

# The 'Valley of the Innocent'? Large West TV and Populism in East Germany

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## Abstract :

West German TV was a key source of uncensored information in Socialist East Germany (1949-1990) - so important that areas without it became condescendingly known as the 'valley of the innocent' (Tal der Ahnungslosen). We show that these areas without historic exposure to West TV have 10-20% higher vote shares today for the right-wing populist party *Alternative for Germany (AfD)*. This finding is highly robust, in particular to controlling for county fixed effects, the distance to West Germany and IT infrastructure. However, this difference was not reflected in voting behaviour or attitudes before the AfD's foundation in 2013. Instead, micro data suggests that to date, respondents in areas without historic exposure to West TV rely less on public broadcasters and more on social media and alternative news sites to inform their voting decisions. This increases the returns to the high presence of the AfD on social media and reduces the dissuasive effect of negative AfD coverage by public broadcasters.