The Kretschmann Effect: Personalisation and the March 2016 Länder Elections

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This paper examines the influences of candidate perceptions on Germany's spring 2016 Länder election results. It takes a comparative approach, using a modified Michigan model on the data collected simultaneously in three Länder (Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saxony-Anhalt). It explains why the Green party was successful in Baden-Württemberg but not in the other Länder, the impact of the major candidates, and what distinguishes the influences of the current prime ministers running for these elections. Whereas Winfried Kretschmann's (Green party, Baden-Württemberg) high impact on the election results was driven mainly by a warmth dimension (sympathy), Malu Dreyer (SPD, Rhineland-Palatinate) was viewed as being competent. Both candidates were assets to their parties and co-responsible for the results. In comparison, in Saxony-Anhalt, none of the candidates were as important to the outcomes of the electoral success.

INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Baden-Württemberg Länder election made history. After 58 years of a permanent governmental presence as the leading party, the CDU lost to the opposition (e.g. Gabriel and Kornelius 2011; Keil and Gabriel 2012; Roth 2013 analysed the election in greater detail). Not only was the former opposition in charge now, but the government was led by the first-ever Green-Red coalition at the Länder level under the first-ever Green prime minister, Winfried Kretschmann. Given the challenges of the super-issues of Stuttgart 21, conditions for this new government were far from desirable. Studies show that governmental change in Baden-Württemberg and the Greens' positive election results in other Länder elections (which occurred simultaneously) were driven by the exceptional circumstances around these elections – mainly, although not exclusively, the Fukushima disaster (Olsen 2012).

Five years after the 2011 landslide election the Greens in Baden-Württemberg reasserted their position, whereas the two other Länder elections (Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt), once again held simultaneously, returned to their pre-2011 election results. According to a media analysis in Der Spiegel on 14 March 2016, these results are mainly attributed to the frontrunners of the parties, but also partly to the evolution of the right-wing populistic party AfD, which 'stole' votes from the CDU. However, from a more scientific point of view, the role candidates played in the 2016 election – and play at Länder elections in general – is not that clear. Although

candidates are an important factor (even in Germany's mixed-member proportional electoral system) and they help shape election outcomes (e.g. the spring 2011 elections [Olsen 2012, 126]), their primary impact should be on unattached voters (Brettschneider, Neller, and Anderson 2006). Nevertheless, the 2016 election results speak for themselves.

We took the opportunity of simultaneous Länder elections to shed further light on the role that frontrunners played in these elections, and analyse what made a frontrunner an asset for their party. We demonstrate that frontrunners – especially Winfried Kretschmann (Green party) in Baden-Württemberg and Malu Dreyer (SPD) in Rhineland-Palatinate – had a significant impact on their party's electoral successes, but that the ways in which candidates affected the electorate varied. Whereas Winfried Kretschmann was perceived as being warm (likeable), in Malu Dreyer's case her competence was decisive.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we provide an outline of the relevant theoretical considerations. We discuss Germany as a federal state and the role of candidates in general; specifically with respect to the Michigan model of vote choice. Next we briefly describe the data and methods used. Then we extensively discuss the conditions before the spring 2011 and 2016 Länder elections, as well as their outcomes. Afterwards, we provide a short analysis of individual-level candidate effects, and finally a summary discussion of our findings.

THE ROLE OF CANDIDATES AT GERMAN ELECTIONS

'Political campaigns are attempts by political actors to influence how citizens see the political world' (Schmitt-Beck 2007, 744). During campaigning, parties and candidates try to persuade voters to accept their messages and their personal qualities. However, the degree to which the personal is relevant to vote choice depends on the political system. In democracies with a majority electoral system, electoral behaviour (and therefore the campaigns) centres on candidates and their characteristics (Debus 2010). In democracies with proportional representation – like Germany – a candidate's importance is significantly lower. Beyond the characteristics of the voting system, presidential systems naturally benefit candidates more than a parliamentarian system (Germany). Thus, with respect to the political system in Germany, candidates are only one factor among many that influence vote choice.

However, the often-proclaimed personalisation of politics thesis states that candidates have become an increasingly important factor in German elections as well. Even though the empirical evidence for this thesis so far is very thin (Holtz-Bacha, Langer, and Merkle 2014), it is evident that candidates do have an impact on elections in Germany (Debus 2010, 294) although it varies across levels, regions (Pappi and Shikano 2001, 383), and other contextual determinants (Krewel, Schmidt, and Walter 2016, 123).

Therefore, in our specific analysis, we considered that the three observed Länder differed significantly in their given political tradition, voting system, and initial situation. For example, whereas voters in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt had to cast two votes (one for the candidate of the election district and one for the party seat share at the Länder level), in Baden-Württemberg voters had only one vote

(counting for both). Baden-Württemberg can be defined as very conservative with traditionally high results for the CDU, one of the most stable party systems; whereas in Rhineland-Palatinate, the SPD has dominated since the election of 1991 (before that the CDU was the strongest party). Saxony-Anhalt, the only eastern Land in this election cycle, has a typical eastern German party system in which the German Left party (former PDS) always had comparatively good election results (Olsen 2012, 118). Solely based on Länder factors, differences are to be expected.

With respect to the Länder elections it is important to recognise that Germany is a federal republic. Multi-level systems and multi-level elections have specific features that can influence campaign dynamics and electoral results (e.g. elections on different levels are not detached from each other). Dinkel has shown that a cyclical relationship exists between the federal and Länder elections. The further away in time the Länder elections are from the federal elections within the electoral cycle, the more opposition parties gain in the share of the expected votes (Dinkel 1977). Although this cycle model has been challenged several times (Jeffery and Hough 2001), the concept of 'second-order elections' (Reif and Schmitt 1980) remains important. Because the electorate perceives both the European and Länder elections as less important than the federal elections, the European and Länder elections are used to reflect on and punish federal-level government performance – in line with the electoral cycle – and also for individual 'experiments' in which voters might 'try out' new voting options. When these are combined with the lower turnout for these elections, it may create coalitions that are more 'unusual'.

Moving from the aggregate level of voter choice to the individual level and the candidate's perspective, two important questions must be addressed before analysing 'our' Länder elections. First, how do candidate effects influence the theories of individual voter choice? Second, are all voters affected by candidates equally or do certain characteristics lower this influence?

