"Don't mention the war!"

How populist right-wing radicalism became (almost) normal in
Germany

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Introduction

In the 1980s, the Populist Radical Right emerged as a new party family. Its members
have a number of core characteristics in common: they are nativist, authoritarian,
and usually also populist (Mudde, 2007). While their relationship with European
integration is more complex than it would first seem, they are often also eurosceptic
(Vasilopoulou, 2018).

By the early 2000s, electorally relevant populist radical right parties existed in
many West European countries. The most prominent case was Austria, where in 1999
the FPÖ won 26.9 per cent of the votes and entered a coalition with the Christian
Democrats, becoming the subject of EU sanctions. But other countries were similarly
affected. Five years earlier, Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI), a personal party with strong
populist tendencies, had replaced the Christian Democrats as the dominant force
in Italian politics. While FI itself was not normally seen as a populist *radical* right
party, it formed a series of coalitions with the successor party of the neo-fascist MSI
(with whom it later merged) and the populist and increasingly radical Lega (Nord). In
France, the founder of the Front National progressed into the second round of the 2002
presidential election. In Belgium , the *cordon sanitaire* around the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams
Belang forced mainstream politicians to form politically awkward coalitions. In the
Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn, the "Pink Populist", created the blueprint for radical right
parties that claimed to stand up for liberal democracy.

A decade later, only a handful of EU countries remained that had *no* radical right
party, the most influential in terms of EU politics being Germany. But even this
was about to change. The moderately eurosceptic "Alternative for Germany" (AfD)
narrowly failed to win representation in the federal parliament in September 2013.
Over the next two years, the party became progressively more radical and won seats in
every single state-level election that it contested. By May 2017, it had delegations in 13
out of 16 state parliaments and in September of the same year, it won 12.6 per cent of
the national vote, making it the strongest opposition party in the new parliament. The
AfD was also successful in three further state elections held in 2017 and 2018. Even
after a number of defections, it has 278 MPs at the federal and the state level at the
time of writing and is expected to do well in the 2019 elections in eastern Germany.

Moreover, it holds seats in local and regional assemblies. As a result, the AfD now has a large cohort of professional politicians in its ranks, who have access to the media but also to considerable financial and organisational resources. Therefore, the AfD will continue to shape German politics, and in turn, European politics for years to come, even if their support may decline in the short-term.

2018 was a pivotal year for the AfD: the party had now existed for a full five-year electoral cycle and managed to enter the last two state parliaments (Bavaria and Hesse) in which it had *not* been represented, confirming the party's role as an integral yet isolated element of the German party system. Moreover, it was the year that their leaders in the federal parliament and their newly formed faction there emerged as a new power centre.

To put these events into perspective, I will address three related questions in this contribution. First, why has Germany finally succumbed to right-wing populism? Second, how is the AfD changing politics, and how has the party adapted to its new position within the party system? Third, what are the implications of the AfD's presence for Germany and the EU?

Why and how did German exceptionalism come to an end?

The Extreme Right in (Western) Germany, 1949-2013

Right-wing extremism was deeply discredited in the Federal Republic. The young democracy outlawed the use of Nazi symbols and language and introduced legislation that made it possible to ban openly anti-democratic associations and parties. When the SRP, a thinly disguised NSDAP successor party, gained momentum in the early 1950s, it was quickly banned and disbanded. Any political group that came too close to right-wing extremist ideas potentially faced the same measures.

This does not mean that anti-semitism and authoritarian tendencies disappeared over night. However, openly extremist statements became increasingly stigmatised, which set in motion a virtuous cycle (Art, 2011): politically ambitious right-wingers had to moderate to pursue a career in the mainstream parties, whereas fringe parties could only attract politically inept extremists. In turn, these parties (most notably the NPD, which enjoyed a brief series of successes in state elections during the 1960s but rapidly declined after they failed to win representation in the 1969 federal election), were riddled with factionalism and became even more radical and isolated.

While there have been at least three waves of party-based right-wing mobilisation in the 1950s, 1960s and then again from the late 1980s onwards, these remained confined to the subnational level. History and political culture aside, there are two structural factors that help to explain this.

First, like other Christian Democratic parties (Kalyvas and Kersbergen, 2010), Germany's CDU was programmatically vague and remained able to appeal to a very broad constituency. This appeal was further extended by the CDU's relationship with its "sister party", the Bavarian CSU. The CSU is more populist (Falkenhagen, 2013), more restrictive on immigration (Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002), and also slightly more eurosceptic (Wimmel and Edwards, 2011) than the CDU. As the two parties do not compete and always form an electoral alliance at the national level, the CDU could still attract more radical voters (and the CSU more moderate voters) than it would have otherwise been the case.

