

Geopolitics on a Jersey: Gazprom's Sponsorship of FC Schalke 04 and its Soft Power Implications

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Abstract

Throughout the past two decades, elite sports, especially soccer, have seen an onslaught of lucrative investments by authoritarian states. Media outlets have branded these investments as “sportswashing,” while contemporary scholars have adapted soft power theory to sports in order to measure the geopolitical implications of these state-backed investments.¹ However, scholarship intersecting sports and soft power is limited to a broad, transnational scale, and primarily focuses on the diplomatic efficacy of mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup and Olympics. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill a gap in the literature and measure the soft power gains from a sports sponsorship on a regional level. More specifically, this paper analyzes Gazprom's sponsorship of German soccer club FC Schalke 04 to determine if the state-backed sponsorship successfully increased Russia's soft power among FC Schalke fans. With minimal scholarship in this area, I draw from social psychology theory to develop a unique and nuanced causal mechanism to measure soft power gains from a sports sponsorship. I then apply this causal mechanism to my FC Schalke case study and test two distinct hypotheses in order to identify soft power indicators from Gazprom's sponsorship. I

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first examine FC Schalke club politics to determine whether Schalke fans experienced a ‘good-will effect’ towards Gazprom and Russia, then track voting data from four Bundestag elections to measure if this ‘good-will effect’ became a motivating bias for pro-Russia political behavior among the FC Schalke constituency. With both confirming and disconfirming evidence for pro-Russia bias among Schalke fans, my ultimate soft power implications are ambiguous. However, this paper still provides a more nuanced mechanism to measure soft power as a result of a sports sponsorship and illuminates the need for future studies to further measure the geopolitical implications of sports investments by authoritarian regimes.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, imagery and branding from authoritarian regimes have become commonplace in elite soccer. From club ownership by UAE and Qatari heads-of-state¹ to corporate sponsorship from state-backed airlines,² to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar³ and acquisition of English club Newcastle United by the Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund,⁴ authoritarian regimes, primarily Gulf Monarchies, have become increasingly calculated, but also overt, with their investments. Politicians and media have branded these recent investments as “sportswashing” – “trying to use the glamour of sport as a public relations tool to improve [a state’s] image.”⁵ Successful play in competition, hosting of a mega-event, or a lucrative sponsorship of a popular

[1] Jamie Doward, “Amnesty Criticises Manchester City over ‘Sportswashing.’” *The Guardian*, November 11, 2018.

[2] Barney Ronay, “Sportswashing and the Tangled Web of Europe’s Biggest Clubs,” *The Guardian*, February 15, 2019.

[3] Spencer Bokart-Lindell, “The Qatar World Cup Is Peak ‘Sportswashing.’ But Will It Work?” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2022.

[4] “Newcastle United Deal Was Always ‘Blatant’ Saudi Sportswashing,” *Amnesty International UK*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/newcastle-united-deal-was-always-blatant-saudi-sportswashing>.

[5] Lynn Maalouf, “Saudi Arabia: Launch of Women’s Football League Should Not Distract from Abysmal Human Rights Situation,” *Amnesty International*, August 13, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/saudi-arabia-launch-of-womens-football-league-should-not-distract-from-abysmal-human-rights-situation/>.

club team, especially on the international scale of elite soccer, can “cut through the noise of the global information society to disseminate a series of widely heard, reputation-promoting messages over a sustained period.”⁶ In other words, these states have engaged in sportswashing in an attempt to reframe negative socio-political narratives into positive branding based on the cultural connectedness of soccer. While popular media label these investments sportswashing, scholars argue that states invest in elite sport to increase their international prestige through “soft power.”⁷ Soft power occurs when a state highlights its positive social, cultural, and political qualities in order to appear more attractive and legitimize its policy preferences to other international actors. In this context, sportswashing regimes attempt to increase their soft power and prestige through the cultural resonance generated by state investment in elite sports.

While authoritarian regimes have increasingly engaged in sportswashing within international soccer, no investment scheme has been as robust as Russia’s. For example, during the 2014-15 European soccer season, England’s Chelsea FC and Germany’s FC Schalke 04 played each other in the UEFA Champions League tournament.⁸ This matchup between Europe’s most prestigious clubs was largely funded by Russia. In 2014, Chelsea FC was owned by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, while FC Schalke 04 was sponsored by Russian state-owned oil-conglomerate Gazprom, which was also the official sponsor of the UEFA Champions League. Throughout the 2010s, Russia asserted itself as a powerful entity in international soccer through club ownership, corporate sponsorship, and the hosting of the 2018 World Cup. At the same time, Russia’s investments were juxtaposed with its declining prestige.

[6] Paul Brannagan and Richard Giulianotti, “The Soft Power-Soft Disempowerment Nexus: The Case of Qatar,” *International Affairs* 94 (September 7, 2018): 1181, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy125>.

[7] Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan, “Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualizing States’ ‘Soft Power’ Strategies through Sports Mega-Events,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27.2 (April 2, 2016): 251–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791>.

[8] Haylett, Trevor. “Stubborn Schalke Fight Back to Hold Chelsea.” *UEFA Champions League*, September 17, 2014.

In the past two decades, Russia has faced increasing criticism from the international community for democratic backsliding and antagonistic foreign policy, and Russian investors were ultimately excommunicated from soccer following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. If Russia's investments were ultimately undermined by foreign policy, then what can their strategy tell us about the efficacy of sportswashing? How does a state generate prestige through sports? What are the limits of this phenomenon? Why sportswash at all?

This paper will attempt to discover *why* Russia invested in international soccer and test whether these investments *successfully increased* Russia's soft power. However, scholarship about sports as a soft power tool is limited in scope, mostly focusing on global mega-events and sponsorship on a transnational level. Therefore, this paper will attempt to analyze soft power at a regional scale and specifically test how Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke 04 influenced Russian soft power among everyday Schalke supporters within Germany.

With that said, I will first review existing literature about soft power theory and soft power within sports. I will then contextualize the Gazprom case study, providing a brief historical analysis of Russia's engagement with soft power, sports diplomacy, and the rationale behind Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke within the soft power framework. In the following section, I will develop soft power's causal mechanisms within my sports-specific case study and discuss my methodology to test soft power among FC Schalke supporters. Finally, I will conclude this paper with a discussion of my results and the ultimate soft power implications. I will define the limits of soft power through sports investment and the efficacy of sportswashing as a foreign policy strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Explanation of Soft Power

Soft power has become an important component of international relations theory, as the interconnectedness of information has allowed for states to influence policy and behavior based on implicit messaging,

rather than overt coercion. According to international relations theorist Joseph Nye, who coined the concept, soft power occurs when an international actor uses its socio-political characteristics to implicitly co-opt other actors to define their interests and policy similar to its own.⁹ For Nye, the deemphasis of military power in the post-Cold War world has opened the door for alternative “intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions” to influence interstate political interactions.¹⁰ States can mobilize these socio-cultural power resources to “communicate with and attract the publics of other countries.”¹¹ In generating soft power, a state will engage in performative politics to legitimize itself and its policy preferences within international diplomacy. This legitimacy should result in increased prestige and ultimately inspire voluntary deference to the state’s preferred policy from other international actors. According to Nye’s logic, just as “we like those who are similar to us,” states will shape their policy in concordance with those that demonstrate “likeable” qualities.¹²

Scholars have debated soft power’s mechanisms, theoretical vagueness, and empirical limitations. Some have argued that soft power is subjective because what may be considered *attractive* can differ between the acting state and its soft power target. In other words, attraction politics can be fruitless if the target has a different political-cultural orientation.¹³ As a result of its ambiguity, scholars have theorized that soft power can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly. On one hand, soft power may not actually be “soft,” as it can be deliberately employed as a public relations campaign towards a specific audience.¹⁴ On the oth-

[9] Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy*, 80 (1990): 153–171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>; “The Changing Nature of World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105.2 (1990): 177–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151022>.

[10] Nye, “Soft Power,” 167.

[11] Joseph S. Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 95.

[12] Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, United States: PublicAffairs, 2011): 91.

[13] Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (MD, United States: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2011).

Janice Bially Mattern, “Why ‘Soft Power’ Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the

er hand, international actors can passively express soft power through socio-cultural stereotypes.¹⁵ Other scholars have attempted to conceptualize the structural process of soft power attraction, as well as resources that constitute a soft power “asset” used by a state to increase their international prestige.¹⁶ Finally, scholars have theorized that states can combine attractive soft power assets with tangible “hard power” resources (military strength, economic influence, natural resources) to enact more persuasive “smart power” strategies primarily based on nation-building and development.¹⁷ Although scholars have not settled on a concrete “mechanism” for soft power, Nye’s “power of attractiveness” has become a legitimate foreign policy strategy, with international actors using soft power principles in attempts to implicitly (or explicitly) co-opt others to support their preferred diplomatic policy.¹⁸ This paper likewise follows Nye’s soft power theory and assumes soft power can be deliberately used as a foreign policy tool to increase a state’s attractiveness.

Soft Power and Sports

Sports have become an outlet for states to engage in soft power politics, as the transnational nature of elite sport provides a global audience for states to advertise attractive qualities through positive imagery and messaging. The most prominent outlet for sports diplomacy is the host-

Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics,” *Millennium* 33.3 (June 1, 2005): 583–612, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031601>; Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, “Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power,” *Media, War & Conflict* 7.1 (2014): 70–84.

[15] Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power*, 37–39.

[16] Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power*, 53; Steven Lukes, “Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds,” *Millennium* 33.3 (June 1, 2005): 477–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031201>; Ty Solomon, “The Affective Underpinnings of Soft Power,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20.3 (September 1, 2014): 720–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113503479>.

[17] Joseph S. Nye, “Smart Power,” in *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, United States: PublicAffairs, 2011): 207–35, and, Joseph S. Nye, “Hard, Soft, and Smart Power,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, ed. Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588862.013.0031>.

[18] Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power and American Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 119.2 (June 22, 2004): 255–71.

ing of a mega-event such as the FIFA World Cup or Olympics, which offers states a platform to increase soft power by highlighting positive socio-cultural characteristics while under the international microscope of its event.¹⁹ For example, Germany's hosting of the 2006 World Cup helped to improve its image and geo-political status post-reunification. The German government deliberately highlighted Germany's cultural identity, modern infrastructure, and technological innovation, which resulted in a soft power boost that increased foreign investment and tourism.²⁰ Likewise, China used the 2008 Beijing Olympics to showcase its attractive social, cultural, economic, and technological achievements to a western-dominated audience and elevate the country's status as a modern state.²¹ In the same way, sports mega-events can be used to increase national pride and an authoritarian regime's support base, thus increasing a state's domestic soft power.²² During the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics, the Soviet Union/Russia generated patriotism and domestic soft power by framing the mega-event as an opportunity to showcase Russian hegemony and strength through sporting success and

[19] Jonathan Grix and Donna Lee, "Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction," *Global Society* 27.4 (October 1, 2013): 521–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.827632>; Jonathan Grix, Paul Michael Brannagan, and Barrie Houlihan, "Interrogating States' Soft Power Strategies: A Case Study of Sports Mega-Events in Brazil and the UK," *Global Society* 29.3 (July 3, 2015): 463–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2015.1047743>; Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan, "Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualizing States' 'Soft Power' Strategies through Sports Mega-Events," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27.2 (April 2, 2016): 251–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791>.

[20] Grix and Brannagan, "Of Mechanisms and Myths."

[21] Chwen Chwen Chen, Cinzia Colapinto, and Qing Luo, "The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights into China's Soft Power," *Visual Studies* 27.2 (June 1, 2012): 188–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2012.677252>.