To analyse the determinants of voter choice with respect to the three observed Länder elections, we used the so-called Michigan model, which has been widely used in the past to analyse candidate effects, for example: the specific candidate effects in Länder elections (Blumenberg and Kulick 2010), chancellor effects in a single election (Schoen 2011), and long-term comparative studies of candidate images and effects (Brettschneider, Neller, and Anderson 2006).

The Michigan model, developed in the 1950s in the context of American presidential elections, is widely recognised as the most important and most influential model of the social-psychological school of voting behaviour: 'Therein it is assumed that voting behaviour is most appropriately explained by voters' perceptions and evaluations of political objects. In particular, the authors suggest that candidate orientations and issue orientations contribute considerably to electoral decision-making' (Schoen 2011, 93). However, the most important factor of this model is party identification, which is defined as an 'individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment' (Campbell et al. 1960, 121). Of course, in this case, the important group-object is a political party to which a person develops a special bond over his/her political life through political socialisation.[1] Simultaneously, party identification is the distillate of all the political events (the political past of a person) that have shaped a person's perception of a party throughout her/his life

(Campbell et al. 1960, 118). Party identification thereby serves as a filter of perception for all other determinants of the model.

In this model, candidates are one of the important determinants that influence voter choice. Perception of the candidates and parties is not independent of party identification, but is causally influenced by it. Within the interplay of these determinants, candidates are also important influences that shape party identification. In the classical perception of the social-psychological approach, candidates and issues are treated independently. However, as Brettschneider (2002) pointed out, the separation between candidates and issues may not be as strict. Or, as was written in the American Voter, 'After all, they are parts of one political system and are connected in the real world by a variety of relations that are visible in some degree to the electorate. A candidate is the nominee of his party; party and candidate are oriented to the same issues or groups, and so forth' (Campbell et al. 1960, 59). Thus, Brettschneider argues that candidates and issue perceptions are woven together, since voters' candidates assessments include relevant traits not considered political (which may be of foremost importance) as well as their ability to tackle current political issues. In this context, Brettschneider speaks about voters' issue-specific evaluations of candidate performance. He criticised the classical approach as conflating evaluation objects (candidates) and evaluation characteristics (issue competencies). Therefore, he proposed an analytical distinction between the dimensions of evaluation and a reformulation of the objects of evaluation with respect to parties and candidates (Brettschneider 2002, 210-211). Even though it has not been actively communicated, the latter already reflects the research reality, as many studies carried out in the German context use a party's issue competence as a proxy of the issue dimension. Taking into account the insights of previous research (Pappi and Shikano 2001), we adopted Brettschneider's approach and utilised a modified social-psychological model – an influence triad of party identification, party issue competence, and candidate perception.

The impressions and/or perceptions voters form about candidates are 'more than just summary evaluative judgements about other people but rather are mental structures stored in memory' (McGraw 2003, 389). In an ideal world, the contents of those images would consist of

> data-driven impressions, treating each person as a unique individual with a unique configuration of attributes. This would greatly increase the richness, validity and accuracy of social interaction. However, we do have limited capacity, and as a consequence we have social categorization and stereotyping. (Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1994, 106)

Simplification is the result of social categorisation and this simplification is based on personality traits. In the study of candidate effects on election results after American Voter,[2] several personality traits have been identified which matter to voters. Those are moral integrity, empathy, trustworthiness, competence, and leadership qualities (Glantz 2011, 30). However, since in most cases those traits have been derived from exploratory approaches, the exact number of categories and their names are still under discussion. Additionally, research from social psychology (Cwalina and Falkowski 2016) suggests these dimensions can ultimately be condensed into two

dimensions labelled as 'warmth' or 'moral' and 'competence'.[3] 'Warm' indicates if a person finds the candidate sympathetic, sincere and likeable (likes him or her as a person) and competent if the candidate would be a good leader, with all its facets. This condensation is used because of the need for complexity reduction. In popular sciences these two dimensions recently appeared within the framework of the Wizard of Oz, where respondents had to choose between two leaders: the Scarecrow (heart, but not brain) or the Tin Man (brain, but no heart). It turned out that respondents were able to make use of this analogy (Winters 2014).

We follow this parsimonious approach and take only two dimensions into account when it comes to leader evaluation. Figure 1 illustrates our model.

Last, candidates are not equally important to all voters. This insight is already embedded in the social-psychological model in which the existence and degree of party identification is relevant to vote choice:

> Thus, for voters who strongly identify with a party, party attachment, issue and candidate orientations tend to move in tandem, because such voters usually vote for their preferred party even when they are not in complete agreement with its or its candidate's current positions, the independent effect of candidate orientation on the vote is expected to be relatively small for this group of committed partisans. In contrast, however, among voters who are only weakly attached to a party, inconsistencies among party identification and attitudes toward candidates and issues can be expected to be more common. This also means that the potential for candidate orientations to play a significant role in the calculus of voters is greatest among these unattached voters. (Brettschneider, Neller, and Anderson 2006, 485)

Another moderating influence on voter choice may be the personality of voters (Steinbrecher 2015). However, due to the limitations of the data being used in the present study and the scope of our study to survey the impact of candidates in a specific election, we were forced to be agnostic about factors other than those which have been presented.

FIGURE 1
THE MODIFIED SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF VOTE CHOICE
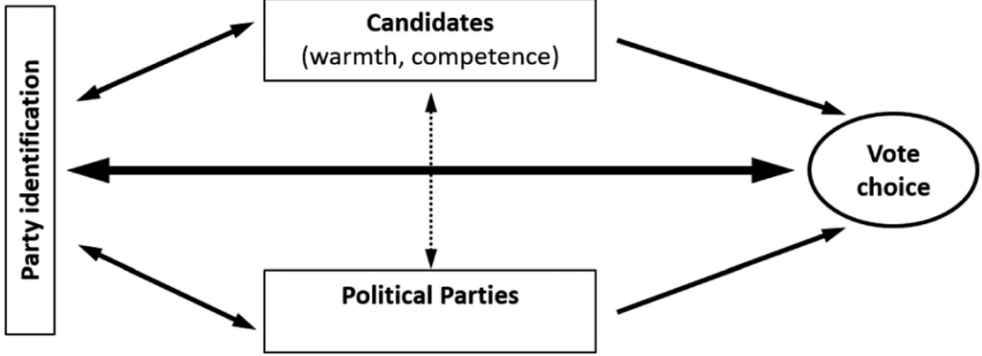
Source: Own depiction.

