPD supported various legislative proposals that led to a more restrictive design of the German immigration and integration policy framework.

Within their election programme for the 2017 federal elections, the SPD clearly declared their humanitarian orientation. They focussed on issues such as facilitating family reunification for immigrants with subsidiary protection status, strengthening integration efforts by expanding language courses and educational opportunities, establishing a solidarity-based distribution mechanism for the EU and combating the root causes of immigration. Additionally, they emphasised facilitating the immigration of skilled workers (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2017, pp. 74–77). Although they also voiced some more restrictive demands, such as speeding up asylum procedures, protecting external borders from illegal refugees and supporting Frontex, the overall tenor was liberal and humanitarian (Bauer-Blaschkowski, 2022, p. 357). Thanks to this liberal stance, difficulties arose at the beginning of the coalition negotiations with the CDU/CSU in agreeing on a shared position in the area of immigration and integration policy. Ultimately, a compromise was reached that demanded a lot from both sides. In the coalition agreement, a commitment was made to the legal and humanitarian obligations while at the same time declaring that a situation like the one in 2015 should not be allowed to repeat itself (Bauer-Blaschkowski, 2022, p. 359). Although no explicit limit on the number of refugees allowed to enter Germany annually was determined, a range of 180,000 to 220,000 was specified as a threshold that should not be exceeded. This very restrictive measure goes back to the CSU's wishes, while the SPD's election programme did not even include any reference to such. In addition, although family reunification for immigrants with subsidiary protection status was made possible again in principle, it was severely restricted with a limit of 1,000 people per month (Jakobs & Jun, 2018, pp. 284–285). The support for sea

rescues, as demanded by the SPD, was also not included. The coalition agreement, therefore, represented a much more restrictive position than that demanded by the SPD in its election programme (Bauer-Blaschkowski, 2022, pp. 360–361). In addition, the tone used to talk about immigration-related topics also became much harsher and more critical (Hillje, 2018).

This rightward shift only became more evident throughout the legislative period. Almost all of the laws passed by the government in the area of immigration and integration represented restrictive changes (Bauer-Blaschkowski, 2022, p. 369). In addition, a split within the party became increasingly noticeable. A liberal and a more conservative group opposed each other and could not agree on a common approach towards immigration-related issues (Teevs, 2018). The second group also included the then-chairwoman of the SPD, Andrea Nahles, whose statement that Germany could not take in all refugees also drew criticism from within her party for using right-wing rhetoric (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018). The latter group also prevailed with the adoption of the government's immigration package, which contained the most important immigration and integration policy changes of the legislative period. These included liberalisations in the area of immigration opportunities for skilled workers as well as further relaxations to increase the employment of immigrants (Bauer-Blaschkowski, 2022, p. 364). However, the majority of the measures can be considered restrictive. These included lowering the hurdles for detention pending deportation, allowing to place detainees awaiting deportation in regular prisons, reducing benefits for immigrants living in collective accommodation and those who hinder their deportation, as well as extending the length of stay in initial reception centres (Zeit Online, 2019). Several prominent SPD politicians spoke out clearly in favour of the party's more restrictive course and stated that the regulations must be enforced with the required rigour (Spiegel, 2019b). However, the measures were also criticised by the opposition parties and civil society organisations for being disproportionate and denying immigrants the possibility of social participation. More importantly for this analysis, however, they were also criticised by parts of the SPD. Some members of parliament referred to the party's original values and made it clear that these were not aligned with the laws passed (Lindhoff, 2019; Spiegel, 2019a). This again supports the finding that the SPD shifted its position on immigration and integration to the right during the 19th legislative period.

### **6.3.2. The Left Party in the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

The Left Party remained true to its left-wing position on immigration and integration throughout the 19th legislative period. From its position in the opposition, it aimed to prevent a more restrictive layout of German immigration and integration policy and instead root it in humanity and the rule of law.



The positions they advocated for in their election programme for the 2017 federal elections are very humanitarian and liberal. They wanted to work towards the creation of an immigration society based on solidarity. This included establishing safe escape routes, faster access to work permits and a clear rejection of upper limits and mass accommodation (Die Linke, 2017, pp. 64–66). They also called for the abolition of Frontex and the establishment of state-funded sea rescue operations. Furthermore, they opposed restrictions on family reunification and any tightening of residence laws (Die Linke, 2017, 107, 114). The Left Party upheld these positions throughout the entire legislative period. This is reflected in their voting behaviour, as they reject the immigration package adopted by the federal government, which contradicts many of their demands mentioned here, and sharply criticised it for precisely these reasons (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019). They also introduced their own legislative initiatives, albeit unsuccessfully, which reflected their positions (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018b, 2018c). In their speeches and resolutions, they always clearly expressed their demands for easier access to citizenship and a humane immigration and integration policy, as well as their rejection of deportation prisons, upper limits and stricter asylum and residence laws (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018a; Die Linke, 2018b).

However, two groups can also be recognised within the Left Party. While one advocates precisely the values described above, the other favours a more restrictive approach. One of the most prominent faces of the second group was the then parliamentary group leader Sarah Wagenknecht. While she was in favour of open borders for asylum seekers, she questioned whether the same openness should also apply to labour immigrants, thus clearly distancing herself from the actual party line (Die Linke, 2018a). At the 2018 party conference of the Left Party, a vote was held on the party's future course on immigration and integration issues due to these differences in opinions. The left-wing and liberal group prevailed here. According to Träger (2020), the Left Party thus confirmed its humanitarian and liberal position (p. 172). To summarise, it can be said that the Left Party has not changed its position on immigration and integration policy during the 19th legislative period.