[22] Jonathan Grix and Nina Kramareva, "The Sochi Winter Olympics and Russia's Unique Soft Power Strategy," *Sport in Society* 20.4 (April 3, 2017): 461–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1100890>; Nina Kramareva and Jonathan Grix, "'War and Peace' at the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics: The Role of Hard and Soft Power in Russian Identity," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35.14 (September 22, 2018): 1407–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2019.1610400>; Sven Daniel Wolfe, "'For the Benefit of Our Nation': Unstable Soft Power in the 2018 Men's World Cup in Russia," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 12.4 (October 1, 2020): 545–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2020.1839532>.

infrastructure achievement.²³ The hosting of a mega-event is the primary mechanism by which states have used sports to increase their soft power and attractiveness to both broad global audiences and a targeted domestic support base, and these mega-events have received the bulk of the attention from soft power and sports scholarship.

While mega-events loudly increase a state's profile and broadly highlight its attractive qualities, sports sponsorships are another way to subtly increase soft power through positive fan attachments. Sponsorships can communicate specific social, economic, and cultural ideals to a target audience, the fans of the sponsored club, in order to improve awareness of a state's attractive qualities and increase prestige with sporting success.²⁴ However, there is limited scholarship about the soft power intentions and implications of state-backed corporate sponsors, and current empirical results are inconsistent. Some cases of state-backed corporate sponsorship within sports have generated tourism, positive press coverage, and prestige for the sponsors' home states, but others have not.²⁵ On one hand, 'Fly Emirates' and 'Etihad Airways,' the Emirati state-backed jersey sponsors of Manchester City FC, Real Madrid, AC Milan, and numerous other elite European soccer clubs, have significantly improved both those airlines' revenue and the UAE's state "brand strength."²⁶ On the other hand, the 'Qatar Airways' jersey sponsorship of Paris Saint Germain and FC Barcelona generated negligible soft power gains for Qatar, as the state adversely damaged its prestige as a result of human rights abuses during stadium construction for the 2022 World Cup.²⁷ While state-backed sponsorship has become a prominent method to increase brand awareness within sports, especially among authoritarian

[23] Kramareva and Grix, "'War and Peace' at the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics."

[24] Simon Chadwick, Paul Widdop, and Nicholas Burton, "Soft Power Sports Sponsorship – A Social Network Analysis of a New Sponsorship Form," *Journal of Political Marketing* 21.2 (April 3, 2022): 196–217, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2020.1723781>.

[25] John S. Krzyzaniak, "The Soft Power Strategy of Soccer Sponsorships," *Soccer & Society* 19.4 (May 19, 2018): 498–515, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2016.1199426>.

[26] *Ibid.*, 509.

[27] *Ibid.*, 508.

regimes, it is unclear whether these sponsorships ultimately generate soft power, as there is a dearth of literature studying this topic.

SOFT POWER IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE RATIONALE FOR GAZPROM'S SPONSORSHIP

Soft Power in Russian Foreign Policy

Russia began using the politics of attraction to rebuild its image during Vladimir Putin's second Presidency, from 2004-2008. In a July 2004 speech to Russian diplomats, Putin declared that "relations between CIS states and Russia should be made as attractive as possible."²⁸ Russia's initial soft power engagements were focused on strengthening its influence within Eurasia with "large information and cultural centers for work with expatriates."²⁹ Later in the decade, Russian leaders began to explicitly reference attraction politics within foreign policy rhetoric. For example, Russia's 2008 Foreign Policy Concept aimed to "[promote] the Russian language and... culture" in "foreign states."³⁰ In a 2008 interview with *Rossiyska Gazetta*, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov remarked that "[Russia's] diverse links with compatriots should be constructed" cognizant of the growing role of "'soft power' – an ability to affect the environment through... forms of attractiveness."³¹ By 2010, Russia had adopted explicit soft power tactics not only within CIS states, but also in Eastern Europe. Most notably, the Kremlin began its 'Russian World' foreign policy initiative to construct a narrative of pan-Russian identity among former Soviet states, especially Ukraine, using socio cultural institutions such as the Russian Orthodox Church, NGOs such as the

[28] CIS, or The Commonwealth of Independent States, is a Eurasian regional inter-governmental organization formed in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[29] Fiona Hill, "Moscow Discovers Soft Power," *Current History* 105.693 (October 1, 2006): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2006.105.693.341>.

[30] Dmitry Medvedev and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," July 12, 2008, https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf.

[31] Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin, "Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy," *Politics* 35.3-4 (November 1, 2015): 352, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12109>.

‘Russkyi Mir’ (Russian World) Foundation, and mass media outlets, such as the English-language TV channel ‘Russia Today.’³² By 2013, Russia had officially committed to soft power as a foreign policy tool to strengthen its image and international standing, with the Kremlin initiated projects helping promote attractive qualities like culture and national identity.³³

History of Russian Sports Diplomacy

While Russia’s soft power strategy primarily focused on projecting a pan-Russian identity across Eurasia, the Kremlin also pursued sports diplomacy through mega-events as a way to increase its attractiveness on a global scale. For example, Russia’s promotional campaign for the 2014 Sochi Olympics, titled ‘Gateway to the Future,’ highlighted Russia’s commitment to modernization through a state-of-the-art Olympic Games.³⁴ For Russia, the Sochi Olympics was intended to showcase Russia’s attractiveness as a modern state with appealing tourist destinations like Sochi. This rhetoric was again echoed in “Russia’s Information Support Objective of the Foreign Policy Concept 2013, 2016,” which aimed to “[deliver] the international community unbiased information about Russia’s... process and plans of its socioeconomic development and Russia’s cultural and research achievements.”³⁵ Thus, the Sochi Olympics was an effective component of the Kremlin’s soft power strategy because it was used to showcase Russia’s ingenuity and unique cultural identity to an international audience.

Russia’s soft power rhetoric for the 2018 FIFA World Cup mirrored that of the Sochi Olympics. Russia marketed the tournament as an opportunity to promote infrastructure development, social advancement,

[32] Valentina Feklyunina, “Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the ‘Russian World(s),’” *European Journal of International Relations* 22.4 (December 1, 2016): 782-783, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115601200>.

[33] *Ibid*, 781.

[34] Nina Kramareva, “An Analysis of Russia’s ‘Alternative’ Soft Power Strategy and National Identity Discourse via Sports Mega-Events” (d_ph, University of Birmingham, 2018): 280, <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8589/>.

[35] *Ibid*, 285.

and Russia's openness to the world.³⁶ Alexei Sorokin, a former Russian diplomat and head of the 2018 World Cup organizing committee, confirmed the Kremlin's sports diplomacy strategy when he proclaimed in 2014 that "football is foreign policy."³⁷ According to the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, mega-events such as the Olympics and World Cup were "an important element of foreign policy activities of the Russian Federation... to ensure that the world has an objective view of the country."³⁸ In other words, Russia employed a soft power strategy in sporting events as a means to counter negative narratives and stereotypes expressed by western media. For example, Russia highlighted its religious diversity during the 2018 World Cup by emphasizing the Russian Orthodox churches in the host city of Nizhny Novgorod along with Mosques in Kazan.³⁹ In another use of performative politics during the World Cup, Russian cities displayed soccer street art that would normally be characteristic in Western Europe to show acceptance of Western culture.⁴⁰ Thus, Russia used the 2018 World Cup as an outlet to advertise its positive socio-cultural characteristics, constructing various attractive narratives that highlighted Russia's unique identity as well as its embracing of Western cultural imagery and modernity. Similar to the Sochi Olympics, Russia used the 2018 World Cup as an outlet to advertise its positive socio-cultural characteristics and increase soft power.

In addition to mega-events, Russia also engaged in soft power politics within European club soccer through its state-owned oil conglomerate, Gazprom. In 2005, Gazprom purchased 75% ownership of Zenit St. Petersburg⁴¹ and turned the club into an attractive destination

[36] Wolfe, "Benefit of Our Nation," 284-285.

[37] Anna Kemper, "Gazprom: Schalke ist es Wurst, woher das Geld kommt," trans. Google Translate, *Die Zeit*, March 20, 2014, <https://www.zeit.de/2014/13/russland-gazprom-schalke-04-werbung/komplettansicht>.

[38] Kramareva, "An Analysis of Russia's 'Alternative' Soft Power Strategy and National Identity Discourse via Sports Mega-Events," 284-285.

[39] Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, "The 2018 World Cup in Russia and Its Regimes of Visibility: The Cases of Nizhny Novgorod and Kazan," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 44.5 (October 1, 2020): 381, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723520919814>.

[40] Ibid, 383-384.

[41] Jean Julien Beer, "Gazprom: Bis Zu 100 Mio. Für Schalke," trans. Google Translate,

for high-profile players, an outlet to display Russian infrastructure achievement, and a competitive mainstay within elite European soccer. Through Zenit, Gazprom - and by extension, Russia - became culturally resonant within European soccer discourse. In 2012, Zenit shocked European soccer with the signings of rising stars Hulk and Axel Witsel, who were courted by Europe's most prestigious clubs. In an example of Russian soft power at work, a 2012 article from *The Guardian* cited Russia's "huge infrastructure improvements" as a reason why "more and more top players seem likely to follow Hulk and Witsel to Russia."⁴² In other words, Zenit's recruitment of high-profile, western players became an example of Russia's cultural attractiveness as a modernizing state. In addition to player transfers, Zenit's Gazprom Arena, a state of the art stadium partially funded by Gazprom, was similarly used as a tool to increase Zenit's profile in European soccer. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Gazprom Arena was set to host the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final,⁴³ a one-day mega-event that would draw similar crowds and viewers to that of the World Cup. While not an explicit soft power policy from the Kremlin, Gazprom's ownership and lucrative financing of Zenit St. Petersburg increased Russia's relevance within European soccer, and further broadcasted the state's positive socio cultural qualities to a European audience as a competitive mainstay and attractive destination within western-dominated elite soccer.

In addition to Zenit, Gazprom broadly projected its brand through partnership with UEFA and FIFA, the two largest governing bodies in world soccer. Between 2012-2020, Gazprom became an official sponsor of the UEFA Champions League, all FIFA international competitions (including the 2018 World Cup), and the 2020 UEFA European Cham-

kicker.de (*Kicker*, October 10, 2006), https://www.kicker.de/gazprom_bis-zu-100-mio-fuer-schalke-355928/artikel.

[42] Paul Doyle, "Zenit St Petersburg Hope Hulk and Axel Witsel Money Will Do the Talking," *The Guardian*, September 4, 2012, sec. Football, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2012/sep/04/zenit-st-petersburg-hulk-alex-witsel>.

[43] Evans, Simon. "UEFA Moves Champions League Final from St Petersburg to Paris." *Reuters*, February 25, 2022, sec. Sports. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/uefa-moves-champions-league-final-st-petersburg-paris-2022-02-25/>.

pionships.⁴⁴ These sponsorships allowed Gazprom to broadcast its imagery, commercial ambitions, and attractive qualities to a broader European audience. At the same time, Gazprom introduced its “Football for Friendship” charitable organization, and the company frequently broadcasted its philanthropy through UEFA/FIFA imagery. For example, when announcing the renewal of Gazprom’s sponsorship in 2021, UEFA Chief Guy-Laurent Epstein not only emphasized Gazprom’s “heritage in football,” but also their “Football for Friendship programme, which helps give youngsters valuable life skills.”⁴⁵ Gazprom’s partnerships with UEFA and FIFA allowed the company to highlight its philanthropic qualities and socio-cultural attractiveness as a proponent of equitable access to global soccer. In other words, Gazprom’s partnerships exemplified soft power politics because the company leveraged its sponsorships to frame itself as an altruistic actor while concurrently promoting its energy ambitions.