DATA AND METHODS

The present study uses data collected as part of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) (Roßteutscher et al. 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Funded by the German National Science Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and carried out in close cooperation with the German Society for Electoral Studies (DGfW), the GLES comprises a major long-term effort in social science data collection in Germany. It is the largest German national election study so far. Of the broad variety of available GLES components, our study has utilised the long-term online tracking (component 8) data, a main objective of which is to understand how and why political settings and behaviours change at the individual level from one federal election to the next. With respect to the Länder elections, this GLES tracking is supplemented by a 'Landtagswahl (LTW) boost' that carried out an online survey of 500 respondents for each Land election. These 'LTW boost' surveys occur simultaneously with the online tracking to make sure that direct comparisons with the federal level are possible. 'Our' datasets (T31) were collected between 26 February 2016 and 11 March 2016 just before the Länder elections were held. Since the data collected is based on a double opt-in online access panel provided by LINK Institut, all the pitfalls associated with the use of online access panels (non-representativeness, total survey error) apply here, even though the quality of the LINK panel is considered to be comparatively high (Baker et al. 2010). Nonetheless, we have used this data – since they were collected simultaneously and under equal conditions – to carry out a direct comparison of candidate effects at these Länder elections.

Since we wanted to survey the effects of different factors, especially candidates, on voter choice, we created several dichotomous voter choice variables to indicate whether the respondents planned to vote for the party '1' or not '0'.

With respect to the independent variables, we included measurements for candidate effects, party/issue preferences, party identification, and a small range of sociodemographic control variables. As discussed previously, candidate effects were measured on two dimensions – warmth and competence. To build these variables, we used a range of agreement scales that indicated whether a respondent found the named candidate 'trustworthy', 'likeable', 'assertive', and 'economically reasonable', with a scale ranging from 1 'not at all' to 5 'fully agree'. For both the dimensions warmth and competence, the mean of two of the scales was calculated: 'trustworthy' and 'likeable' for warmth, and 'assertive' and 'economically reasonable' for competence.

As Debus (2010) and Pappi and Shikano (2001) have argued, all relevant candidates should be included when analysing candidate effects, since candidates other than the frontrunners might influence the results as well. Unfortunately, the GLES only collected data for the most important candidates of given elections, which limited our analysis to the CDU and Green party in Baden-Württemberg and the CDU and SPD in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt.[4]

Party/issue preferences were measured as the distances between the respondent's position and the anticipated party position on two issues – the 'libertarian – authoritarian' scale on the one hand and the 'socioeconomic' scale on the other. The absolute

distances were calculated for each party and respondent[5] (equation (1)):

$$\Delta\text{Positional Issue} = \sqrt{(\text{Positional Issue}_{\text{Party}} - \text{Positional Issue}_{\text{Respondent}})^2}$$

Last, we included party identification as a dichotomous variable that indicated whether a respondent identified with the named party (1) or not (0). The data for this question was based on the German standard question design frequently used by the GLES.

The individual-level survey data was complemented by official statistics and the results of exit-poll surveys carried out by commercial research institutes (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen and infratest dimap).

THE SPRING 2011 AND SPRING 2016 LÄNDER ELECTIONS

With three Länder elections being held simultaneously, 13 March 2016 was the largest political event in Germany in 2016 with respect to democratic participation. To better understand the characteristic features of these 2016 elections, it is necessary to return to the beginning of 2011 when the campaigns for the 2011 spring elections were carried out.

According to Olsen (2012, 117), 'As Germany entered the 2011 election season national party-political questions predictably dominated the media discourse', which was focused primarily on questions of party dominance, involvement, and the German political system itself. In this regard, the situation of the 2016 election was similar to the 2011 election: Will the FDP find its way back into the Länder parliaments (it did not in 2011)? Will the SPD make a comeback (it did at least to a small extent in 2011)? How persuasive will the strong federal CDU be in the Länder elections (it was relatively low in 2011)?

Not including the demonstrations against the infrastructure project Stuttgart 21 in Baden-Württemberg – which caused major disturbances to the 2011 campaigns in Baden-Württemberg – the 2011 election was not expected to be very exciting. However, after the Tohoku earthquake caused a series of nuclear accidents at the Fukushima I Nuclear Power Plant in Fukushima (Japan) on 11 March 2011, the 2011 campaign content and dynamics shifted significantly. In the German population's perception, nuclear power was now the most important problem (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V. 2016a). Confronted with the tragedy in Japan, citizens in the larger German cities gathered in their tens of thousands to protest against nuclear power and to demand a quick reaction from German politicians. Simultaneously, survey results predicting the electoral outcome showed a massive rise in the vote shares for the Green party which, as a successor of the anti-nuclear power movement, still holds ownership of this issue.[6] With the proclamation of the so-called Atom-Moratorium on 14 March, Angela Merkel and her cabinet reacted quickly to provide a security examination of all German nuclear power stations which resulted in the shutdown of seven plants. However, as shown by the election results of the CDU and FDP in the Baden-Württemberg Land election on 27 March 2011, the Fukushima catastrophe was the last nail in their coffins. The Green party, strengthened by its clear and

popular (amongst its voters) position on Stuttgart 21, was the clearest winner of the three elections, and the FDP and CDU lost ground due to their positions on the nuclear catastrophe and the Stuttgart 21 project. Even though the Green party's desired coalition partner, the SPD, did not perform well in the elections (the SPD did not take a clear position on Stuttgart 21), Winfried Kretschmann became the first Green prime minister in Germany.