### **6.3.3. The Social Democratic Party in the 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

In the 20th legislative period, the SPD is still part of the government. However, something essential has changed. It is now the strongest force and thus holds the office of Chancellor and other important positions, such as the Ministry of the Interior, which plays a decisive role in shaping German immigration and integration policy. In addition, its coalition partners are no longer the more restrictive parties CDU and CSU. In the course of this legislative period, however, the SPD's position has nevertheless shifted further to the right.

Under the current SPD-led government, a large number of restrictive legislative initiatives were passed. An insight into some of these can already be found in chapter 2. Another example is the border controls at Germany's external borders, which are intended to reduce illegal immigration and combat the organised smuggling of immigrants. They were introduced in mid-October 2023 for certain neighbouring countries and were extended to all of Germany's external borders in September 2024 (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2023, 2024b). The SPD Minister of the Interior, Nancy Faeser, stated that these controls are intended to turn away as many people as possible directly at the border and thus prevent them from even setting foot on German territory (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2024). These measures contrast with previous SPD positions. When the previous Minister of the Interior, Horst Seehofer of the CSU, announced in 2019 that the border controls, which were introduced as part of the refugee crisis in 2015, would be further extended, the SPD criticised this and emphasised what an achievement the open internal borders within the EU represent (Spiegel, 2019c). Another example is the demanded imprisonment of all immigrants for whom another EU country is responsible according to the Dublin Regulation and who nevertheless enter Germany. According to Nancy Faeser, they should all be detained near the border directly after their arrival to ensure they can be turned back as quickly as possible and without complications (Buchsteiner, 2024). When such transit zones were called for by the CDU in 2015, the SPD fiercely opposed them and made it clear that the detention of refugees immediately after their arrival was unacceptable and criticised the whole idea as inhumane (Zeit Online, 2015).

In general, the 2021 election programme also addresses far fewer specific goals concerning immigration and integration politics than the previous one. Despite the very limited number of objectives, many have not been implemented, even though they were also included in the coalition agreement. For example, both documents clearly demanded the facilitation of family reunification for refugees with subsidiary protection (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2021, p. 45; Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands et al., 2021, p. 111). In November 2023, however, it was stated that no changes were planned in this regard after all (Die Bundesregierung, 2023).

In addition, the language used by the SPD has changed significantly. While they criticised the CSU for adopting the language of the right-wing populists in the last legislative period (Roßmann, 2018), they later adopted a harsher tone regarding immigration themselves. One example is that Olaf Scholz, the Chancellor, was featured on the front page of one of Germany's most prominent newspapers in October 2023 (Hickmann & Kurbjuweit, 2023). In the interview, he demanded in a strikingly explicit and newly hardened tone that Germany must finally deport people on a grand scale, as the welfare state cannot cope with unlimited immigration (Zeit Online, 2023a).

There are also repeated calls from within the party that strongly criticise the SPD's immigration and integration policy. Multiple members of parliament, as well as thousands of party members, demand that the right to asylum should not be restricted any further and that the human rights of refugees should be protected. According to them, some of the laws endorsed by the SPD discriminate against immigrants and ultimately only benefit the right-wing parties due to their restrictive nature (Spiegel, 2024; Sturm, 2023; Zeit Online, 2024f). Furthermore, the organisation Netzpolitik.Org has published an internal paper by the SPD Working Group on Immigration and Diversity. This paper notes several legal concerns regarding the security package adopted by the government. It also states that the adopted laws are not compatible with the SPD's core values of solidarity, justice and the protection of human dignity (Reuter, 2024). All of that further indicates the SPD's shift to the right in the area of immigration and integration policy.

#### **6.3.4. The Left Party in the 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period**

The Left Party remained committed to its humanitarian and libertarian approach to immigration and integration policy throughout the 20th legislative period. Just as in the previous period, it stood up for its values from its position in the opposition.

The Left Party's election programme for this legislative period was very similar to the previous one and once again called for the establishment of an immigration society based on solidarity. Just like in the previous programme, they advocated for the establishment of safe escape routes, unrestricted family reunification and the facilitation of obtaining residence and work permits (Die Linke, 2021, 113, 117). In addition, accommodation in large collective accommodations was rejected, and the replacement of Frontex with sea rescue missions was promoted (Die Linke, 2021, p. 115).

As in the previous legislative period, the Left Party continued to advocate the above-mentioned goals throughout the entire period. They voted against all restrictive measures adopted by the government and strongly criticised them (Die Linke, 2024; Mahnke, 2024; Spiegel, 2023b). They also introduced their own legislative initiatives aimed at easing the right of residence and facilitating the reunification of spouses (Deutscher Bundestag, 2022a, 2022b). Although these remain unsuccessful, they clearly show how the party positions itself.

The differences of opinion within the party discussed in chapter 6.3.2 also came to an end during this legislative period. In October 2023, a split within the party happened, and Sahra Wagenknecht left the Left Party with a few of her confidants to form her own party (Tagesschau, 2023e). The split significantly weakened the Left Party and deprived it of its status as an independent parliamentary group (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023). However, at the

same time, it provided more clarity in the area of immigration and integration policy, as many of the critical and restrictive voices left the party.