Gazprom’s Energy Politics and the Soft Power Sponsorship of FC Schalke

In 2006, Gazprom raised gas prices for Ukraine, which injured Russia’s credibility as an energy supplier to the European market. For skeptical European decision-makers, Gazprom’s dispute with Ukraine indicated that the Kremlin would “consider the weaponization” of energy resources in order to achieve geo-political goals.⁴⁶ The negative publicity clashed with Russia’s energy ambitions, as the Kremlin had formulated plans to expand Gazprom’s transit network. In 2005, Gazprom joined with other European energy suppliers to construct the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany underneath the Baltic Sea. With lim-

[44] BBC News. “Fifa Admits Scandal Deters New Sponsors.” July 24, 2015, sec. *Business*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-33649448>.

[45] UEFA.com. “Gazprom Partners with UEFA National Team Football and Renews UEFA Champions League Sponsorship | Inside UEFA.” *UEFA*, May 19, 2021. <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/0269-124ffe0cee51-2308c1da4764-1000--gazprom-partners-with-uefa-national-team-football-and-renews/>.

[46] Valentina Feklyunina, “Russia’s International Images and Its Energy Policy. An Unreliable Supplier?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64.3 (May 1, 2012): 454, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2012.661923>.

ited political influence, Russia needed to rebuild Europe's trust in Gazprom in order to advance the Nord Stream project. As such, the Kremlin campaigned to improve Gazprom's image, initiating image-rebuilding strategies at the 2006 G8 Summit,⁴⁷ as well as targeted public relations campaigns in the UK and Germany through Gazprom's regional subsidiaries.⁴⁸ To rebuild its energy credibility and expedite the Nord Stream pipeline project, Russia launched a soft power campaign intended to improve Gazprom's attractiveness in Europe.

Gazprom's most consequential soft power maneuver was the 2006 sponsorship of Germany's second most popular soccer club: FC Schalke 04. While officially a corporate sponsorship, Gazprom's investment was brokered at the highest levels of government between Vladimir Putin and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, then an advisor for Gazprom.⁴⁹ Formal negotiations occurred between FC Schalke's Supervisory Board⁵⁰ and Alexei Miller, Gazprom's chairman who was considered a "close confidant" of Vladimir Putin.⁵¹ In a further example of the sponsorship's political importance, the official contract was finalized at the 2006 Petersburg Dialogue in Dresden, an annual diplomatic summit between Germany and Russia. This summit was attended by high-level politicians and business leaders, including Vladimir Putin and Chancellor Angela Merkel.⁵² When Clemens Tönnies, Chair of Schalke's Supervisory Board, officially announced the sponsorship, he held a Gaz-

[47] Ibid, 458.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Reinsch, Michael. "Eine Flamme Züngelt Auf Schalker Brust." trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, November 10, 2006. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/millionen-deal-perfekt-eine-flamme-zuengelt-auf-schalker-brust-1385281.html>.

[50] The FC Schalke Supervisory Board oversee day-to-day operations of the club. Members of the supervisory board are elected to three-year terms by the Schalke supporters. The Chair of the Supervisory Board is the highest-ranking member and has ultimate authority over club operations.

[51] Reinsch, "Millionen-Deal perfekt."

[52] "Russian-German Talks," DW (Germany), October 9, 2006, <https://www.dw.com/en/not-everything-can-revolve-around-gas/a-2199460>.

prom-branded Schalke jersey alongside Vladimir Putin.⁵³ While the Kremlin did not characterize Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke as an official foreign policy maneuver, its negotiations involved key decision-makers and received political priority, suggesting its importance to Russia's diplomatic strategy.

Within the soft power framework, Gazprom's sponsorship appears a targeted investment to improve Russia's attractiveness among a key German constituency. FC Schalke is located in Gelsenkirchen, a working-class city with a population of about 260,000 within the industrial Ruhr Valley. Gelsenkirchen, in particular, was a nucleus for German coal mining, and FC Schalke likewise developed the reputation as "an underdog working-class club tied to the local mining industry." FC Schalke supporters prided themselves on their club's "participatory emotional community based on mining heritage."⁵⁴ The club's working-class identity and connection to Germany's energy industry made it a perfect beneficiary of Gazprom's sponsorship. In other words, FC Schalke fans would be expected to find Gazprom a resonant partner for the club and support the Nord Stream project. Russian negotiators likewise highlighted Schalke's blue-collar identity as a reason for the sponsorship. According to Sergei Fursenko, Chief Executive of Gazprom German subsidiary Lentransgaz and negotiator of the sponsorship:⁵⁵

"...[FC Schalke 04]'s image, its history, its unique bond with its fans and the international ambitions of its team harmonize well with the spirit of Gazprom...our sponsorship will be an important step to optimize the brand awareness of Gazprom and to improve the way it is perceived on

[53] Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, "President Vladimir Putin Met with Klement Tennis, Director of German Football Club Schalke-04, and Sergei Fursenko, Head of Lentransgaz and President of St Petersburg Football Club Zenit," Kremlin: President of Russia, October 11, 2006, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/36420>.

[54] Julia Wambach, "Feeling Political Through a Football Club: FC Schalke 04, 1904–2020," in *Feeling Political: Emotions and Institutions since 1789*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022): 252.

[55] Feklyunina, "Russia's International Images and Its Energy Policy. An Unreliable Supplier?"

European markets.”

For Fursenko, Gazprom’s branding would resonate with the coal-mining identity of Schalke supporters. He suggested the sponsorship was a deliberate attempt to rebuild Gazprom’s image among a trusting constituency. In the same way, Alexei Miller in a 2011 interview specifically confirmed the sponsorship’s image-rebuilding strategy: “Schalke is a brand in German football the same way that Gazprom is a brand here [in Russia]. Sport and culture bring people together. They help us respect and trust each other more.”⁵⁶ Miller’s comments further implied that Gazprom’s investment was intended to rebuild ‘respect and trust’ among Germans. In sponsoring Schalke, Gazprom intended to engage in soft power politics and improve its image and attractiveness among a constituency with strong ties to the German Energy Industry.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Soft Power’s Causal Mechanisms Within a Sports Sponsorship

Principles of social psychology provide an additional theoretical basis to my research by explaining soft power’s causal mechanisms and illuminating discernable soft power indicators from Gazprom’s sponsorship. With that said, German soccer fans who pay money to become an official member of their club are considered the most dedicated fans and therefore most likely to hold strong emotional attachments and incorporate their club into their own identities.⁵⁷ Emotionally attached fans are likely to develop a “good-will effect” when their club’s corporate sponsor appears credible, loyal, and fundamental to the club’s stature

[56] “Spiegel Interview with Gazprom Chief Alexei Miller: ‘We Are Only Serving Our Customers’ Demand for Russian Gas,” *Der Spiegel*, January 3, 2011, Spiegel International, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/business/spiegel-interview-with-gazprom-chief-alexeimiller-we-are-only-serving-our-customers-demand-for-russian-gas-a-737443.html>

[57] Richard Giulianotti, “Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26.1 (2002): 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723502261003>.

and competitiveness.⁵⁸ As of then, Gazprom became the source of the largest sponsorship in the history of German soccer, providing the club the financial stability to maintain its standing and success.⁵⁹ The credibility of Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke was also evident as the company's only sponsorship within Europe's "big five" leagues.⁶⁰ Therefore, Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke may have created strong positive fan attachments as a result of its largesse, loyalty, and credibility. Dedicated fans who viewed the club as part of their identity would similarly view themselves as a personal beneficiary of Gazprom's financial support. In the soft power framework, FC Schalke fans would inherently view Gazprom (and Russia) as culturally resonant and attractive because of its support for their beloved soccer club. FC Schalke fans would be expected to develop positive feelings and a good-will effect towards Gazprom, thus increasing Russia's soft power as these fans come to view Gazprom and Russia as more favorable and prestigious.

If FC Schalke fans develop a strong good-will effect towards Gazprom, then these positive feelings could translate to political decision making. Fans experiencing a good-will effect towards Gazprom could make pro-Russia political decisions in concordance with the "hot cognition"

[58] Tony Meenaghan, "Understanding Sponsorship Effects," *Psychology & Marketing* 18.2 (2001): 95–122, [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6793\(200102\)18:2<95::AID-MARI001>3.0.CO;2-H](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6793(200102)18:2<95::AID-MARI001>3.0.CO;2-H); Rui Biscaia et al., "Sport Sponsorship: The Relationship Between Team Loyalty, Sponsorship Awareness, Attitude Toward the Sponsor, and Purchase Intentions," *Journal of Sport Management* 27.4 (2013): 288–302, <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.27.4.288>; Alfredo Silva, "Team Identification and Sponsors' Altruistic Motives on the Effectiveness of Professional Soccer Sponsorship," *Managing Sport and Leisure* (2022): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2084636>.

[59] DW Staff, "Record Bundesliga Deal," DW (Germany), October 9, 2006, <https://www.dw.com/en/gazprom-to-pump-millions-into-schalke/a-2199406>.; During the period of Gazprom's sponsorship, Schalke competed in the highly prestigious UEFA Champions League seven times, even reaching the semi-finals (for the first/only time) in 2010 (see: "Schalke | History | UEFA Champions League | UEFA.Com," <https://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/history/clubs/57388--schalke/>).

[60] The "big five" is a colloquial term used to characterize the English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, French Ligue 1, Italian Serie A, and the German Bundesliga. These leagues are the five wealthiest and most watched in Europe, and likewise produce the most competitive clubs and players.

hypothesis,⁶¹ in which decision-makers use the affect heuristic and recall their first impressions in order to evaluate a political issue. In other words, Schalke fans may make political decisions about Russia based upon their preconceived positive opinion of Gazprom as sponsor. With Russia a pertinent issue in German politics, Schalke fans experiencing a good-will effect may use motivated reasoning based on hot-cognition to support pro-Russia political parties. The hot cognition hypothesis would explain the causal mechanism of a Russian soft power increase among Schalke fans, as their ‘good-will effect’ towards Gazprom would implicitly shape their political preferences to match those of the Kremlin. Hot-cognition serves as a soft power indicator for voluntary deference, as supporters of Schalke use their motivated bias to implicitly shape their own voting behavior to support pro-Russia parties and policy.

Figure 1: The Causal Mechanisms of Russia’s Soft Power – Sponsorship to Voluntary Deference



Methodology

I employ two research strategies to test soft power from Gazprom’s sponsorship. First, I track Schalke club politics to determine whether fans experienced a good-will effect. I then analyze voting data to assess whether the good-will effect translated into hot-cognition through voting behavior. If Russia’s soft power did increase, I would expect a positive correlation between an established good-will effect and hot-cogni-

[61] Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber, “The Automaticity of Affect for Political Leaders, Groups, and Issues: An Experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis,” *Political Psychology* 26.3 (2005): 455–82.

tion. Schalke fans would demonstrate positive attachments to Gazprom as a sponsor and alter their voting behavior to increasingly support pro-Russia parties and policies.

For the first study, I analyze the club politics of FC Schalke during the period of Gazprom's investment to determine whether fans experienced a good-will effect towards their sponsor. In German soccer, clubs have a '50+1' rule, in which supporters control a more than 50% stake in their club and have oversight of the club's hierarchy and operations, with regular public elections to hold leadership accountable.⁶² Therefore, the fans had the opportunity to be complicit with or reject FC Schalke's relationship with Russia through these elections.

With press releases and club statements as my primary evidence, I track the Schalke-Russia relationship during Gazprom's sponsorship from 2006-22.⁶³ If Gazprom's sponsorship did increase soft power, then I would expect Schalke's Supervisory Board and supporters to be deferential, or even supportive, of their club's relationship with Russia. Should fans be complicit in the Schalke-Russia relationship, then this would suggest that the supporters experienced a good-effect that muddied their assessment of the club's dynamic with Russia.