Of course the Fukushima catastrophe impacted not only the election results of Baden-Württemberg, but also those of Rhineland-Palatinate (also on 27 March) and Saxony-Anhalt (20 March). However, since Stuttgart 21 was not an issue in these other two Länder elections; the initial situation was a little different but more stable. In Rhineland-Palatinate the SPD had gained an absolute majority in the Land election of2006underKurtBeck's leadership, winning 45.6 per cent of the votes. However, the 2009 federal election results in Rhineland-Palatinate indicated that the SPD would lose its absolute majority in the next election. On the other hand, in 2006 the CDU's vote share sunk slightly (to 32.8 per cent) while the Greens failed to overcome the 5 percent threshold. Thus, even though Kurt Beck was still running for prime minister, it was certain that the SPD would lose some percentage points in its support in 2011; replicating the historical 2009 result was nearly impossible, just as it was unclear as to how many percentage points would be lost and to which party. It is again reasonable to suggest that the Fukushima effect may have been responsible to a significant degree for the 2011 election results: the CDU gained slightly (+2.4 percentage points) and the SPD lost massively (29.9 percentage points). The Green party gained 10.8 points, even more than the SPD had lost. A short look at inter-party voter migration statistics may offer an explanation (Gothe 2011). First, as expected, the highest migration occurred between the SPD and Green party – about 87,000 former SPD voters cast their vote for the Green party in this election. Second, the Green party was able to mobilise many former non-voters. Overall, the Green party was the clear winner of the election.

In the 2011 Land election in Saxony-Anhalt, both the CDU (36.2 per cent in 2006) and the German Left party (24.1 per cent in 2006) knew before the election that they would need to rely on the SPD (21.4 per cent in 2006) as a coalition partner after the election. They focused on highlighting to the public the programmatic overlaps between their own parties and the SPD. On the other hand, the SPD understood its position and made no commitments regarding any coalition option. This understanding, combined with the fact that voters in Saxony-Anhalt were satisfied with the work of the government and economic development, had enabled a campaign without dramatic peaks (Holtmann and Völkl 2011, 748). All other parties struggled to get their agenda heard by the public. For example, in Saxony-Anhalt a weak Green party (3.6percentin 2009)[7] campaign was dominated by the question of whether they would even overcome the 5 per cent threshold. However, the Fukushima catastrophe helped to shift the fortunes of the Green party. Whereas the 2011 election results of the CDU, SPD, and Left party remained almost the same as in 2009 (CDU: 23.7 per cent; SPD: 20.4 per cent; Left party: +0.1 per cent), the Green party's vote share increased to 7.1 per cent. In absolute numbers or percentage points the growth of 3.5 per cent might not sound like much, especially when compared to the results in Baden-Württemberg or Rhineland-Palatinate, but the Green party almost doubled its 2009 election

results. In addition, Saxony-Anhalt is the only Land (compared in the present study) located in eastern Germany. Overall, the eastern party system is quite different from the western party system and the federal party system as a whole. These differences also mean that Länder elections in eastern Germany often significantly divert from the federal trend and overall they are driven more by Länder politics than their western German siblings.

In summary, until that March the 2011 Länder election campaigns were driven by Land-specific structural factors and – with the exception of Baden-Württemberg where Stuttgart 21 played an important role – took place under fairly 'normal' conditions. After the Fukushima catastrophe of 11 March 2011 the electorate shifted and the Green party saw massive vote gains in all three Länder.

Five years later, nuclear power is no longer a big issue and is rarely discussed. During those years, the so-called Laufzeitverlängerung (the extension of usage of nuclear power stations) was retracted and the ultimate departure of nuclear power in Germany was sealed. Instead of a concern with nuclear power plants, the European refugee crisis threatened to divide both the minds and politics of German citizens and helped generate an atmosphere in which the right-wing populist party 'Alternative für Deutschland' (AfD) was able to find support once more. With respect to the future electoral successes of the Green party, the shift in concern from nuclear power to the European refugee crisis put the Greens in a vulnerable position. While the Green party benefited from the Fukushima catastrophe in 2011, the current European refugee crisis has not provided a similar political advantage. The Green party has a clear position on this crisis, but other parties do as well, and the Greens cannot claim issue ownership as they did on nuclear power. Additionally, on the Länder level no other issue had the same importance as Stuttgart 21 . Thus, if the 201 1 election was special in several ways and mainly driven by the Fukushima catastrophe which influenced many voters from other parties to vote for the Green party, it is reasonable to expect that the Green party could potentially return to its pre-2011 strength after the 2016 Länder elections. Table 1 illustrates the turnout and results for the three spring 2016 Länder elections and the change in percentage points from the 2011 election. By comparing changes in voter support for the Green party in the 2016 Länder elections to the 2011 elections the expectation that the Green party could potentially return to its pre-2011 strength holds true for Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt, but not for Baden-Württemberg.

TABLE 1
SPRING 2016 ELECTION RESULTS IN THE LÄNDER (PERCENTAGE SHARE OF VOTE; DIFFERENCE FROM2011 IN BRACKETS)

	Baden-Württemberg		Rhineland-Palatinate		Saxony-Anhalt	
Turnout	70.4	(+4.2)	61.1	(+9.9)	70.4	(+8.6)
CDU	27.0	(-12.0)	31.8	(-3.5)	29.8	(-22.8)
SPD	12.7	(-10.5)	36.2	(+0.5)	10.6	(-10.9)
FDP	8.3	(+3.0)	6.2	(+2.0)	4.9	(+1.0)
Green party	30.3	(+6.1)	5.3	(-10.1)	5.2	(-2.0)
Left party	2.9	(+0.1)	2.8	(-0.2)	16.3	(-7.3)
AfD	15.1	(+15.1)	12.6	(+12.6)	24.2	(+24.2)

The results reveal some interesting patterns. First, the turnout was higher in all three 2016 Länder elections than it was in 2011. Given the fact that the 2011 turnout was already comparatively high, this increase is at least remarkable. In addition, the FDP has won some support again even though it failed to achieve the 5 per cent threshold in Saxony-Anhalt. From a broader perspective, this might indicate that the FDP will not vanish from the German political landscape for now and that it might still have some core voters. However, to speak of a comeback as stated in the questions above might be an exaggeration.