In conclusion, no relevant differences between the two cases analysed can be detected. The SPD moved further to the right in the area of immigration and integration throughout both legislative periods. The Left Party, on the other hand, has not changed its humanitarian and liberal position throughout the analysed periods.

#### **6.4. Governing in a Coalition Government**

In this sub-chapter, I will analyse how governing in a coalition government has influenced the Green Party in regard to its stance on immigration and integration. However, during the 19th legislative period, the Green Party was not part of the government but of the opposition. Accordingly, it did not have any coalition partners, so the influence of such partners can be ruled out from the outset. For this reason, no in-depth analysis has been carried out for this period.

In the 20th legislative period, the Green Party is part of the federal government again for the first time since the 15th legislative period from 2002 to 2005 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2022c). They form a coalition with the SPD and the Free Democratic Party (FDP). This is the first time the three parties have governed together at the federal level. With 25.7 per cent of the vote, the SPD is the strongest force in the coalition and, therefore, also appoints the Federal Chancellor, Olaf Scholz. The Green Party is the second strongest with 14.7 per cent. At 11.4 per cent, the FDP is the smallest coalition partner (Tagesschau, 2021).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the variable, I will compare the coalition agreement for parallels and differences with the Green positions. Afterwards, I will go into depth on the partner parties' positions on immigration and integration and how they have changed during the legislative period. In a third step, I will investigate if the coalition partners have pressured the Green Party to alter their stances and how they have reacted to those propositions.

##### **6.4.1. The Coalition Agreement**

The coalition agreement between the three parties struck a relatively liberal and humane tone and promised a fresh start in immigration and integration policy (Hardenberg, 2021; Jakob, 2021). While many experts state that the changes are not significant enough to speak of an

actual new beginning (Rudloff, 2021; Thym, 2021), many changes can nevertheless be recognised. These include the resumption of family reunification for people with subsidiary protection and the acceleration and digitalisation of visa issuance. There are also a lot of plans in the area of integration. For example, work bans for people already living in Germany are to be abolished, well-integrated people are to be granted the right of residency more quickly, and participation in German courses is to be made possible regardless of the chances of asylum, and as soon as possible (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands et al., 2021, pp. 110–111). At the European level, the rule of law and the upholding of human rights are being promoted, for example, through Frontex's involvement in sea rescues or a fundamental reform of the European asylum system, including a functioning distribution mechanism (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands et al., 2021, pp. 112–114). All of these projects are very much welcomed by civil society organisations and are seen as a left movement in the area of immigration and integration policy (Hardenberg, 2021; Pro Asyl, 2021).

However, some restrictive measures have also been planned. These include, among others, the so-called repatriation initiative, under which the number of deportations is supposed to be increased (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands et al., 2021, p. 112). In addition, for many projects, the categorisation as restrictive or liberal depends on the exact implementation. One example of this is the introduction of a special representative to conclude immigration agreements with countries of origin. Although the coalition agreement states that these should only be concluded according to strict human rights standards and should be separated from development cooperation (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands et al., 2021, p. 112), various organisations and journalists have stated that the exact design will be decisive here (Jakob, 2021; Pro Asyl, 2021). The same applies to the plan to examine the extent to which it is possible to determine the protection status of refugees in third countries (Jakob, 2021).

When comparing the coalition agreement with the Green Party's party election programme, many of the planned measures fit in very well with the Green Party's immigration and integration policy line. Many of their demands have been included, such as the facilitation of family reunification, the protection of human rights at the EU's external borders, a shorter period till people are granted the right of residence and the rapid provision of language courses for all immigrants (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, 185, 187, 239, 241). At the same time, some of the demands made by the Green Party in its election manifesto are not reflected in the coalition agreement. For example, there are no plans to reduce the length of stay in initial reception centres from 18 to three months (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 186). The demand for decentralised accommodation and the ability to enable people to live in their own homes quickly have also not been addressed (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 185). There are also some plans that stand in clear contrast to the election programme. The Asylum

Seekers Benefits Act is not planned to be abolished as originally demanded but will merely be further developed (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 186; Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands et al., 2021, p. 111). Additionally, the Left Party criticises that the Greens have gone against their fundamental values with the agreed return initiative (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 2021).

To summarise, many of the Greens' positions can be found in the coalition agreement and, by and large, they remain relatively true to their position. Nevertheless, it is also evident in other places that certain compromises have already been made and that some of their demands could not be realised within this coalition.

#### **6.4.2. The Coalition Partners**

As already discussed in chapter 6.3, the SPD is the neighbouring party on the right of the Green Party regarding immigration and integration issues. It originally stood for a social and humanitarian immigration and integration policy. However, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period, it has shifted a bit further to the right and often supported more restrictive immigration and integration policies at the federal level. In addition, a new harshness in the language can be recognised, as well as a clear focus on the potential threats of immigration for Germany. Despite all this, it continues to occupy its place in the centre of the right-left scale in the party German system when it comes to immigration and integration politics.