Hypothesis 1: If FC Schalke supporters demonstrated a good-will effect towards Gazprom/Russia, then they would have been complicit in the Schalke-Russia relationship by electing pro-Russia club leaders to the Supervisory Board.

A second component of my methodology is voting data. I will assess whether Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke translated to voluntary deference among fans. I analyze the voting results from four Bundestag Elections from 2009-2021 to determine if Schalke fans increasingly vot-

[62] In general, supporters must pay a fee to their club in order to participate in elections and other operations. This financial commitment may further integrate the emotional attachments between supporter and club.

[63] I use Google Translate to read and quote sources in German. Any translation is indicated in the citation.

ed for pro-Russia political parties as a result of hot-cognition. I will use data from FC Schalke's official supporters' club database to isolate voting constituencies with the highest concentrations of FC Schalke fans.⁶⁴ I will then select three constituencies to analyze and compare their voting results to a demographically similar municipality, the broader election district, and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). I source my data from local election centers published through Vote iT GmbH's votemanager public database.⁶⁵ In this way, I isolate and control for Germans who would be most likely to view Russia as culturally attractive and prestigious as a result of their positive attachments to Gazprom. While FC Schalke fans may have developed a positive opinion of Gazprom as a sponsor, voting data can illustrate whether the good-will effect was strong enough to elicit pro-Russia political behavior.

Hypothesis 2: If Gazprom's sponsorship was strong enough to elicit hot-cognition, then FC Schalke constituencies would have disproportionately voted for pro-Russia political parties in Bundestag elections.

GOOD-WILL EFFECT WITHIN FC SCHALKE CLUB POLITICS

2006-2010: Initial Reaction to the Sponsorship

Gazprom's 2006 sponsorship immediately transformed FC Schalke from a debt-ridden club struggling to reclaim its historic success to "one of the big boys" in European soccer.⁶⁶ The deal received broad support from FC Schalke fans, while members of the club's Supervisory Board

[64] "Supporters Club - FC Schalke 04," website, *FC Schalke 04*, <https://schalke04.de/en/members-fans/supportersclub/>.

[65] VoteIT is a German election management software that processes and displays votes for municipalities in local, state, and federal elections. The 'open data' represents the official reported election results from a local election center that used VoteIT's 'vote manager' software. The software then compiles and displays these election results.

[66] Rob Hughes, "Russian Gas Fueling Quest by Schalke - Sports - International Herald Tribune," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2006, sec. Sports, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/17/sports/17iht-soccer.3194585.html>.

introduced new aspirations for the club with Gazprom's financial backing. According to Rolf Rojek, chairman of the FC Schalke Fan Club Umbrella Association and member of the Supervisory Board, fans had "a whole range of new hopes" for their club, which ranged from lower food prices to increased spending on stronger players.⁶⁷ Clemens Tönnies, Chair of the Supervisory Board, proclaimed that Gazprom's sponsorship enabled the club to enter "a new dimension," while board member Gerhard Rehberg affirmed the sponsorship was indicative of "the respect that our club earned especially on the international stage."⁶⁸ Gazprom's sponsorship created optimistic ambitions among FC Schalke's leadership and fanbase. However, the excitement was not necessarily for the club's business savvy, but rather a reaction to the financial crisis that underlined the sponsorship. At the time, FC Schalke faced debt that at best paralyzed the club's upward mobility and at worst threatened bankruptcy. The club was estimated to be at least 120 million euros in debt⁶⁹ and faced investigations from soccer authorities about its bookkeeping.⁷⁰ With Schalke having negated future revenues borrowing against itself until 2026, the club needed immediate financial rescue to ensure long-term success.⁷¹ Hans-Joachim Watzke, Managing Director for rival Borussia Dortmund,⁷² summarized the necessity of the sponsorship when he claimed that, despite being an intense rival, "if Schalke has everything under control financially, we are happy about

[67] Richard Leipold, "Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst," trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[68] DW Staff, "Record Bundesliga Deal."

[69] Ibid.

[70] Hughes, "Russian Gas Fueling Quest by Schalke - Sports - International Herald Tribune."

[71] Helmut M. Dietl and Egon Franck, "Governance Failure and Financial Crisis in German Football," *Journal of Sports Economics* 8.6 (2007): 665.

[72] The FC Schalke-Borussia Dortmund rivalry is considered to be one of the most intense and historic club rivalries in the world. The two clubs represent neighboring cities and both claim roots to the industrial history of the Ruhr Valley. Therefore, it is uncharacteristic that one club would praise the other.

that.”⁷³ Gazprom’s lucrative financial support saved Schalke from future bankruptcy and certainly provided the Russian company more credibility and good-will among supporters.

Despite positive messaging about Schalke’s competitive direction, club leaders misled the public about Russian influence in club operations. Board member Gerhard Rehburg reaffirmed that Gazprom would “have no influence whatsoever on the operative business or sports decisions” of the club,⁷⁴ and according to Fan Association Chair Ralph Rojek, only ten percent of supporters were skeptical of the Russian investment.⁷⁵ However, Gazprom immediately exerted influence on Schalke. As a part of the sponsorship, FC Schalke entered a partnership with Russian club Zenit St. Petersburg, which was 75% owned by Gazprom.⁷⁶ This partnership was unfavorable for Schalke, as Zenit St. Petersburg had a poor image due to racism and white supremacy among their fans.⁷⁷ Even still, the partnership was framed as a positive by Schalke’s then manager Mirko Slomka. He claimed that the “cooperation” with Zenit was beneficial for his club and “interests [him] even more [than the sponsorship] as a coach.”⁷⁸ However, the broader German soccer community was weary about Russian influence. An unnamed rival manager in comment to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* expressed concern about Schalke’s autonomy: “A main sponsor practically always has the opportunity to exert influence,” and that Russian influence “always come[s] through the back

[73] Richard Leipold, “Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst,” trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[74] DW Staff, “Record Bundesliga Deal.”

[75] Richard Leipold, “Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst,” trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[76] Beer, “Gazprom: Bis Zu 100 Mio. Für Schalke.”

[77] Sonia Oxley, “Advocaat Dismisses Racism Concerns Over Zenit Fans,” *Reuters*, May 14, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-soccer-uefa-zenit-idUKL1315539720080514>.

[78] Beer, “Gazprom: Bis zu 100 Mio. für Schalke.”

door, never through the main entrance.”⁷⁹ While the Schalke community supported the sponsorship, the German soccer community uninvolved with Schalke, which did not experience a good-will effect, expressed reservations about Gazprom’s influence and intentions. The unclear and conflicting messaging from FC Schalke regarding Gazprom’s influence illustrates an immediate good-will for their Russian sponsors. In other words, Schalke was grateful for Gazprom’s bailout.

2011-2016: Intrusion, Pushback, and Complicity

Clemens Tönnies became the Kremlin’s primary point of intrusion into Schalke’s club affairs through his personal relationship with Vladimir Putin.⁸⁰ In May 2011, Tönnies traveled to Moscow to negotiate a new five-year Gazprom sponsorship for upwards of 120 million Euros, but also met with Putin to discuss Schalke’s club affairs. Putin, who is a self-proclaimed Schalke supporter, was disappointed with the planned transfer of star goalkeeper Manuel Neuer to perennial Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich.⁸¹ According to Tönnies, Putin “asked [him] to do everything we could to keep Manuel.”⁸² Tönnies undermined his own credibility as Schalke’s transfer negotiator when he complied with Putin and attempted to renege the deal. This interaction was confirmed by Neuer, who claimed that Tönnies “appealed to [him] that the most

[79] Richard Leipold, “Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst,” trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[80] Between 2006 and 2008, Tönnies collaborated with Putin to fund the construction of a factory in Russia for his meat manufacturing business, and since used his personal relationship with Putin to mediate contact between Gazprom and Schalke. (See: Olaf Sundermeyer, trans. Google Translate, “Sportpolitische Kampagne: Russland Gibt Gas,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 25, 2012, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/sportpolitische-kampagne-russland-gibt-gas-11931678.html>.)

[81] Florian Scholz and Tobias Altschäfl, “Fußball Bundesliga, Die Ganze Wahrheit: So Kämpfte Putin Um Manuel Neuer,” trans. by Google Translate, *Sport Bild*, December 27, 2011, <https://sportbild.bild.de/bundesliga/2011/die-ganze-wahrheit-21780470.sport.html>.

[82] Patrik Stollarz, “Putin Tried to Prevent Sale of German Goalkeeper,” *The Times*, October 28, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/putin-tried-to-prevent-sale-of-german-goalkeeper-p93svtzzjw2>.

powerful man in the world wanted to keep him with his money.”⁸³ While Neuer’s transfer proceeded, Putin’s request indicated a growing acquiescence by Schalke’s leaders towards their Russian sponsors, and Schalke received negative press coverage following the incident.

Despite the clear intrusion into club affairs, Schalke fans still supported Tönnes even after complying with Putin’s clear overstep. In 2013, less than two years after Neuer’s transfer, FC Schalke supporters overwhelmingly reelected Tönnes as Chair of the Supervisory Board, winning 4496 out of 5725 (78%) votes cast at the 2013 club election.⁸⁴ While it is unclear whether the Neuer transfer changed Tönnes’ reputation among supporters, his resounding reelection was positive reinforcement for his enabling behavior towards Russia. When offered the opportunity to reject Russian influence, Schalke supporters instead maintained their commitment to Tönnes during the 2013 club election. In reelecting their compromised Chair, Schalke supporters displayed trust, confidence, and good-will towards the club hierarchy amidst its growing relationship with Russia.

Other Schalke leaders mirrored Tönnes’ complicit behavior, reaffirming their commitment to Gazprom despite Russia’s declining prestige within Germany following the annexation of Crimea. Rather than mirror public opinion and condemn Russia’s behavior, Schalke’s messaging fluctuated between neutrality and outright support for Russian interests. On one hand, the official club statement cautiously labeled its partnership with Gazprom as “reliable, trusting, and constructive,” and refused to comment on the political situation in Gazprom’s “home country.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, Schalke leaders again appeared complicit and def-

[83] Scholz and Altschäffl, “Fußball Bundesliga, Die Ganze Wahrheit: So Kämpfte Putin Um Manuel Neuer.”

[84] “Clemens Tönnes Bleibt Aufsichtsratsvorsitzender Des FC Schalke 04,” trans. Google Translate, bild.de (*Bild Magazine*, June 30, 2013), <https://www.bild.de/regional/koeln/clemens-toennies-bleibt-aufsichtsratsvorsitzender-31051556.bild.html>.

[85] Saskia Aleythe, “Moralisch fragwürdige Verbindungen,” trans. Google Translate, Süddeutsche.de (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 7, 2014), <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/sport/vertrag-mit-gazprom-schalke-geraet-wegen-putin-in-verlegenheit-1.1906197-2>.

erential towards Russian interests. For example, Alexander Jobst, Schalke's marketing director, in a 2014 interview affirmed that "Gazprom is [Schalke's] most important partner" despite Russian aggression in Crimea. More importantly, Jobst discussed Schalke's commercial ambitions in Russia: "Russia is one of [Schalke's] most important markets for the future... [and] we are planning further steps in the long term to position ourselves as FC Schalke."⁸⁶ Jobst's rhetoric illustrated Schalke's favoritism for its Russian investors. Rather than distance itself from the increasingly-aggressive (and unpopular) Russian state, the club's commercial ambitions matched Russia's economic preferences.