The AfD won more than the forecast percentages in all three Länder,[8] becoming the second strongest party in Saxony-Anhalt and the third strongest in Baden-Württemberg. Therefore, the right-wing populist party (Lewandowsky, Giebler, and Wagner 2016) was the real winner of the election, although its position as an outsider within the party system does not enable it to forge coalitions and it will remain the opposition. It is fairly clear that the AfD's success in these Länder elections is connected to the refugee crisis and to a certain protest culture among the disenchanted part of the electorate. This hypothesis is guided by voter migration: most AfD voters were former nonvoters (101;000 [Infratest dimap 2016f]). According to the 2016 exit poll surveys (this is important since the AfD changed dramatically between 2013, its founding year, and 2016), AfD voters are predominantly male, not highly educated, and are either unemployed or manual workers – a typical profile for right-wing and protest voters (Lubbers and Scheepers 2001, 431). A high proportion of AfD voters stated that they voted for the party because they were disappointed by the other parties (Infratest dimap 2016e).[9] However, since the scope of this present study is not to analyse the AfD's 2016 election success, but rather to examine candidate effects on the success of the other parties, we will leave deeper analysis of the AfD successes to other scholars at this point.

The electoral results of the other three parties differ across the Länder. Rhineland-Palatinate was the least volatile.[10] In the 2016 election, the Green party lost significantly (as expected) in this Land. The reason for this loss is twofold: first, as argued previously, the nuclear power issue had been removed from the table; and second, in Rhineland-Palatinate, the race between the CDU and SPD had been quite tight during the whole campaign, although the CDU had been on its way to the lead until just before the election. This should have caused voter switching from the Green party to the SPD, since a SPD-led coalition was the preference of most voters (49 per cent). Again, this view is supported by the voter migration balance, according to which 90,000 of the former Green party voters switched to the SPD. This was by far the highest migration between parties in this Land election (Infratest dimap 2016d). The CDU mobilised voters from the SPD (14,000) and Green party (21,000) as well as former non-voters (58,000). However, with losses to the AfD (50,000) and the increased turnout, the net gain simply was too low to outweigh the losses. The reasons why the SPD in the end won the race are most probably rooted in Land politics. In Malu Dreyer (55 years old11) – successor to Kurt Beck who had resigned as Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate in 2013 – the SPD also had the more popular candidate. Even CDU and FDP voters perceived her to be a good Minister-President, while voters perceived Julia Klöckner (at 43 the youngest candidate) as less sympathetic, less in touch with the people, less trustworthy, and less able to address the challenges of the refugee crisis; even though she had a high competency with respect to

dealing with the economy (Infratest dimap 2016c). Near the end of the campaign, Klöckner – who had been a candidate in the previous election – sought an open confrontation with Angela Merkel over her handling of the refugee crisis, and as a result Klöckner's thirst for power and coldness were displayed to the public.

In comparison, the Saxony-Anhalt candidates were much duller. Rainer Haseloff (62) led the CDU. Haseloff, Minister-President for Saxony-Anhalt since 2011, challenged Merkel's politics regarding the refugee crisis quite early to weaken the AfD's position. However, with a strong AfD and the federal CDU's more open position on refugees, voters in Saxony-Anhalt who strongly opposed refugees voted for the 'original' (the AfD) in the face of a false compromise by the CDU. The voter migration balance supports this perspective: in 2016 38,000 former CDU voters cast votes for the AfD (Infratest dimap 2016f). Although Haseloff was perceived as the strongest candidate in this election (Infratest dimap 2016b), the CDU had less electoral pressure due to the SPD's weak prospects. The SPD was one partner with the CDU in a grand coalition before the election and, typically, such partnerships lead to a flat campaign since the big parties cannot attack each other for being responsible for the last legislative period. Additionally, a month before the election, Katrin Budde (51) – candidate and chairperson of the SPD – was still optimistic about the possible results, although that optimism faded away in the lead-up to the election. The junior partner of a coalition always has a harder time making headway in an electoral campaign and in this election the challenges were threefold for the SPD. First, as previously mentioned, the SPD could not blame the CDU for the last legislative period. Second, attacks on, or coalition signals against, the Left party were risky since it was unclear whether it would be needed to form a three-party coalition after the election (and, as it turned out, it was). Third, the refugee crisis and reservations about refugees – who typically are relatively high in numbers in the eastern Länder – did not benefit the SPD. As a result, the SPD lost voters to all other parties and to the non-voter category. The biggest shifts, however, were to the AfD (20,000) and the CDU (20,000).

The German Left party experienced a similar fate, which we discuss here because of its importance in Saxony-Anhalt. Another look at the voter migration balance reveals that the formerly second strongest party of the parliament lost significantly to all other parties (except the SPD), experiencing the biggest loss to the AfD (28,000). Clearly, the focus on the refugee crisis, although it took a position opposite to the AfD, did not help the German Left party and its candidate Wulf Gallert (52), a non-ideological pragmatist who was trying for the third time to become prime minister.

The SPD and Left party losses had consequences. Carrying the burden of these losses, candidates Budde and Gallert both resigned shortly after the election.

Last, the Green party – running professor of psychology Claudia Dalbert (61) as their leading candidate – could not counter the fears about the refugee crisis either. This diminished all their hopes to maintain the level of voter support that they had achieved in the 2011 election. Thus, staying in parliament after getting in for the first time ever can be counted as a succes d'estime for the Green party in Saxony-Anhalt. In the end, the 2016 election in Saxony-Anhalt led to the first so-called 'Jamaica coalition', which includes the CDU, SPD, and Green party under the leadership of Prime Minister Haseloff (CDU).

The election results were much different in Baden-Württemberg. Although the CDU and SPD consistently lost votes and seats in this election – in fact, the combined results for the CDU and SPD have never previously been as bad at the Länder level (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V. 2016b, 8) – the Green party was able to mobilise more voters than in the 2011 election. The reasons for this success can be attributed to the strength of Winfried Kretschmann (68) and to voter satisfaction with the government as a whole, which was comparatively high (32-33 per cent). Specifically, satisfaction with the government was high amongst Green party voters (Blumenberg and Faas 2017) and all other parties, with the exception of the AfD. Consequently, the three most favoured coalitions included the Green party and the two most favoured coalitions were under Green party leadership with the SPD (#1) and the CDU (#2) as junior partners (Infratest dimap 2016b).