In studies from before 2021, the FDP has always been placed furthest to the right of the three governing parties regarding immigration and integration issues. In most cases, it is assigned a similar position to the CDU, with only the CSU and the AfD being located further to the right on the scale (Gessler & Hunger, 2022; Vanderwilden, 2023). In their election manifesto for the 2021 federal elections, they only devote two out of sixty-seven pages to the topic of immigration and integration. For this reason, it is relatively difficult to determine an exact position. However, there is a clear focus on labour immigration, which primarily involves recruiting qualified workers (Freie Demokraten, 2021, p. 57). Otherwise, there are some liberal demands, such as the call for Frontex to take over sea rescue operations, simplified and faster acquisition of German citizenship for immigrants and the promotion of language and integration courses (Freie Demokraten, 2021, p. 58). However, there are also a large number of restrictive demands, such as the call for strong protection of the EU's external borders, an increase in the capacity of pre-deportation detention centres, as well as the establishment of an additional category for war immigrants, which includes an immediate return to the home country after the end of the war (Freie Demokraten, 2021, pp. 57–58). It is also important to list what is not

addressed. Among other things, this concerns the accommodation of immigrants, the benefits that they receive, and family reunification.

Over the course of the legislative period, the FDP has increasingly campaigned in favour of a restrictive German immigration and integration policy and has thus moved steadily to the right of the left-right scale. This trend became very apparent in 2023. Before that, the party seemed very supportive of supporting liberal immigration policies with its coalition partners. In the summer of 2022, the FDP not only supported the introduction of the liberal "Chancen-Aufenthaltsrecht", which is intended to make obtaining the right of residence easier, but also praised it highly. They celebrated it as a paradigm shift in immigration policy that would allow well-integrated individuals to stay in Germany permanently. At the same time, the party's economic orientation was already evident there, as it emphasised that an important condition in this process is for these people to be able to finance their own livelihood (Freie Demokraten, 2022a). In other statements in 2022, the FDP also made it clear that it sees Germany as a country of immigration that is dependent on the immigration of skilled labour. Although the deportation of convicted persons also played a role repeatedly, the focus laid on promoting the recruitment of foreign skilled workers (Freie Demokraten, 2022b).

The tone changed considerably during the following year. Party leader and Finance Minister Christian Lindner wrote an article in a German newspaper with Justice Minister Marco Buschmann in which they spoke out in favour of a new "realpolitik" on immigration and integration. The article repeatedly emphasises that too many people who afterwards depend on welfare state benefits are coming to Germany. In addition, they criticise the fact that the social benefits immigrants receive in Germany are significantly higher than the EU average, which constitutes a strong pull factor. One of the solutions they propose is to prevent certain groups of people from entering Germany by rejecting them at the European external borders and controlling Germany's borders as well. Following them, the period in which immigrants receive the lower analogue benefits must be extended. In addition, despite various rulings by the Federal Constitutional Court, various special cases should be used to reduce immigrants' social benefits (Lindner & Buschmann, 2023). The entire article only focuses on the problems that immigration poses for Germany; the emphasis on the advantages is missing completely. Images of criminal immigrant men are drawn, and the restrictive structuring of immigration and integration law is portrayed as the only way to maintain citizens' trust in the state. To summarise, it can be said that this article shows that the demands of the FDP have become more restrictive and the tone much more critical and harsh (Weiland, 2023). These positions are further underpinned in another interview in which Christina Lindner clearly states that, in his opinion, all legal options for preventing irregular immigration should be fully exhausted (Jungholt et al., 2023).

This course continued in 2024. For example, Secretary-General Bijan Djir-Sarai already called for the deportation of convicted offenders to Afghanistan to be made possible again early on. Parliamentary group leader Christian Dürr underpinned this statement and added that Germany must regain control over its asylum system, as too few deportations are currently being carried out (Freie Demokraten, 2024a). There are even voices within the party calling for direct negotiations with the Taliban in regard to deportations, a departure from Germany's previous stance on the regime. Parts of the party are also calling for the resumption of deportations to certain parts of Syria (Zeit Online, 2024d). The demands also reached a new level in the area of benefit cuts. According to the parliamentary group leader, benefits for people obliged to leave the country should be cut to a bed-soap-and-bread minimum (Zeit Online, 2024e). A nine-point plan for a stricter immigration and integration policy presented by the party also includes measures such as a major expansion of the list of safe countries of origin, easier deportation of people who have supported terrorist offences and significant benefit cuts for asylum seekers who first entered other Dublin states. These measures are intended to reduce irregular immigration to Germany, which, according to the party, is currently far too high (Freie Demokraten, 2024b).

It can be concluded that the FDP has toughened its tone over the course of the 20th legislative period and called for ever more restrictive measures. The same applies to the SPD.

#### **6.4.3. Pressure on the Green Party**

The restrictive policy shifts of the coalition partners exerted increased pressure for change on the Green Party. A similar pattern of events can be recognised for all the restrictive measures adopted. As a first step, the SPD and/or FDP advocates for more restrictive measures. The Green Party then criticises these and expresses doubts. They are then put under pressure by their coalition partners and portrayed as a blocking party until they finally give in. Even if it cannot be clearly established whether the decision to give in is actually a reaction to pressure from the coalition partners, a clear pattern can nevertheless be recognised. I will demonstrate this process below using multiple cases as examples.