However, Jobst's rhetoric was not the only instance of Schalke's acquiescence during the Crimea crisis. Days before Russia invaded Crimea, the club received an invitation for the squad to meet Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin. While Schalke stalled formal plans to proceed with the trip, Clemens Tönnies particularly harmed Schalke's prestige when he demonstrated blatant favoritism for Putin when responding to criticism for the visit. Rather than follow German public opinion in opposing Putin, Tönnies suggested the club instead delay not in protest, but because "president [Putin] currently has much more important topics on the agenda."⁸⁷ Tönnies's bias engendered broad negative publicity and backlash from prominent German politicians. Peter Tauber, Secretary General of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), claimed that "accepting an invitation to the Kremlin... does not really show tact," while Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Member of the European Parliament for the Free Democratic Party, had already called for the removal of Gazprom as Schalke's sponsor in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea.⁸⁸ At a time in which German opinion was shifting against

[86] Thomas Mersch Von and Stefan Merx, "Schalke-Vorstand Jobst: Gazprom Ist Unser Wichtigster Partner," trans. Google Translate, *The Wall Street Journal* (Dow Jones & Company, March 7, 2014), <https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/schalke-vorstand-jobst-gazprom-ist-unser-wichtigster-partner-1394192313>.

[87] Jörg Strohschein, "Kritik an Hauptsponsor Gazprom: FC Schalke 04 - der Preis der Moral," trans. Google Translate, *Der Tagesspiegel Online*, April 24, 2014, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/sport/fc-schalke-04-der-preis-der-moral-5163448.html>.

[88] "Verhältnis zu Russland: Schalke 04 plant Putin-Besuch - Kritik von CDU," trans.

Russia's foreign policy, Tönnies illustrated a deliberate favoritism towards Putin. The trip to the Kremlin represented the most public, and consequential, exertion of Russian influence over FC Schalke. At this point, Schalke was not only complicit in negotiating with Gazprom, but club leaders were obedient to the Kremlin and pursued strategies that directly harmed the club's popularity. Following the Crimea crisis, FC Schalke controversially strengthened the club's relationship with Russia despite it being antithetical to German public opinion and Schalke's credibility as autonomous from its Russian sponsor.

While Schalke's acquiescence to the Kremlin engendered some discontent during the Crimea crisis, club supporters were ultimately complicit in their club's relationship with Russia. In response to the trip, Roman Kolbe, a lifelong registered Schalke member and author of the popular fan magazine *Schalke Unser*, penned a letter to Schalke's leadership that criticized the club's relationship with Russia. Kolbe juxtaposed Schalke's "democratic foundation" with Russia's democratic backsliding and annexation of Crimea, and directly indicted Tönnies when he asserted Schalke "should not serve an autocrat."⁸⁹ Kolbe's letter claimed to reflect a broad opposition to the Schalke-Gazprom relationship. Consequently, Kolbe's opposition to Tönnies translated into political action. During the 2016 club election, supporters campaigned against Tönnies, while three members of the Supervisory Board privately negotiated to oust him as club Chair, citing concern about Schalke's "external presentation."⁹⁰ However, this substantial opposition was unsuccessful and

Google Translate, *Der Tagesspiegel Online*, April 24, 2014, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/schalke-04-plant-putin-besuch-kritik-von-cdu-5439550.html>; "Schalke 04: Tönnies verteidigt Putin und Sponsor Gazprom," trans. Google Translate, *Der Spiegel*, March 24, 2014, <https://www.spiegel.de/sport/fussball/schalke-04-toennies-verteidigt-putin-und-sponsor-gazprom-a-960383.html>.

[89] Kit Holden, "Vladimir Putin, Gazprom and Schalke 04: How Russia sending troops to the Crimea is being felt in the Bundesliga," *The Independent*, March 7, 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/vladimir-putin-gazprom-and-schalke-04-how-russia-sending-troops-to-the-crimea-is-being-felt-in-the-bundesliga-9177403.html>.

[90] Oliver Müller, "FC Schalke 04: So Schmutzig Läuft Der Machtkampf Hinter Den Kulissen," trans. Google Translate, *WELT*, June 25, 2016, <https://www.welt.de/sport/fuss->

Tönnes was reelected by Schalke supporters, receiving 5367 (56%) of 9447 votes.⁹¹ While Tönnes did not receive the support he had in previous elections, he still maintained a significant base despite his blatant favoritism for Russia. By the 2016 election, the Tönnes regime had cemented a subservient relationship with Gazprom and the Kremlin, and allowed Schalke to be influenced by Russia even to the detriment of the club's popularity and prestige within Germany. Supporters had developed an unwavering good-will effect towards Gazprom and Russia, and these positive associations were activated when voting for Tönnes despite his ties to Putin. While Schalke's leaders were publicly acquiescent to Russia, its supporters were equally complicit in continually choosing to elect Russian-sympathetic leadership. With Tönnes clearly obedient to the Kremlin, this election suggests that supporters not only reaffirmed trust and confidence in their club leaders, but also trust and good-will towards Russia as a visible actor in club operations. When German opinion shifted against Russia for the Crimea crisis, Schalke antithetically strengthened its relationship with the Kremlin.

2017-2022: Further Russian Intrusion and Collapse of the Tönnes Regime

During the final period of Gazprom's sponsorship, Schalke engaged in public relations initiatives aimed to advertise Russian interests. In 2018, Schalke sent two members of their Youth Academy to the Football For Friendship Forum in Moscow, a Gazprom international children's social project.⁹² In addition, Schalke maintained its partnership with Gazprom's Zenit St. Petersburg, whose fans once again created negative pub-

ball/bundesliga/fc-schalke-04/article156560742/So-schmutzig-geht-es-hinter-Schalke-Kulissen-zu.html.

[91] Jens Greinke, "Mitgliederversammlung: Tönnes und Lange im Aufsichtsrat," trans. Google Translate, WA.de, June 26, 2016, <https://www.wa.de/sport/schalke-04/mitgliederversammlung-schalke-zieht-heute-aufsichtsrat-ein-vier-kandidaten-zwei-platze-6519246.html>.

[92] FC Schalke 04 (@s04), "Als deutscher Vertreter schicken wir 2 @knapenschmiede-Kicker zum Football For Friendship Forum nach Moskau. <https://t.co/ZBEi5mtQOO>," *Twitter*, April 14, 2018, <https://twitter.com/s04/status/985127407664459776>

licity for chanting a Nazi slogan during a 2018 league game.⁹³ Despite Zenit's poor image, Schalke maintained this relationship at the behest of Gazprom and even played an exhibition with Zenit at the end of 2018.⁹⁴ However, Schalke's most blatant compliance with Russian interests was its support for Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a controversial expansion of the original Nord Stream pipeline. Many European actors opposed the project because of Russia's aggressive behavior in Ukraine and continued weaponization of energy prices. Even still, Schalke took a public political stance in advertising Nord Stream 2. In 2018, the club was the only professional club to send associates to Switzerland to compete in a soccer tournament against "teams from the energy industry" collaborating on Nord Stream 2.⁹⁵ Schalke continued to politicize its position on Nord Stream when, in 2019, the Supervisory Board appointed Matthias Warnig, Chairman of the Nord Stream 2 Executive Board and close confidant of Vladimir Putin, to a special 2-year term with the club. Warnig's presence within the Schalke hierarchy reflected the growing interconnectedness between the club and the Nord Stream 2 project as Schalke became a credible institution for which Gazprom could promote their controversial pipeline.

Schalke's controversy, declining success, and financial instability compelled supporters to oust the Tönnes regime. Following a poorly-planned exhibition with Russian club FK Baltika Kaliningrad, the *Schalke Unser* fan magazine strongly criticized Schalke's relationship with Gazprom, claiming their sponsor did not have the best interest of the club.⁹⁶ Fans again expressed anti-Gazprom resentment when they

[93] "Spartak, Zenit Fined for Fans' Racist Chants," *ESPN*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.espn.com/soccer/russian-premier-league/story/3471658/spartak-moscow-and-zenit-st-petersburg-fined-for-fans-racist-chants>.

[94] "S04 to Face Zenit St. Petersburg in a Friendly," *Schalke 04*, n.d., <https://schalke04.de/en/team/s04-face-zenit-st-petersburg-friendly/>.

[95] "Traditionself Gewinnt Mit Gerhard Schröder Turnier von Nord Stream," trans. Google Translate, website, *Schalke 04*, July 2, 2019, <https://schalke04.de/traditionself/traditionself-gewinnt-mit-gerhard-schroeder-turnier-von-nordstream-2/>.

[96] "Keine Liebesgrüße aus Moskau," trans. Google Translate, *Schalke Unser*, February 15, 2018, <https://schalke-unser.de/beitrag/5167>.

protested against the appointment of Matthias Warnig.⁹⁷ Finally, Tönies was suspended by the club's supervisory board in August 2019 for racism after substantial public protest from Schalke supporters. Hans Sarpei, a former Schalke player and influential member of the supporters' group, called for the Supervisory Board to take a "clear stand" against Tönies.⁹⁸ These protests continued through the end of the 2019-20 season until Tönies officially resigned.⁹⁹ The following season, the remaining members of the Tönies regime also faced opposition from supporters. At this point, Schalke faced insolvency due to a 200-million-euro debt amidst the COVID pandemic.¹⁰⁰ Equally important, the team had been relegated from the German Bundesliga for the first time since 1988. The Schalke Ultras Supporters Group labeled club leaders as "morally bankrupt," and fans retrospectively accused Tönies of running the club as "patriarchal" and "autocratic."¹⁰¹ Another prominent Schalke supporters' group displayed banners at the stadium addressed to Alexander Jobst and Joachim Schneider, both holdovers from the Tönies regime: "To Alex and Jochen... your painful mistakes can no longer be excused. Terminate your contracts, for the good of the association."¹⁰² FC Schalke's poor performances, financial mismanagement, and racism from Tönies inspired supporters to pressure resignations and an overhaul of the club hierarchy.

[97] Roman Goncharenko, "Who Is Nord Stream's Matthias Warnig, Putin's Ex-Stasi Pal?" *Deutsche Welle*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/who-is-nord-streams-matthias-warnig-putins-friend-from-east-germany/a-56328159>.

[98] David Vorholt, "Opinion: Tönies' Resignation Is Inevitable," *Deutsche Welle*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-clemens-t%C3%B6nnies-resignation-is-inevitable/a-49880319>.

[99] Davis VanOndorp, "Schalke Chairman Clemens Tönies Resigns," *Deutsche Welle*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/bundesliga-schalke-chairman-clemens-t%C3%B6nnies-resigns/a-54001677>.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Matt Ford, "Schalke Relegated from Bundesliga: A Royal Case of the Blues," *Deutsche Welle*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/schalke-relegated-from-the-bundesliga-the-inside-story-of-a-royal-case-of-the-blues/a-57184763>.

[102] Andy Brassell, "Schalke and the Hole That They Can't Stop Digging for Themselves," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2020, sec. Football, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2020/dec/21/schalke-and-the-hole-that-they-cant-stop-digging-for-themselves-bundesliga>.

However, Schalke supporters did not indict Gazprom during the overhaul of the club hierarchy, as the Russians remained a sponsor until the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Following the invasion, Schalke, along with the rest of the European soccer community, broke ties with its Russian investors. The club terminated its contract with Gazprom while Matthias Warnig, who was elected to a second term on the board, resigned from his position. Even still, Schalke's split from Gazprom was not a unilateral decision by the club. The German Football Association tabled "solidarity of other clubs in Germany" to assist Schalke through its financial turbulence and loss of Gazprom's support.¹⁰³ In this sense, Schalke's disassociation with their Russian sponsors was not a premeditated decision, but rather a swift reaction to Gazprom's role in the invasion of Ukraine. Had Russia not escalated in Ukraine, it is likely that Gazprom and Matthias Warnig would still remain part of Schalke.