Similar to the Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt campaigns, the Baden-Württemberg campaign was mainly driven by the refugee crisis. As in the other two Länder elections, the AfD benefited. In the case of Baden-Württemberg another difference was apparent. Although the CDU lost support only slightly in the other two Länder, it lost a lot of support in Baden-Württemberg. However, those who ascribe this loss to a different strategy that the CDU may have used in Baden-Württemberg are wrong. Similar to his colleagues in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt, Guido Wolf (54) opposed Angela Merkel's handling of the refugee crisis, but was immediately punished with reduced voter support. Winfried Kretschmann, on the other hand, supported Angela Merkel's approach to the crisis, which guaranteed him even more sympathy from conservatives.

The Green party's good results did not enhance the SPD's fortunes. Being the smaller coalition partner for five years, the SPD was never able to move its own policies forward and, in a way, these limitations almost mirrored those of the federal SPD. Both Kretschmann and Merkel – one on the Land and one on the federal level – overshadowed everything. The SPD was not able to benefit from the good government ratings and descended almost into irrelevance compared to the Green party. To illustrate the dramatic scale of this fall, the popularity of the chairman of the Baden-Württemberg SPD (since 2009) – Nils Schmid (42), former minister of finance and economy and candidate for prime minister in 2011 and 2016 – provides a stunning example. Whereas shortly before the election, 79 per cent of voters could name Winfried Kretschmann (candidate for the Green party) and 60 per cent knew Guido Wolf, a mere 50 per cent could identify Nils Schmid (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V. 2016, 31).

This lack of popular support had dire consequences for the SPD. After the election, it was not possible to form a Green-Red coalition. Instead, following the Hessian example, a Green-Black grand coalition was formed under Prime Minister Kretschmann, which banished the SPD to the opposition. In the coalition contract Baden-Württemberg gestalten: Verlässlich. Nachhaltig. Innovativ, the Green party's voice cannot be ignored. How much this coalition is based on one person will be shown in the future.

These findings on the importance of candidates also are reflected in our data. But, before proceeding to the logistic regression results, we take another look at the perceptions of candidates on our two dimensions, independent from voter choice, in the Länder elections (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
PERCEPTION OF THE FRONT RUNNERS
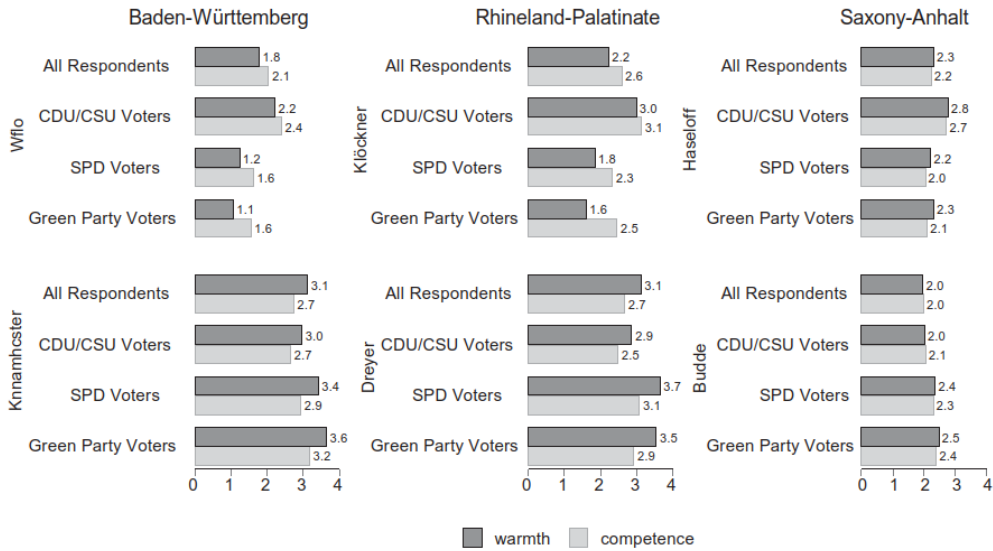
Notes: Own depiction. Voters indicate having voted for the stated party in the last federal election (2013).

Figure 2 illustrates the differences in voter support for the CDU (upper side of the bar charts), SPD and Green party candidates. Whereas CDU candidates in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate are perceived overall to be much lower in warmth and competence, the gap between voters who voted for the CDU in the last federal election and voters who voted for other parties in the same election is striking. The CDU candidates were able to positively engage their core voters, but not those of other parties. With respect to CDU voters, the difference in their support for Dreyer and Kretschmann is small. Also, in this sample, it is worth noting that the competence and warmth dimensions shift between the two classical factions – the CDU candidates score better in competence than in warmth, but the opposite is the case for the SPD and Green party candidates. As previously discussed in the Julia Klöckner example, the commercial exit poll data indicated good competence but no warm ratings. Open opposition to Angela Merkel's position on the refugee crisis may have reinforced this perception even further.

The electoral situation in Saxony-Anhalt, on the other hand, may be a special case with respect to individual-level data. In this Land, voters' perceptions of candidates are equally low for all political parties; even the name of the Saxony-Anhalt prime minister, Reiner Haseloff, does not stand out significantly.

However, high warmth and competence ratings in themselves do not necessarily imply that the candidates influenced voter choice. As previously mentioned in the Data and Methods section, the present study calculated a series of logistic regressions with planned voter choice as a dependent variable. Since the GLES data includes major candidates only, the analysis presented here incorporates results for the CDU and Green party in Baden-Württemberg and the CDU and SPD in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt only. This limitation also means that the candidate effects of the

Green party in Saxony-Anhalt and Rhineland-Palatinate, and the effects of the SPD candidates in Baden-Württemberg cannot be tested.[12]

Based on the model discussed previously, Figure 3 illustrates the impact of candidates on the 2016 Länder elections.