A good example is the introduction of the payment card, which has already been discussed in chapter 2.2. As already mentioned there, the Green Party initially clearly opposed the nationwide introduction of such a concept. In response, both the SPD and the FDP portrayed the Green Party as a blocking party. The SPD stated that the sensitivities of individual coalition partners could not hold back the policy aspirations of the entire government. The FDP even addressed the Green Party directly and insinuated that its blockade attitude minimised the public's trust in the government and strengthened the right-wing parties. Deputy Chairman



Wolfgang Kubicki even threatened to break up the coalition if the Green Party did not give up its blockade stance (Tagesschau, 2024d; Zeit Online, 2024a). In the end, the Green Party agreed to the plans, after all, albeit with a few minimal changes.

A similar picture emerges concerning the deportations to Afghanistan. As shown in chapter 2.3, the Green Party clearly positioned itself against such a measure for a long time. As a result, they were clearly criticised by the FDP. The General Secretary publicly called on Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock to give up her blockade stance and to not stand in the way of the deportation plans (Tagesspiegel, 2024). In addition, according to reports in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the SPD Chancellor himself is said to have intervened and made it clear that, although he would be prepared to consult with his coalition partners, ultimately, his opinion as Chancellor would determine the final decision (Balser et al., 2024). In this case, too, the Greens supported the measure in the end, contrary to their original position.

Even if the Chancellor has not officially commented on this, there are numerous press reports suggesting that he has repeatedly used his authority to set policy guidelines. Another example of this is Germany's support for the European asylum reform. For a long time, the Green Party clearly opposed the reform and blocked it at the national level and, thus, also at the European level (Kelnberger, 2023). This blockade was mainly justified by human rights concerns regarding the planned asylum procedures at the external borders, which they also categorically ruled out in their 2021 federal election programme (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, 2021, p. 239; Jakob, 2023). In addition, they also criticised the planned introduction of a crisis regulation, which, according to Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, could significantly lower the standards for people seeking protection and could also lead to some EU countries having even fewer incentives to register refugees in their countries (Balser et al., 2023). After a long dispute between the governing parties, Chancellor Olaf Scholz is said to have intervened and decided that Germany could not continue to block the planned reform under any circumstances (Balser et al., 2023; Lohse & Gutschker, 2023). Ultimately, his decision was respected, and the entire German government, including the Green Party, supported the reform. However, it was not only the SPD who pressured the Greens. The FDP found much more straightforward words during the discussion period. Party leader Christian Lindner said that the reform should, under no circumstances, be blocked by Germany because it is inevitable to maintain the nation's social peace (Lohse & Gutschker, 2023). General Secretary Bijan Djir-Sarai was even harsher and described the Greens as a security risk for Germany due to their blockade (Wixforth, 2023).

As already noted at the beginning of the chapter, a clear pattern can be recognised that runs through many of the immigration and integration policy debates of the governing parties. The SPD and the FDP demand more restrictive immigration and integration policy measures,

against which the Green Party clearly positions itself. As a result, the Green Party is publicly criticised, especially by the FDP, while the SPD tries to influence them with the help of its position of power as the party of the Chancellor. In the end, the two are often very successful in their endeavours and the Green Party, contrary to its original position, supports the restrictive measures.

To summarise, there is a clear difference between the two cases. While the Green Party was part of the opposition in the 19th legislative period, in the 20th legislative period, it is part of a coalition government with the SPD and FDP. This alone can exert considerable pressure on the party and encourage it to change its position. However, the analysis clearly shows that there are two additional factors. First, the two coalition partners are positioned further to the right than the Green Party and move even further to the right during their time in government together. Secondly, the two parties are exerting pressure on the Green Party and are repeatedly trying to persuade it to move to the right in the area of immigration and integration.

### **6.5. Summary**

The four analyses have shown that two of the four hypothetical explanatory variables exhibit different characteristics within the two analysed periods. On the one hand, this is the case with the election results of the Green Party. While they won almost all elections during the 19th legislative period, the 20th legislative period was characterised by heavy losses. Although they still achieved their personal best result at the federal level in the 20th Bundestag election, all subsequent elections at the federal-state level were clearly lost. The second variable that shows different characteristics is that of being part of a coalition government. The Green Party was part of the opposition during the 19th legislative period and is part of a coalition government in the 20th. However, the analysis shows that it is not only the sole participation in a coalition government that is decisive. The Green Party has even managed to incorporate many of its immigration and integration policy goals into the coalition agreement. However, their coalition partners shifted their own immigration and integration policy positioning further to the right over the course of the 20th legislative period. Additionally, they also repeatedly exerted pressure on the Green Party to change theirs.

The two other hypothetical explanatory variables analysed show no significant fluctuations within the periods examined. On the one hand, the opinion of Green voters on immigration and integration remains very stable over the entire period analysed. Secondly, the two neighbouring parties show the same patterns of movement in both cases. While the Left Party has not changed its position significantly, the SPD has moved further to the right in both the 19th and 20th legislative periods.

## 7. Discussion

In the course of this chapter, I will discuss the results of the analysis in light of the theory on which the thesis is based. In addition, I will use further literature in order to achieve a better understanding of the results as well as to situate them in the current state of research. These two steps also serve to clearly demonstrate what new insights the work has to offer. I will also take a closer look at the study's limitations and, building on this, present possibilities for further research. To this end, I will discuss each of the four hypothetical explanatory variables in more detail and then conclude by providing a broad overview of the whole thesis.