The Good Will Effect of Gazprom's Sponsorship

Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke generated both hard power and soft power indicators. While Gazprom's investment inspired a good-will effect among fans, it is the enabling behavior of Schalke's leadership that indicated a more coercive 'hard power' by Russia. The lucrateness of Gazprom's investment saved Schalke from financial recession and bankruptcy. This bailout established a coercive transactional relationship between Gazprom and Schalke's leaders who became dependent on the sponsorship to maintain the club's historic reputation and competitiveness. Club leaders, in particular Clemens Tönnies, were acquiescent as the Kremlin became increasingly blatant in influencing club operations. As evidence of the coercive nature of Gazprom's investment, Tönnies pursued club policy at the behest of Putin even when it injured Schalke's prestige. By the end of Gazprom's sponsorship in 2022, FC Schalke became a tool of Russian foreign policy to broadcast Putin's 'love' of soccer and advertise Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

While club leadership's acquiescence indicated a transactional relationship of hard power, the Schalke supporters demonstrated a good-will

[103] VanOpdorp and Speight, "Schalke to End Partnership with Gazprom."

effect in concordance with soft power. Despite the negative publicity generated from the Schalke-Russia relationship, supporters reaffirmed trust and support for Schalke's compromised leaders through the club elections. It was not until Tönnies's racist remarks, financial mismanagement, and relegation from the Bundesliga that supporters overthrew their club's pro-Russia leadership. Despite the abuse of power by Gazprom, the supporters did not publicly undermine their sponsor until Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Their trust in the club's pro-Russia leadership exemplifies a reframing of policy preferences that indicates soft power. In other words, Schalke supporters expressed voluntary deference to Russia when electing compromised leaders who continually allowed their club to become an object of the Kremlin.

HYPOTHESIS 2: HOT-COGNITION WITHIN GERMAN VOTING

This section analyzes voting patterns among FC Schalke supporters in four Bundestag elections from 2009-2021 in order to determine whether the good-will effect towards Gazprom translated into 'hot-cognition' during political decision making. I track the rhetoric of key political leaders and party platforms prior to each election and determine if any changes to a party's pro-Russia policy had a positive correlation with voting results. To isolate Schalke supporters from the rest of the German population, I analyze voting from three locations in North Rhine-Westphalia: the Gelsenkirchen electoral district, the city of Rheda-Wiedenbrück, and the town of Wetztingen. I compare the voting results of the three locations to constituencies with similar socio-demographics to control for common indicators of voting behavior that would explain broad voting patterns, so any discrepancies may be related to hot-cognition.¹⁰⁴

While Gelsenkirchen contains the largest proportion of Schalke fans, the other two test locations contain influential FC Schalke Fan Clubs.

[104] I compare the results in Gelsenkirchen to the neighboring Ruhr Valley city of Herne (see table 4). For Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen, I use their larger voting districts (Gütersloh and Steinfurt I) as the control.

Rheda-Wiedenbrück's fan club was founded in 2004, and has over 400 members including Clemens Tönnies,¹⁰⁵ so these fans may be more primed to positively associate with Russia because of their personal connection to the club Chair. Likewise, Wettringen's Schalke Fan Club has one of the highest proportions of registered Schalke supporters relative to the municipality's total constituency. Wettringen's Fanclub has over 750 members,¹⁰⁶ while the town itself only has about 6000 voters, which means that political decisions of Schalke fans have a significant impact on Wettringen's voting results.¹⁰⁷

Russia in the 2009-2013 Bundestag Elections

Germany's centrist governing coalition¹⁰⁸ shared a diplomatic approach towards Russia for the 2009 and 2013 elections. The platform of the center-left Social Democrat Party (SPD) included *Ostpolitik*, which called for diplomatic relations and strong dialogue with Russia. In 2007, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, leader of the SPD, advocated for "a new European Ostpolitik" with Russia that emphasized German-led economic integration projects such as the Nord Stream Pipeline.¹⁰⁹ While Ostpolitik was originally conceived as a West German policy initiative to pursue cordial bilateral relations with East Germany and the Soviet Union, Steinmeier and the SPD adapted this friendly rhetoric to advocate for strong diplomacy with Putin's Russia. Likewise, Chancellor Merkel and the CDU generally echoed Steinmeier's diplomatic approach. The

[105] "Historie Fanclub Schalke 04 Rheda-Witdenbrück," n.d., trans. Google Translate, <http://www.fanclub04.de/pages/historie.html>.

[106] "Aktuell | Attacke 94 e.V. Wettringen," n.d., trans. Google Translate, <http://attacke94wettringen.de/ticker>.

[107] "Wahl Zum Deutschen Bundestag - Wahl Zum Deutschen Bundestag 2017 in Der Gemeinde Wettringen - Gesamtergebnis," *Gemeinde Wettringen*, https://wahlen.citeq.de/20170924/05566096/html5/Bundestagswahl_37_Gemeinde_Gemeinde_Wettringen_Erststimmen.html.

[108] The centrist coalition was between Germany's two most popular parties, the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and the center-left Social Democrat Party (SPD).

[109] Marco Siddi, "A Contested Hegemon? Germany's Leadership in EU Relations with Russia," *German Politics* 29.1 (2020): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1551485>.

Chancellor continually reaffirmed Germany's partnership with Russia, most notably at a 2008 NATO Summit when Germany opposed inviting Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. Following Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, the SPD and CDU condemned the aggression, but still cautiously advocated for cooperation with Russia.¹¹⁰ Despite Russia's democratic backsliding and political repression after Putin's victory in the 2011-12 elections, SPD and CDU leaders still maintained a strained, yet diplomatic position.¹¹¹

While Germany's centrist coalition prioritized diplomacy with Russia, the fringe parties had differing platforms. For example, the Green Party, with a leftist platform focusing on social justice and climate policy, opposed Russia's foreign policy and the Nord Stream pipeline. In contrast, the democratic socialist Die Linke (The Left) party, with roots from East Germany, expressed a "radical" pro-Russia tone during these same debates and favored a strong relationship with Russia.¹¹² Finally, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) entered political discourse with an anti-Eurozone platform and called for close ties with Russia. Die Linke and the AfD were the only other parties to demonstrate resolute support for Putin's regime. However, the disagreements among Germany's fringe parties were overshadowed by the dominant diplomatic narrative from the CDU-SPD coalition.¹¹³

2009-2013 Voting Behavior

The results from the 2009 and 2013 Bundestag election suggest a minimal correlational relationship between pro-Russia political rhetoric and hot-cognition voting. The strongest evidence for hot-cognition is in the Gelsenkirchen electoral district (see tables 1 & 1.1). Voters in Gelsenkirchen more strongly rejected the anti-Russia Green Party (-3.9%) when

[110] Marco Siddi, "An Evolving Other: German National Identity and Constructions of Russia," *Politics* 38.1 (2018): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395717715819>.

[111] Siddi, "A Contested Hegemon? Germany's Leadership in EU Relations with Russia," 104.

[112] Siddi, "An Evolving Other: German National Identity and Constructions of Russia," 42.

[113] *Ibid.*

compared to Herne (-2.1%) and North Rhine-Westphalia (-1.4%). In Gelsenkirchen, the Greens lost more than half of its support base from 2009. In addition, Die Linke, which did not receive any first-place votes from Gelsenkirchen in the 2009 election, drastically increased its vote share by 6.1% in 2013.¹¹⁴ Die Linke was the only left-wing party to steadfastly support Russia, as the Greens were explicitly anti-Russia while the SPD took a friendly, but reserved stance. While the correlation is not strong enough to claim that hot-cognition was the primary motivator, it does suggest that Russia's influence did play a role in voting decisions. As further confirmation, Die Linke lost half its support base in Herne, while voters increased support for the SPD. This voting behavior suggests that Herne's left-wing voters did not factor Russia into the decision when choosing a new party. In other words, Die Linke's uncharacteristic increase in Gelsenkirchen supports hot-cognition among left-wing voters. However, AfD results in Gelsenkirchen dispute hot-cognition as a motivator for voting decisions. Gelsenkirchen voters selected the AfD at a similar proportion to Herne meaning that AfD's pro-Russia platform was not a unique decider for Gelsenkirchen's right-wing Schalke voters. Either way, nearly 10% of Gelsenkirchen voters changed their vote to an explicitly pro-Russia party during the 2013 election, and this disproportionate increase does indicate that Russian sentiment was prevalent in voting decisions.

Hot-cognition did not influence voting decisions in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen. While voters in Rheda-Wiedenbrück (see tables 2 & 2.1) did retract support for the Greens, this voting change was not an outlier when compared to the Gütersloh district and NRW results. Rheda-Wiedenbrück's voting mirrored the statewide patterns which disproves the notion that the city experienced unique voting behavior because of a good-will effect. Moreover, voters increased support for the SPD-CDU coalition fairly evenly, which suggests that Russian sentiment did not explicitly influence voting behavior, as there would have been a

[114] Die Linke did receive a large amount of 'second-choice' votes from Gelsenkirchen in the 2009 election. However, this study only focuses on first-choice votes as a measure for hot-cognition.

stronger support for the explicitly pro-Russia parties. In Wettlingen (see tables 3 & 3.1), support for the Greens slightly increased while Die Linke and AfD decreased, which also suggests that pro-Russia hot-cognition was not a factor for voters.

Russia in the 2017 Bundestag Election

Russia's annexation of Crimea, support for separatists in the Donbass region, and Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline made Russia an important issue during the 2017 Bundestag election. Most notably, the SPD and CDU diverged in their Russia platform following the annexation of Crimea. While the SPD initially echoed popular opinion and condemned Russia's action, party leaders soon shifted back to their *Ostpolitik* platform when Crimea de-escalated and supported new forms of dialogue and cooperation with Russia.¹¹⁵ Steinmeier and then Vice Minister Sigmar Gabriel championed the SPD's updated platform. Both Steinmeier and Gabriel opposed long-term sanctions against Russia, while Steinmeier advocated for Russia's reincorporation into the G8, and Gabriel positioned himself as the primary defendant for Nord Stream 2 against EU opposition and United States sanctions.¹¹⁶ Despite their involvement in sanctions negotiations, the SPD's commitment to *Ostpolitik* repositioned the party as pro-Russian following the annexation of Crimea. In contrast, the CDU became an anti-Russia party following the Crimea crisis. Angela Merkel sharply criticized Russia's foreign policy and led EU sanctions, while other prominent CDU politicians harshly opposed Russia.¹¹⁷ In addition, the CDU allied with the Greens and advocated for a long-term opposition to Russian foreign policy. Even after de-escalation,

[115] Marco Sidi, "German Foreign Policy towards Russia in the Aftermath of the Ukraine Crisis: A New Ostpolitik?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68.4 (2016): 675, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1173879>.

[116] Tuomas Forsberg, "From Ostpolitik to 'Frostpolitik'? Merkel, Putin and German Foreign Policy towards Russia," *International Affairs* 92.1 (2016): 31-32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12505>; Bjorn Gens, "Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics: Nord Stream 2, Sanctions and the Question of EU Leadership towards Russia," *Global Affairs* 5, no. 4-5 (October 20, 2019): 324, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2019.1681013>.

[117] Forsberg, "From Ostpolitik to 'Frostpolitik'?" 30.

lation in Crimea, the two parties called for additional sanctions should Russia continue to sponsor separatists in Eastern Ukraine.¹¹⁸ While the SPD's *Ostpolitik* reaffirmed the party's pro-Russia stance, the CDU's sanctions regime reset the party platform as anti-Russia.