The logistic regression shows statistically significant candidate effects for Wolf, Kretschmann, Klöckner, and Dreyer. For example, the higher warmth ratings for Wolf raised the potential for voter support for the CDU in Baden-Württemberg, and the higher warmth ratings for Kretschmann had a positive effect on voter support for the Green party. In Rhineland-Palatinate the competence ratings, rather than the warmth dimension, were decisive. In Saxony-Anhalt no such effects are apparent.[13]

A further analysis of the average marginal effects of candidate effects at means (not shown) in each Land revealed that Kretschmann and Dreyer were the most influential candidates with marginal effects at around 0.35 (warmth for Kretschmann and competence for Dreyer), whereas the candidate effect for Klöckner was calculated to be 0.1 only (competence). This finding also means that, with respect to voter choice, Kretschmann and Dreyer were equally important according to the GLES data. However, the dimensionality is different. Presumably the reasons for this difference are twofold and related to the political culture of the Länder as well as the characteristics of the CDU candidates. Whereas in recent years political scandals in the comparatively rich Baden-Württemberg were shaped around the CDU's trustworthiness (EnBW, Stuttgart 21), the opposite is the case in Rhineland-Palatinate (Nürburgring, airport Frankfurt-Hahn). These Baden-Württemberg conflicts were connected to political elites, which might have led to a situation in which voters wanted to support candidates who embodied a break with the past.

FIGURE 3
IMPACT OF FRONT RUNNERS ON VOTE CHOICE (LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS)
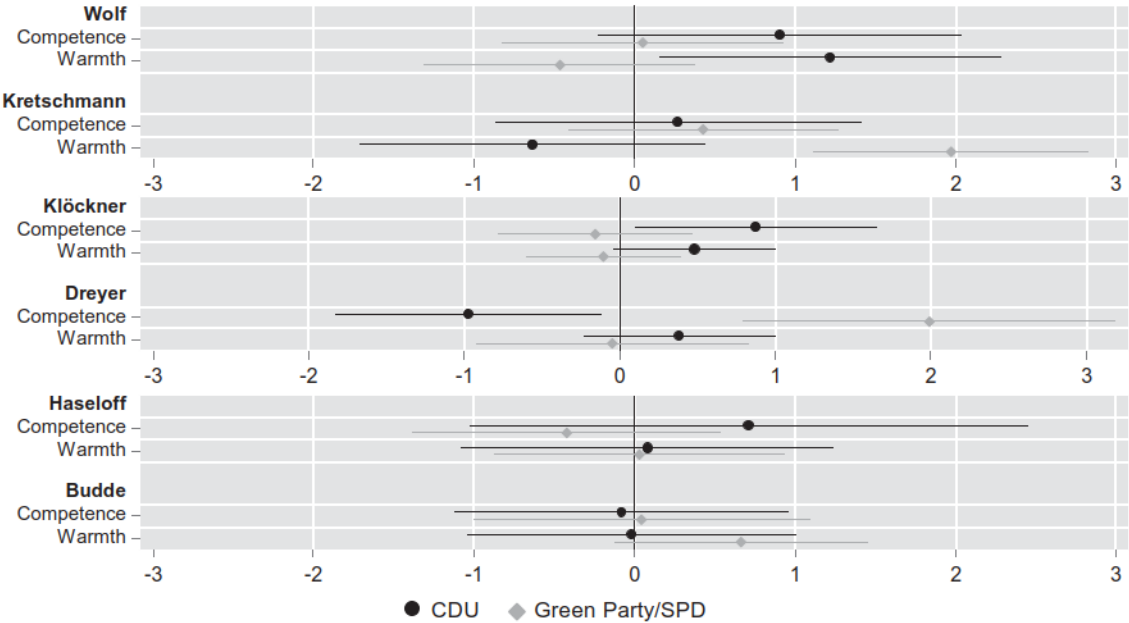
Notes: Symbols represent regression coefficients, and lines represent the 95 per cent confidence intervals; all other variables than candidate effects have been dropped for the purpose of visualisation, but have been included in the underlying model (please see Table A1 in the Appendix for the coefficients and measures of goodness of the full model).

First, the popularity of the prime minister was a bonus in the 2016 Länder elections, although this candidate effect varied. In Baden-Württemberg, where Kretschmann was popular with the whole population, support for the smaller coalition partner SPD suffered. In a similar way, Malu Dreyer had an impact on the SPD result in Rhineland-Palatinate, with the difference being that, in this case, support for the Green party was repressed by the good poll results of its former coalition partner. Second, Julia Klöckner's (CDU, Rhineland-Palatinate) and Guido Wolf's (CDU, Baden-Württemberg) strategy to oppose Angela Merkel's handling of the refugee crisis did not play well with voters. As a consequence, their credibility amongst voters suffered. Thus, compared to the candidates previously mentioned, Klöckner and Wolf had significantly lower candidate effects on the election results. Last, the candidate effects of the Green party in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt can be disregarded altogether (not shown in this analysis).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Whereas in 2011 the Fukushima catastrophe (together with the Stuttgart 21 issue) paved the path for the electoral successes of the Green party in all three observed Länder – and especially Baden-Württemberg – the issue composition in the Länder was different in the 2016 elections. The strong forecasts of potential success for Alternative für Deutschland in the 2016 elections upset the electoral status quo, and without knowing much about the Länder one could have assumed this also meant that voters would return to their roots or vote for the AfD rather than the Green party. Still, this situation was only true in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt. Even without the special issue composition of 2011 in Baden-Württemberg, the Green party was able to reassert its strong result of 2011. In the days following the election, much of the electoral success was attributed to a single person – Winfried Kretschmann.

Therefore, the present study took the opportunity of simultaneous Länder elections to shed further light on the role that frontrunners play in German Länder elections and to analyse what makes a frontrunner an asset for their parties.

In our analysis, we were able to demonstrate that, indeed, Winfried Kretschmann was an asset, as was put forward by the media and other observers. But no less important was Malu Dreyer for the SPD in Rhineland-Palatinate. The way in which both candidates were significant to the electoral results differed. While Kretschmann foremost was perceived as the warm candidate, in Dreyers' case, it was her competence that was decisive to the election result.

So, yes, the candidate can make a difference to election result – even amongst attached voters in German Länder. That is the first lesson that can be learned from our analysis. Secondly, and especially in the light of recent election results around the world, it is noteworthy that being warm might be as important as being competent and vice versa, but that high scores on one of the traits may make the difference between success and failure.