### 7.1. Changes in Voters' Opinion

The first hypothetical explanatory variable analysed was the attitude of Green voters. As discussed in chapter 4.3, Downs (1957) assumes that parties change their positions when the opinion of the electorate shifts in such a way that it no longer agrees with their position, and they risk losing many votes. Various authors have further refined this argument. They assume that niche parties are an exception here, as they only focus on the opinion of their electorate and are, therefore, only influenced by fluctuations within this group (Adams et al., 2006; Bischof & Wagner, 2020; Ezrow et al., 2011).

However, the analysis clearly showed that the majority of Green voters in both the 19th and 20th legislative periods held a clear pro-immigration position that has not changed over time. Moreover, compared to all other party supporters, as well as the entire German electorate, they have been the group that has most clearly rejected anti-immigration measures and statements and most strongly supported immigration-friendly ones. Based on the MSSD logic, it can, therefore, be ruled out that changes within the Green electorate led to the changes in the party's positioning.

This presents a very interesting phenomenon, as the analysis provides evidence that the Green electorate has not changed its views, and therefore, there was no pressure here on the party to adjust its positioning in order to retain the electorate. On the contrary, by shifting towards the centre, the Green Party has even risked dissatisfaction within their electorate. A study by Adams et al. (2006) shows that niche parties are penalised by their own electorate for shifts towards the centre. The question arises as to why the Green Party is taking this risk. On the one hand, these results can be interpreted as an indication that changes within the party's own electorate are not a necessary condition for a shift in party positions. Instead, the analysis has shown that other variables can help explain the shift. The influence of these variables could simply be strong enough to override the risk of dissatisfying the own electorate. This represents an important addition to the current academic debate on the factors behind

party position shifts and suggests that various factors should be considered when attempting to understand individual cases. In addition, more research is needed on the connection and possible interaction effects of the explanatory approaches discussed in the literature.

However, there are also two other explanatory approaches for this phenomenon from the literature that provide intriguing impulses and opportunities for further research. First, Klüver and Spoon (2017) have shown that parties that are part of a coalition government pay less attention to opinions within their electorate if the respective issue is controversial within the coalition. Chapter 6.4 shows that the topic of immigration and integration has led to disputes between coalition partners. Based on the insights of Klüver and Spoon (2017), these disputes could explain why the Green Party has moved its positioning away from that of its electorate.

Another explanation relates to the categorisation of the Green Party as a niche party. In general, Green parties are often directly labelled as niche parties (Adams et al., 2006, p. 513; Meguid, 2005, p. 347). However, there has been a debate about categorising the German Green Party for some time. As early as 2011, several articles were published dealing with the question of whether the Green Party was becoming the new mainstream party. There was a consensus among the authors that the Green Party cannot be categorised as a mainstream party. One reason for this is that although the party has been able to win over new groups of voters over the years, it still does not reach many population groups (Kroh & Schupp, 2011; Probst, 2011). On the other hand, the electorate's perception plays a major role, as they did not categorise the party as economically competent in the 2000s (Schneider & Winkelmann, 2012). Importantly for this thesis, Probst (2011) also notes in his article that the Green Party can no longer be defined as a clear ecological niche party (p. 153). The exact categorisation of the Green Party is still being discussed today, but the view that the Green Party is not a mainstream party still prevails. Niedermayer (2021) bases this assessment on the fact that membership figures, parliamentary representation and election results are too low and that the voter group addressed is not broad enough. Kupka (2022) adds that the Green Party's election programme has not changed significantly over the last 20 years in terms of its concretisation, focus and tone.

In all the articles mentioned, however, it is noticeable that the focus is almost always on categorisation as a mainstream party. However, the extent to which the Green Party can still be defined as a niche party remains largely unresolved. More research is needed here. This categorisation would also be very relevant for this master's thesis. Suppose the Green Party can indeed no longer be defined as a niche party. In that case, according to the theory used in this thesis, it should be assumed that the attitudes of its electorate no longer form the focal point but those of the population as a whole. Even if this was not included in the analysis, at least the analysis of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation shows that the attitudes of society as a

whole have become somewhat more restrictive with regard to the immigration possibilities of migrants throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period (Hirndorf, 6-8). So, if the Green Party is indeed no longer categorised as a niche party and thus pays attention to the attitudes of the electorate, this shift could offer an alternative explanation as to why the Green Party has developed contrary to the attitudes of its electorate.

Apart from the theoretical considerations, it is also possible that methodological and analytical weak points have led to a misjudgement regarding the attitudes of the Green electorate. As already discussed in chapter 5.3.1, to my knowledge, there are no surveys that have been conducted regular surveys over the entire period that address attitudes towards immigration and integration and can also be broken down by party affiliation. For this reason, a variety of different data had to be consulted. While the GLES cross-section studies from 2017 and 2021 and the study by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation are consistent and comparable, they do not cover the entire period analysed. The data from the monthly ARD-DeutschlandTRENDS offer a good opportunity to bridge these gaps. However, it must be borne in mind that often, the same questions were not asked, so comparability over the entire period is not fully guaranteed. There is, therefore, a chance that there has been a shift within the Green electorate that my analysis has not picked up on. Further in-depth research would be helpful here.