Germany's fringe parties used the annexation of Crimea to define themselves as pro-Russia. The AfD reorganized to become an anti-Eurozone, anti-immigration, far-right populist party that maintained close ties with the Putin regime. AfD politicians expressed discontent with Russian sanctions,¹¹⁹ and AfD leader Frauke Petry met with Russian officials and Putin allies in Moscow months before the 2017 election.¹²⁰ In addition to the AfD, the Free Democrats Party (FDP) also used the Crimea crisis to define themselves as a pro-Russia party. In August 2017, one month before the election, FDP leader Christian Lindner claimed that Russia's annexation of Crimea was a "permanent provisional solution."¹²¹ Lindner's comments officially positioned the FDP alongside the AfD as a right-wing Russia sympathetic party, and his comments inspired Germany's other fringe parties to delineate their Russia position. Die Linke's Sahra Wagenknecht similarly asserted that Germany needed to "return to the roots of détente policy towards Russia," while AfD's Alexander Gauland remarked that "it is right to recognize Crimea as part of Russia."¹²² While the FDP and Die Linke referenced principles of *Ostpolitik* as informing their foreign policy, the AfD went a step further and defined themselves as explicitly pro-Kremlin.

[118] Ibid, 33.

[119] Frédéric Lemaître, "Germany's Eurosceptics Broaden Their Appeal and Win Regional Votes," *The Guardian*, (September 23, 2014), sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/23/alternative-germany-eurosceptic-votes-afd>.

[120] "Leader of Germany's Far-Right Party Meets Putin Allies in Moscow," *Reuters*, (February 21, 2017), sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-afd-idUSKBN16012C>.

[121] Esther King, "Christian Lindner: Germany Should Accept Crimean Annexation as 'Permanent Provisional Solution,'" *POLITICO*, blog, (August 6, 2017), <https://www.politico.eu/article/christian-lindner-germany-should-accept-crimean-annexation-as-permanent-provisional-solution/>.

[122] Gens, "Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics," 323.

2017 Voting Behavior

Gelsenkirchen voting results suggest that hot-cognition may have informed voting decisions. While vote share on the left marginally changed from the 2013 election, centrist voters shifted to the more radical, pro-Russia parties. The FDP's renewed pro-Russia platforms helped its resurgence throughout Germany, and the party's vote share increased by 5% in Gelsenkirchen and neighboring Herne (see table 1.2). While votes for Die Linke did not change from 2013, Gelsenkirchen's best evidence for hot-cognition was the quadrupling of support for the AfD. In 2017, many AfD voters were also historic nonvoters and held radical anti-immigrant views as well as weak views on democracy compared to the other parties.¹²³ Gelsenkirchen was an even greater outlier for AfD support, with nearly 17% of voters selecting the far-right party, 3.1% more than Herne and 8.8% more than NRW. In Gelsenkirchen, the AfD attracted nonvoters and centrist coalition voters, which lost a combined 16% vote share. AfD platforms were radically different from the centrist coalition, suggesting that Gelsenkirchen voters switched because of a single issue. Given the AfD's simplistic populist platform, it is likely that pro-Russia sentiments contributed to Gelsenkirchen's 3.1% higher vote share in 2017 compared to 2013. In other words, Gelsenkirchen's outlier support for the AfD suggests the party may have activated pro-Russia sentiments as a motivated bias.

In contrast, 2017 voting results in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wettringen (see tables 2.2 & 3.2) do not correlate to hot-cognition. Voting results in the two municipalities mirrored broader patterns, which means that FC Schalke voters did not demonstrate unique voting behavior. The SPD, despite defining itself as pro-Russia, lost 4.27% and 4.21% of the vote share in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wettringen, respectively, while the Greens' vote share in these municipalities did not change. While the FDP and AfD did see substantial increases in vote share, there was not

[123] Michael A. Hansen and Jonathan Olsen, "Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election," *German Politics* 28.1 (January 2, 2019): 12-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1509312>.

an atypical level of support for pro-Russia parties that would suggest that hot-cognition informed voting decisions.

Russia in the 2021 Bundestag Election

Nord Stream 2, Russian militarism in Eastern Ukraine, and the Kremlin's poisoning of Alexei Navalny received political attention in the years preceding the 2021 Bundestag election. Centrist leaders now attempted to balance opposition to Russian foreign policy with geo-economic incentives of Nord Stream 2.¹²⁴ In 2018, Merkel stressed that the pipeline was "not possible" unless Russia respected Ukraine's oil transit rights.¹²⁵ She frequently criticized Putin's policies in Eastern Ukraine but still prioritized "dialogue"¹²⁶ with the Kremlin. At the same time, the CDU formalized its geo-economic position in rejecting a 2021 Bundestag motion by the Greens to oppose Nord Stream 2 construction.¹²⁷ Despite Merkel's ambivalence, other CDU leaders voiced strong opposition to Russia. Following the 2020 poisoning of Alexei Navalny, party leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer proclaimed she was "not fond" of Nord Stream 2 and threatened to sanction the pipeline as a threat to "security interests of Eastern [Europe]."¹²⁸ As German Defense Minister, Kramp-Karrenbauer also affirmed an anti-Russian stance with an

[124] Germany and Russia have shared a "strong economic interdependence... based on trade and energy." Following US sanctions against Nord Stream 2, Germany's business elite lobbied the government to defend German economic sovereignty from American encroachment. In addition, Germany's business elites downplayed the political importance of Nord Stream 2 and consistently served as a strong domestic pushback against anti-Russia foreign policy (see: Gens, "Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics," 329-330).

[125] Gens, "Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics," 329.

[126] Laurenz Gehrke, "Germany's Scholz Calls for EU Ostpolitik," *POLITICO*, (August 12, 2021), <https://www.politico.eu/article/youre-so-vague-germanys-scholz-calls-for-new-russia-policy/>.

[127] Götz Hausding, "Deutscher Bundestag - Antrag Zum Kurswechsel in Der Russlandpolitik Abgelehnt," *Deutscher Bundestag*, n.d., <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2021/kw23-de-russlandpolitik-843426>.

[128] Andreas Rinke, "German Politicians Question Russia Gas Project after Navalny Suspected Poisoning," *Reuters*, (September 15, 2020), sec. APAC, <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-politics-navalny-germany-idUSKBN25X0KV>.

increase in United States military personnel in Germany.¹²⁹ Moreover, the SPD similarly reshaped its platform to ambivalently support Nord Stream 2 but also oppose the Putin regime. These sentiments were best expressed by SPD Chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz. As Finance Minister, Scholz claimed United States sanctions on Nord Stream 2 were “an infringement of sovereignty” and allegedly offered German state money to progress the project.¹³⁰ At the same time, Scholz described Russia’s annexation of Crimea as “a huge problem” for European security.¹³¹ Similar to the CDU, the SPD rejected the 2021 motion to oppose Nord Stream 2 construction.¹³² The centrist parties opposed Russian aggression within the Putin regime while still supporting geo-economic cooperation.

Germany’s fringe parties had contrasting Russia platforms. The AfD championed pro-Russia advocated for new legislation to remove Russian sanctions, criticized the expulsion of Russian diplomats after the poisoning of a Chechen opposition leader in Berlin, and celebrated Putin’s reelection.¹³³ In addition, leaked Kremlin documents characterized Markus Frohnmaier, a 2017 AfD parliamentary candidate from Southeast Germany, as Russia’s “own absolutely controlled [member of parliament] in the Bundestag” should he be elected.¹³⁴ Die Linke joined with

[129] Jim Garamone, “Austin Announces 500 More Service Members to Be Based in Germany & U.S. Department of Defense & Defense Department News,” *US Department of Defense*, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2570254/austin-announces-500-more-service-members-to-be-based-in-germany/>.

[130] Rob Schmitz, “Germany Reportedly Offered U.S. \$1 Billion To Save Russian Pipeline,” *NPR*, (September 18, 2020), sec. Europe, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/914281571/germany-reportedly-offered-u-s-1-billion-to-save-russian-pipeline>.

[131] Rebecca Staudenmaier, “Exclusive: Olaf Scholz calls for ‘new policy’ toward Russia,” *DW*, August 11, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/exclusive-german-chancellor-candidate-olaf-scholz-calls-for-a-new-policy-toward-eastern-europe-and-russia/a-58832603>

[132] Götz Hausding, “Deutscher Bundestag - Antrag Zum Kurswechsel in Der Russlandpolitik Abgelehnt.”

[133] Steve Wood, “‘Understanding’ for Russia in Germany: International Triangle Meets Domestic Politics,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34.6 (2021): 779, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1703647>.

[134] Timothy Jones, “AfD Parliamentarian Could Have Russian Support: Report.”

AfD in supporting Russian interests. In 2018, AfD and Die Linke politicians attended an economics conference in Crimea that was funded by the Kremlin.¹³⁵ Additionally, months before the 2021 election, Die Linke suggested replacing NATO with a new European security structure that included Russia.¹³⁶ For the 2021 Bundestag Election, the radical AfD and Die Linke parties reaffirmed themselves as staunchly pro-Russian. Conversely, the Greens and FDP opposed Russia's foreign policy. Annalena Baerbock, the Green Party's chancellor candidate, claimed her foreign policy would prioritize "increasing the pressure on Russia" in response to their interference in Eastern Ukraine. She also demanded that political support for Nord Stream 2 be "withdrawn."¹³⁷ Likewise, The FDP joined the Greens in opposition to Russia and called for a moratorium on the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.¹³⁸

2021 Voting Behavior

While Gelsenkirchen still had a strong vote share for the AfD (see table 1.3), voters also mirrored broader voting patterns with significant increased support for the Greens (+5.6%). However, Gelsenkirchen's support for the AfD was still disproportionately higher than Herne (+3.8%) and NRW (+6.9%). Despite 2021 voting trends shifting away from the radical parties, Gelsenkirchen still demonstrated some evidence for hot-cognition with its outlier support for the AfD. At the same time, the 7.4% increase in support for the anti-Russia Greens and FDP combined with the 7.1% decrease for pro-Russia Die Linke and the AfD means that any disparate support for the AfD in Gelsenkirchen is too minimal to

DW, April 5, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-afd-parliamentarian-could-be-under-russian-influence-report/a-48221119>.

[135] Wood, "'Understanding' for Russia in Germany," 781.

[136] David F. Patton, "Catalysts for Change: Small Parties in the 2021 Bundestag Election," *German Politics and Society* 40.3 (2022): 82, <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2022.400304>.

[137] "Annalena Baerbock Urges Hard Line on Russia, China," DW, April 25, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-greens-annalena-baerbock-urges-hard-line-on-russia-china/a-57325437>.

[138] Maria Shagina and Kirsten Westphal, "Nord Stream 2 and the Energy Security Dilemma: Opportunities, Options and Obstacles for a Grand Bargain," *SWP Comment* 46 (2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2021C46>.

completely attribute to hot-cognition. If hot-cognition were the primary motivator for Gelsenkirchen voters, then the AfD and Die Linke would not lose votes proportionate to the staunchly anti-Russia Green Party.

The 2021 election results in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wettringen do not indicate hot-cognition was prevalent in voting decisions (see tables 2.3 & 3.3). The anti-Russia Green Party and FDP's vote share substantially increased in concordance with the broader voting trends. In Rheda-Wiedenbrück, votes for the Greens and FDP increased by 8.48%, while Wettringen votes increased by 10.89%. In addition, support for the AfD and Die Linke decreased, with the parties losing over half of their vote share between the two constituencies. As a further disconfirmation of hot-cognition, the AfD had a disproportionately lower vote share in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wettringen compared to the broader voting district and NRW.

Summary of Results

Voting behavior that would support hot-cognition was inconsistent in the four Bundestag elections during Gazprom's sponsorship. The Gelsenkirchen constituency demonstrated evidence for hot-cognition with an outlying pro-Russia vote share that would indicate hot-cognition as a motivator. This disproportionate support was most evident for the AfD in the 2017 and 2021 elections. The far-right party, despite its radical platform, appeared to pull voters and nonvoters from across the political spectrum, suggesting that the vote switch was the result of a single issue. Likewise, the AfD performed the best in Gelsenkirchen compared with Herne and the NRW. It is certainly possible that the AfD's strong performance was because the party's pro-Russia stance activated similar feelings within Gelsenkirchen voters.