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NOTES

1. The process itself thereby is a cognitive one which paves the way to base party identification within the social identity approach (e.g. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).
2. Campbell et al distinguished between 'record and experience', 'qualification and abilities', and 'personal qualities' (Campbell et al. 1990, 54-55).
3. The dimensions warmth and competence are usually used within the literature which discusses the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 2002). However, as Frank Asbrock (2008, 48) was able to show, political science also uses those dimensions regularly, even though the labels differ.
4. We therefore also recalculated our analysis using thermometer scales for all candidates (including Green party, Left party and so on) instead of our dimensionality items. However, our results are very robust to those changes.
5. As an alternative to this proceeding we could also have used the competence on solving the most important problem(mip)/the most important problems, as has been done before by other authors. However, since our measurement inherits more variance in answers, which has a positive effect on the estimation (lowers multicollinearity), we decided to stay with this measurement. However, again, we also tested using mip-scales instead of our measurement, which did not significantly affect the results of the analysis.
6. As of 13 July 2016 Infratest dimap listed on its website in the so-called 'Sonntagsfrage (bundesweit)' that the vote share rose from 15 to 21 per cent at the federal level between 10 and 24 March 2011 (Infratest dimap 2016a). Other non-university based research institutes offer similar predictions. This is also true for the Länder elections.
7. The Green Party has not been part of the Landtag since 1998.
8. As of 13 July 2016 Wahlrecht.de listed on its website the latest forecast of the Landtagswahlumfragen before the elections, ranging from 9 per cent in Rhineland-Palatinate, toll per cent in Baden-Württemberg and 18 per cent in Saxony-Anhalt.
9. However, the question used by Infratest dimap here is oversimplified and the result should not be taken too seriously. Not all who said they voted for the AfD because they were disappointed were protest voters, and vice versa. See also Schwarzbözl and Fatke (2016).

10. Pedersen-Indices: Rhineland-Palatinate 14.4; Baden-Württemberg 23.4; Saxony-Anhalt 24.1; Pedersen-Indices without the AfD: Rhineland-Palatinate 8.1; Baden-Württemberg 15.8; Saxony-Anhalt 11.9. Please see Pedersen (1979) for calculation and interpretation.

11. Whereas age does neither indicate qualification nor individual characteristics of the candidates, the effects of candidates' ages on turnout of young voters have been proven elsewhere (e.g. Pomante and Schraufnagel 2015). Additionally – especially in the run-up to the 2011 election in Baden-Württemberg – it has been part of the discussion whether Kretschmann was not already too old to become prime minister. For this reason we included age as information for the readers.

12. However, we have tested their effects by using alternative measurements – namely thermometer scales – which supports our argumentation.

13. Since party identification with the Green party predicted the outcomes perfectly, this variable has been excluded in Saxony-Anhalt. We selected this approach instead of dealing with the separation (see for example Rainey 2016), since dropping it should have raised the estimated effect rather than lowering it. Thus, in the worst case, the candidate effects have been underestimated.

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APPENDIX
TABLE A1
EFFECTS OF CANDIDATES, ESTIMATED ISSUE DISTANCES AND PARTY IDENTIFICATION
ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN THE SPRING 2016 LA¨NDER ELECTIONS (LOGISTIC
REGRESSIONS)

Land Vote choice	BW CDU	BW B90	RLP CDU	RLP SPD	SA CDU	SA SPD
Candidates						
CDU: Competence	0.90	0.05	0.87[*]	-0.16	0.71	-0.42
	(0.58)	(0.45)	(0.39)	(0.32)	(0.89)	(0.49)
CDU: Warmth	1.22*	-0.47	0.48	-0.11	0.08	0.03
	(0.54)	(0.43)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.59)	(0.46)
Green party: Competence	0.27	0.43				
	(0.58)	(0.43)				
Green party: Warmth	-0.64	1.97[***]				
	(0.55)	(0.44)				
SPD: Competence			-0.97[*]	1.99[**]	-0.08	0.04
			(0.44)	(0.61)	(0.53)	(0.54)
SPD: Warmth			0.38	-0.05	-0.02	0.66
			(0.32)	(0.45)	(0.52)	(0.40)
Issues						
Δ SPD: Socioeconomic	-0.31	0.36	-0.25	-0.05	-0.26	0.52[*]
	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.26)
Δ SPD: Libertarian-authoritarian	-0.01	0.03	-0.25	-0.04	-0.18	-0.43
	(0.28)	(0.18)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.29)	(0.27)
Δ CDU: Socioeconomic	0.12	-0.02	0.20	-0.19	-0.29	-0.40[***]
	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.22)	(0.12)
Δ CDU: Libertarian-authoritarian	-0.21	0.08	-0.00	0.10	0.00	0.15
	(0.19)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.16)	(0.14)
Δ Green party: Socioeconomic	0.35	-0.42[*]	-0.05	0.02	0.11	-0.38
	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.24)
Δ Green party: Libertarian-authoritarian	-0.10	-0.27[*]	0.21	-0.21[*]	-0.12	0.39
	(0.22)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Party identification (R: CDU)						
SPD	-4.13[***]	-1.09	-3.21[***]	4.23[***]	4.23[***]	3.71[***]
	(0.95)	(0.70)	(0.52)	(0.72)	(1.09)	(0.95)
Green party	-3.78[*]	2.81[***]	-4.42[***]	1.73[*]		
	(1.60)	(0.79)	(1.17)	(0.71)		
Other/none	-4.11[**]	0.03	-2.88[***]	1.36[*]	-5.10[***]	0.91
	(1.42)	(0.66)	(0.66)	(0.62)	(1.08)	(0.93)
Education (R: Low)						
Medium	1.50	-1.42[*]	0.27	-0.35	0.45	1.14
	(0.83)	(0.69)	(0.61)	(0.64)	(0.94)	(1.20)
High	2.22[*]	-0.64	0.48	-0.52	1.70	1.00
	(0.93)	(0.65)	(0.53)	(0.55)	(1.04)	(1.26)
Sex: Female	-1.13	0.72	0.51	0.08	0.92	1.45[*]
	(0.79)	(0.53)	(0.46)	(0.44)	(0.71)	(0.63)
Age	0.00	-0.03	-0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)
N	201	201	245	245	173	173
McFadden Pseudo R^2	0.627	0.538	0.503	0.531	0.615	0.408

Notes: Entries are logistic regressions coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

*Level of significance: $p < 0.1$.

**Level of significance: $p < 0.05$.

***Level of significance: $p < 0.01$.