## **7.2. Past Election Results**

The second possible explanatory variable analysed is the influence of the last election results. Downs' (1957) theory is based on the assumption that all parties are vote-seeking. If they perform poorly in elections, they do not achieve their primary goal. This, in turn, means that changing their positioning is worth the risk involved. However, if parties perform well, there is no motivation to change. As shown in chapter 4.2.2, much of the current literature also supports the view that the outcome of elections is decisive for the positioning of parties. However, Somer-Topcu (2009) has added a significant limitation. Only elections in the recent past are meaningful, as they provide the most information about the current preferences of the electorate.

The analysis in chapter 6.2 showed that there are clear differences in the success rate in elections between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> legislative periods. While almost all elections in the former have been favourable for the Green Party, the latter is mainly characterised by electoral losses. Based on the MSSD logic, this difference suggests that the election results of the Green Party can be seen as an explanatory variable. The inclusion of theory only further confirms this picture. For the Green Party, it was only during the 20<sup>th</sup> legislative period that losing elections

incentivised it to reconsider its positions. These results support the prevailing beliefs in the literature about the importance of elections in terms of the changing positioning of parties.

However, there is one important election that needs to be considered and discussed in more detail. This is the 2021 federal election, i.e. the election on which the 20th legislative period is based. In this election, the Green Party achieved its best result at the federal level in its entire history. Based on theory, it should actually be assumed that this electoral success has strengthened the party's positioning. This raises the question of how this election fits in with the change of position in the Green Party.

In this respect, it is important to understand the 20th legislative period not only as a single unit but also to bear in mind that there have been many changes during this time. For example, the analysis in chapter 6.4.1 shows that the Green Party was initially able to incorporate many of its demands into the coalition agreement and thus remained true to its line, at least initially. The exemplary analysis of the Greens' shift to the right in chapter 2 also shows that the Greens often opposed restrictive measures even during the 20th legislative period. The restrictive measures were only adopted in the second half of the legislative period. This happened shortly after the first poor election results for the party, which commenced in February 2023 with the Berlin election.

With Somer-Topcu's (2009) research in mind, this may represent the crucial point. The Green Party did very well in the 2021 election. They then tried to stay true to their line as best they could in a coalition government. However, the significance of the Bundestag election has diminished over time. When the poor election results in the federal states began in 2023, they overshadowed the good Bundestag result and motivated the Green Party to change its positioning, which it ultimately did.

With this explanatory approach, however, great care must be taken to ensure no false conclusions are drawn. The analysis carried out in this thesis did not analyse the exact course of events. It is, therefore, impossible to say which came first, the bad elections or the restrictive changes. It is also possible that the restrictive changes led to poor election results. There is also a lack of insight behind the scenes of the party, so it is impossible to say with certainty when exactly the decision was made in favour of the more restrictive course. A more detailed analysis of the processes and the conducting of interviews to gain deeper insights into the party would be very beneficial here.

It must also be borne in mind that this thesis only looks at one of many political topics. It is also possible that the Green Party has maintained its course in other areas or even moved further to the left and that its immigration and integration policy is an exception.

### **7.3. Positional Changes of Other Parties**

The third hypothetical explanatory variable analysed is the positional changes made by other parties. Based on Downs' (1957) model, it is assumed that parties react to the position shifts of other parties by adjusting their own positioning. This is due to the fact that the opposing party's shift has either reduced or increased the size of the vector in which the party wins votes. The party, therefore, also positions itself to make the most of this situation. Recent studies have confirmed this pattern and pointed out once again that neighbouring parties, in particular, have a major influence, as they directly influence the size of the vector of the other party (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009; Williams, 2015).

The analysis has shown that the party to the right of the Greens, the SPD, has moved further to the right regarding immigration and integration in both the 19th and 20th legislative periods. The party to the left of the Greens, the Left Party, on the other hand, remains unchanged in its positioning. This means there are shifts in the environment of the Green Party in both cases analysed. However, this factor can be excluded owing to the MSSD logic, as the characteristics of the variable are the same in both cases; the SPD moves to the right, and the Left Party does not shift. If this factor had an effect on the Green Party, it would have had to become more restrictive already in the 19th legislative period.

This result, however, contradicts the basic theory of the work. Based on the theory, it would actually be assumed that the Green Party might move further to the right in order to attract some of the SPD's voters. However, it must be borne in mind that the consistent positioning of the Left Party could have a moderating effect, as the Green Party could also lose voters to the Left Party with every step to the right. Nevertheless, the results of my analysis question the current state of research and provide evidence that parties do not always react to changes in the position of their neighbouring parties. In further research, it would be interesting to see whether the direction of the shift, i.e., away from or towards the position of the party concerned, is decisive.

### **7.4. Governing in a Coalition Government**

In Downs (1957) model, being part of a coalition government can affect a party differently. On the one hand, it can motivate them to move further away from their coalition partners, as they hope to improve their chances of being re-elected by the coalition as a whole or think that they might be able to win more votes there. At the same time, however, it is also possible for parties to move closer to their coalition partners. One reason may be that they think they can win more voters there. Often, however, it is also because this enables them to work better together and thus prove to voters that they are capable of good government work and thereby win over

voters. The work of Atzpodien (2020) reaffirmed this last point and showed that coalition partners come closer together, especially in situations of pressure.

In principle, it would be very easy to address this factor. The Green Party was part of the opposition in the 19th legislative period and part of the coalition government in the 20th. Based on the logic of the MSSD, it can accordingly be assumed that participation in a coalition government constitutes an explanatory variable. However, a more in-depth analysis has shown that the Green Party was still able to incorporate many of its pro-immigration positions into the coalition agreement at the beginning of the legislative period and also initially advocated strongly against more restrictive measures. Participation in the coalition, therefore, did not directly lead to a shift in the party's position to the right.