However, Russia may not have been the deciding issue for most AfD voters. The AfD's primary political issue was opposition to the German government's EU asylum seeker and pro-immigration policies, while campaign statements about foreign policy were "moderate."¹³⁹ Likewise,

[139] Wood, "'Understanding' for Russia in Germany," 778.

AfD voters were predominantly concerned with immigration and resonated with the AfD's xenophobic rhetoric.¹⁴⁰ Given that Gelsenkirchen had a large asylum-seeking population during the 2017 and 2021 election cycles, this anti-immigration sentiment may certainly have been a motivating factor for the Gelsenkirchen AfD voter. However, when comparing Gelsenkirchen to Herne, it is unclear why Gelsenkirchen would have a consistently stronger vote share for the AfD based on anti-immigrant sentiment alone. Herne's socio-demographics (see table 4) predict an equal, if not stronger support for the AfD compared to Gelsenkirchen. While it is possible that Gelsenkirchen's constituents better resonated with the anti-immigration message, the AfD's pro-Russia platform would also have activated the good-will effect among Gelsenkirchen's Schalke fans. Therefore, the AfD had a stronger support base in Gelsenkirchen because of Schalke voters' good-will effect-inspired motivated reasoning when making a voting decision. In other words, Gelsenkirchen had the highest vote share for the AfD because its voters uniquely chose the AfD based on pro-Russia hot cognition.

While Gelsenkirchen's support for AfD illustrated support for hot-cognition, the voting behavior in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen disconfirmed hot-cognition as a motivating bias during political decisions. The two constituencies did increase vote share for pro-Russia parties during the 2017 election, but this phenomenon mirrored the broader voting trends. The two municipalities, despite their influential Schalke fanclubs, did not demonstrate any unique pro-Russian voting behavior that would illustrate that good-will and hot-cognition motivated voting decisions.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate soft power implications of Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke are unclear and ambivalent. In evaluating hypothesis 1, Schalke supporters did experience a good-will effect in reelecting pro-Russia club leaders, but the subservient dynamic between these leaders and

[140] Hansen and Olsen, "Flesh of the Same Flesh," 15.

Russia does not match voluntary deference that indicates soft power. For hypothesis 2, voting results offer limited support for hot-cognition as Schalke constituencies had contradictory voting for pro-Russia parties. Therefore, Gazprom's sponsorship does not neatly fit Nye's description of soft power, but rather demonstrates indicators of a more nuanced "smart power" that incorporates principles of hard and soft power. On one hand, the transactional nature of Gazprom's sponsorship engendered hard power coercion and acquiescence within club operations which allowed the Kremlin to explicitly leverage Schalke as a foreign policy tool. On the other hand, Schalke supporters demonstrated soft power through voting behavior – supporters reshaped their preferred policy to match Russia through the reelection of compromised club leaders and disparate support for pro-Russia parties in Gelsenkirchen. In this sense, Gazprom's sponsorship explicitly "bought" the loyalty of Schalke's club leaders, but also implicitly generated trust and deference from everyday Schalke fans.

Whether soft power or smart power, any prestige gains from Gazprom's sponsorship were substantially undermined, and ultimately proved fruitless, by Russia's foreign policy. Russia's militarism in Ukraine dissuaded German public opinion and injured Schalke's credibility as a Russian strategic partner, which severely diminished any prestige acquired from the sponsorship. While this case study proved especially difficult as a result of Russia's unpopularity in Germany, it also illuminates the limits of soft power as a tool for foreign policy. These limits were evident when measuring soft power through voting behavior. At times, voters in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen disconfirmed hot-cognition and soft power with opposition to the radical pro-Russia parties, while Gelsenkirchen's outlier status in voting for pro-Russia parties does corroborate the soft power indicators for this study. If my voting results study were expanded to thoroughly analyze voting from all Schalke constituencies across Germany or assess the individual decisions of FC Schalke policymakers in the Bundestag,¹⁴¹ then we could receive a more definitive picture on whether Gazprom's sponsorship did

[141] The 'Kuppelknappen' is an official FC Schalke Fanclub within the Bundestag.

produce soft power despite Russia's unpopularity, or if Gelsenkirchen's disproportionate support for the AfD was a unique case. For now, we have an ambivalent picture on the political implications of Russia's soft power from Gazprom's sponsorship.

While Gazprom's sponsorship of Schalke has been the most controversial attempt at sportswashing, it is far from unique in elite soccer. Despite this paper's ambiguous results, this study still discovered a more nuanced mechanism for analyzing sportswashing as a tool of foreign policy based on good-will effect and hot-cognition. Sports sponsorships are inherently transactional and coercive, and therefore do not definitively fit Nye's vision of soft power. However, the Gazprom case study does illustrate the potential political implications of a sports sponsorship, as Schalke fans still demonstrated some soft power indicators (even if ambiguous) in spite of Russia's overt intrusion in club affairs and broad unpopularity. While further studies into other sports investments are necessary to generalize any concrete implications, the FC Schalke case study suggests that lucrative sponsorships can accomplish soft power goals with hard power tactics. In this sense, a sportswashing regime can buy soft power.

APPENDIX

Gelsenkirchen, Herne, and NRW Election Results

Table 1: 2009 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD ¹⁴²
Gelsenkirchen	54.30%	26.10%	7.00%	7.60%	N/A	N/A
Herne	40.60%	22.90%	9.00%	8.10%	12.90%	N/A
NRW	35.1%	39.6%	8.9%	7.8%	7.1%	N/A

Table 1.1: 2013 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Gelsenkirchen	50.50%	28.60%	1.70%	3.70%	6.10%	3.80%
Herne	44.20%	28.30%	2.80%	6.00%	8.10%	4.00%
NRW	36.70%	43.80%	2.40%	6.4%	5.1%	1.8%

Table 1.2: 2017 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Gelsenkirchen	38.30%	24.50%	6.70%	4.60%	6.50%	16.90%
Herne	42.45%	23.98%	6.82%	5.15%	7.47%	13.80%
NRW	31.3%	38.3%	8.0%	6.5%	6.4%	8.1%

Table 1.3: 2021 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Gelsenkirchen	40.50%	19.80%	8.1%	10.20%	3.20%	14.0%
Herne	44.06%	20.41%	6.80%	10.80%	3.49%	10.20%
NRW	31.1%	30.1%	8.6%	15.2%	3.20%	7.10%

Table 1-1.3 Source: This data is sourced from vote iT's historical Gelsenkirchena database, Herne municipally published resultsb/c/d, and federally published North Rhine-Westphaliae/f statewide results:

- Google Translate, trans., "Wahlergebnisse Gelsenkirchen," n.d., <https://wahl.gelsenkirchen.de/index.php>.
- Jürgen Venghaus et al., "Statistikstelle der Stadt Herne und Infodienst: Westring 123, 44629 Herne," n.d.
- https://www.herne.de/Migration/wahlen/Wahlanalyse_Bundestagswahl_2013.pdf
- "Wahlergebnispräsentation Stadt Herne Bundestagswahl," KRZN Wahlergebnispräsentation, September 26, 2021, <http://wahl.krzn.de>
- "Results Nordrhein-Westfalen - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2013/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-5.html>.
- Results Nordrhein-Westfalen - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-5.html>.

Rheda-Weidenbrück, Gütersloh I Voting District, and NRW Election Results

Table 2: 2009 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	27.76%	47.56%	9.86%	7.57%	6.66%	N/A
Gütersloh I	31.83%	44.99%	9.03%	7.49%	5.95%	N/A
NRW	35.1%	39.6%	8.9%	7.8%	7.1%	N/A

Table 2.1: 2013 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	30.23%	53.15%	2.05%	5.66%	4.35%	2.56%
Gütersloh I	33.57%	50.25%	1.88%	5.43%	4.27%	2.50%
NRW	36.70%	43.80%	2.40%	6.4%	5.1%	1.8%

Table 2.2: 2017 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	25.96%	47.94%	8.01%	5.56%	4.53%	7.16%
Gütersloh I	28.03%	46.56%	6.53%	5.72%	4.34%	8.01%
NRW	31.3%	38.3%	8.0%	6.5%	6.4%	8.1%

Table 2.3: 2021 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	23.68%	41.58%	8.93%	13.12%	6.13%	2.45%
Gütersloh I	25.76%	39.96%	7.58%	12.83%	2.41%	7.19%
NRW	29.10%	26%	11.40%	16.10%	3.70%	7.30%

Table 2-2.3 source: This data is sourced from vote iT's database of Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Gütersloh results, and federally published North Rhine-Westphalia statewide results:

- Google Translate, trans., "Wahltermine Stadt Rheda-Wiedenbrück," n.d., <https://wahlen.regioit.de/2/05754028/index.html>
- Google Translate, "Wahltermine Kreis Gütersloh," n.d., <https://wahlen.regioit.de/2/05754000/index.html>.

Wettringen, Steinfurt I Voting District, and NRW Election Results

Table 3: 2009 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Wettringen	24.61%	54.13%	11%	4.80%	4.89%	N/A
Steinfurt I	30.16%	44.55%	12.37%	6.19%	5.86%	N/A
NRW	35.1%	39.6%	8.9%	7.8%	7.1%	N/A

Table 3.1: 2013 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Wettringen	25.71%	60.76%	2.26%	4.88%	2.98%	N/A
Steinfurt I	31.85%	52.01%	2.79%	5.11%	3.76%	N/A
NRW	36.70%	43.80%	2.40%	6.4%	5.1%	1.8%

Table 3.2: 2017 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Wettringen	21.47%	58.39%	6.42%	5.15%	4.12%	4.46%
Steinfurt I	25.84%	51.30%	6.58%	5.30%	4.93%	6.05%
NRW	31.3%	38.3%	8.0%	6.5%	6.4%	8.1%

Table 3.3: 2021 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Wettringen	24.37%	45.33%	10.65%	11.81%	1.98%	3.53%
Steinfurt I	28.30%	40%	9.30%	12%	2.40%	5.40%
NRW	29.10%	26%	11.40%	16.10%	3.70%	7.30%

Table 3-3.3 source: vote iT's database of Wettringena and Steinfurt Ib results, and federally published North Rhine-Westphalia statewide results:

- Google Translate, "Wahltermine Gemeinde Wettringen," n.d., <https://wahlen.citeq.de/05566096/index.html>.
- Google Translate, "Wahltermine Kreis Steinfurt," n.d., <https://wahlen.citeq.de/05566000/index.html>.

Key

Bold: Pro-Russia Party

Red: Increase by more than 1%

Blue: Decrease by more than 1%

Black: No change greater than 1%

Table 4: Gelsenkirchen and Herne Voting Districts Compared

	Population (per 1000)	Refugees (per 1000)	GDP/ inhabitant (Euros)	No Secondary Certificate	University Entrance Qualification	Unemployment Rate
Gelsenkirchen	260.3	27.5	29,284	10.0%	30.7%	12.8%
Herne	156.5	28.9	22,918	9.1%	35.7%	11.7%

Source: The data is from a survey collected by the German government for the 2019 European Parliament election. The actual data is as of December 31, 2017.

- a. "Structural Constituency Data Gelsenkirchen, Stadt - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/europawahlen/2019/strukturdaten/bund-99/land-5/kreis-5513.html>.
- b. "Structural Constituency Data Herne, Stadt - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/europawahlen/2019/strukturdaten/bund-99/land-5/kreis-5916.html>.

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