Instead, the analysis in chapter 6.4 shows that the circumstances within the coalition have changed over the course of the 20th legislative period. The two coalition partners of the Green Party have moved further to the right in terms of their immigration and integration positioning. In addition, they have exerted considerable pressure on the Green Party, both publicly and behind closed doors, to adjust its position and support the restrictive measures. The analysis thus indicates that parties do not necessarily adjust their positions in coalition governments. However, if the positions of the coalition partners drift further apart and the pressure on individual partners is also increased, positions may shift. This finding offers further insights into how governing within coalitions can influence the positioning of individual partners.

It is important to note, however, that the analysis cannot conclusively establish that the shifts in position and the exertion of pressure are the only factors that are relevant when investigating the coalition dynamics. For example, Atzpodien (2020) points out in her article that increased numbers of asylum applications and increased media attention can also clearly increase the pressure on parties in a coalition and thus favour the convergence of party positions (p. 143). However, it is highly controversial in the literature whether these factors actually lead to changes in parties' positions. Both Vanderwilden (2022, 2023) and Gessler and Hunger (2022) have shown that although the 2015 migration crisis has increased salience regarding migration, there have been almost no noticeable changes in the positioning of the parties analysed. To my knowledge, the direct influence of the media on the positioning of parties has also not been proven. A very detailed literature review by Eberl et al. (2018) on the effects of the media discourse on immigration in Europe shows that the media can influence and shape the attitudes of voters regarding immigration through their reporting. According to them, this can go so far as to change political attitudes and party preferences. Naturally, this also has an impact on parties in a subsequent step, as it has already been shown in chapter 4.4.1 that the positioning of voters also affects the positioning of parties. However, this has already been considered in this work.



## **7.5. Overarching Discussions**

A few other important aspects need to be discussed in relation to the thesis as a whole. First, it is important to emphasise that it is not within the scope of this thesis to establish interaction effects between the individual variables. Thus, it cannot be determined to what extent the variables considered here influence each other. Equally, it cannot be ruled out with certainty that factors not considered in this study have a decisive influence that also affects the results presented here. This problem is also reflected in the broad literature on the motivations behind shifts in party positions. There is a lack of research that considers the many different factors within a single project and can thus highlight interaction effects. Consequently, the potential in this area for further research is significant.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that the possible generalisation of the results is limited, as the study conducted here is a single-country study. The results can, therefore, only be applied to other cases if they have very similar characteristics.

Nevertheless, this study has made a significant contribution to the current state of research. It has provided indications of the importance of election results and participation in a coalition government with regard to the changing positions of parties. Furthermore, it has shown that the exact characteristics of the factors are decisive. It also demonstrates that the factors discussed in the literature can only provide initial impulses when it comes to researching the drivers behind individual cases and that only detailed case studies can provide more precise insights. Moreover, this study has taken a more in-depth look at the German Green Party, a case that has received little attention to date, thereby laying a good foundation for further research.

## 8. Conclusion

The motivation behind this thesis was to gain an understanding of why the Green Party has taken a more restrictive position on immigration and integration during the 20th legislative period. For this purpose, four possible explanatory variables, all based on Downs' (1957) model, were analysed in a comparative case study. During the analysis, it was shown that two variables exhibited different characteristics during the two periods analysed, while the other two remained constant over the entire period. Based on the logic of the MSSD, it is assumed that only the first two can be considered explanatory variables.

One of these two variables is the election results of the Green Party. While successes in almost all elections characterised the 19th legislative period, the 20th is dominated by election losses. Based on theory and MSSD logic, it is assumed that the poor election results can at least partially explain the party's shift to the right. The second variable is the governing within a coalition. Clear differences can be recognised here, as the Green Party was part of the opposition in the 19th legislative period and is part of the coalition government in the 20th. The analysis also shows that the party was initially able to incorporate its positions into the coalition agreement successfully. However, over time, the positioning of the coalition partners has changed, and they have exerted more pressure on the party to comply with them. Based on the theory and logic of the MSSD, it can be assumed that it is not the participation in a coalition government per se that is decisive. Instead, it is the participation in a coalition in which the partners advocate more restrictive positions and exert strong pressure on the other party to support these.

The variables that show no variation are, on the one hand, the attitude of Green voters towards immigration and integration. This remains very immigration-friendly across both periods. Thanks to the MSSD logic, it can be excluded as an explanatory variable. The second is the repositioning of the Greens' neighbouring parties. The Left Party has not changed its position significantly, and the SPD moved further to the right in both the 19th and 20th legislative periods. Thus, although there are changes in the positions of the Greens' neighbouring parties, these occur in both periods examined and can, therefore, be dismissed as explanatory variables according to the logic of the MSSD.

To summarise, this study suggests that poor election results and governing in a coalition with more restrictive partners, which exert pressure for reform, have led the Greens to adopt a more restrictive immigration and integration policy in the 20th legislative period. While changes in the position of neighbouring parties and the opinion of their electorate can be ruled out as factors, other factors and explanatory models remain unconsidered. More research is needed to clarify the extent to which these have also had an influence and how the different explanatory variables influence each other.

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