Second, because of its lack of appeal to capable politicians and its fixation with toxic issues that increasingly fewer potential voters were interested in, the parties at the far right of the spectrum failed to modernise: they did not adopt the "new master frame" (Rydgren, 2005) of the radical right that avoids biological racism and explicit demands to abolish democracy. Only in the city state of Hamburg did parties emerge that promoted right-wing populist policies whilst avoiding references to Germany's traumatic past (Decker, 2008, pp. 129-131). But these parties failed to establish a national presence. And so, for a long time, it seemed as if "Germany had executed containment [of the radical right] close to perfection" (Art, 2018, p. 79).

The AfD, 2013-2015

The AfD was founded just before the 2013 federal election by a group of third-tier politicians, journalists, academics, entrepreneurs and activists in protest over Germany's involvement in the bailout packages for Greece. Its very name - Alternative for Germany - was a reaction to Merkel's claim that there was *no* alternative to her policies.

Initially, the party's public ideology and perception, summarised in the nickname "professors' party", were dominated by members of the traditional elites. Many of them were close to or even former members of the Christian Democrats or the centre-right Free Democrats (FDP) party.[1] However, from its very beginning, the AfD also attracted less established and more radical right-wingers.

By the end of 2014, neither the party's manifesto for the EP elections nor their general demeanour showed evidence of radicalism or populism (Arzheimer, 2015a), but the tide was already turning. After some dithering, Bernd Lucke, the party's most prominent face at the time, decided to push back against eurosceptic, right-wing populist and even extremist factions within the AfD. When Lucke lost a protracted power struggle against co-leader Frauke Petry, who had no such qualms and was backed by even more radical forces, he left the party in July 2015, taking about 10 per cent of the members, some regional leaders and most of the AfD delegation in the EP with him.[2] Even before this quasi-split, the party had dropped below the critical five-percent threshold in national opinion polls and could easily have ended there and then.

The AfD 2015-2017

Two months later chancellor Merkel unexpectedly suspended the Dublin rules. The so-called "refugee crisis", i.e. the sometimes chaotic arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees, provided a new lease of life to the party. Using social media data, Arzheimer and Berning, (2019) show that from mid-2015, the AfD devoted less and less attention to European topics and instead turned to the signature issue of the radical right: immigration and the role of Muslims in European societies. Petry and other leading figures in the party stepped up their rhetoric, following a well-worn pattern: some outrageous statement guaranteed them the attention of the media but was quickly followed up by the claim that they had been misunderstood or misquoted. This repositioning proved highly successful. In five state elections that were held in 2016,

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[1]Even after the party's radicalisation, 21 of its current MPs in the Bundestag are former members of the CDU/CSU and 10 were members of the FDP.

[2]Lucke went on to found a new, decisively moderate party that is of no political relevance.

the AfD garnered between 12.6 and 24.3 per cent of the vote, making it the strongest or second-strongest opposition party in some cases.

Having established this impressive parliamentary presence, Petry came to the conclusion that tactical moderation was the AfD's future. She argued that in the medium term, the AfD should follow the example of the Austrian FPÖ and the Norwegian Progress Party and become available as a coalition partner for the centre right. In a bid to soften the image of the party while consolidating her own power base, like Lucke before her she tried but failed to expel Björn Höcke, party leader in Thuringia and, more importantly, the leader of a semi-official faction called "Der Flügel" (the "Wing" or "Tendency") that is particularly strong in eastern Germany.

In their manifesto, members of the "Wing" style themselves as defenders against the "united front of the old parties and the corrupt media" (Der Flügel, 2017). They see the AfD as a "resistance movement". Instead of conducting politics as usual by working with other parties, they want to turn the AfD itself into the political representation of a broad coalition of right-wing anti-establishment forces, including the islamophobic "Pegida" and similar groups (Der Flügel, 2015). The "Wing" quickly established a flurry of networking activities including an annual conference that is held near the Kyffhäuser monument, which has been a focus of right-wing extremist mobilisation since the 1890s.

Höcke is the most prominent face of the "Wing". Early on in the AfD's history, he had expressed sympathy for voters and rank-and-file members of the neo-Nazi NPD, to whom he offered a new political home. Later, he was recorded giving a racist speech on "Africans". He habitually uses language that is reminiscent of the Nazis and organises nightly assemblies in the streets of the state capital. Höcke's latest "gaffe" over which Petry wanted to expel him was a speech, delivered on the anniversary of the infamous Wannsee Conference, in which he called the Holocaust memorial in Berlin "a monument of shame" and demanded a "180-degree turnaround" in Germany's approach to its history (Höcke, 2017). Höcke apologised and claimed that he had been misunderstood (Spiegel Online, 2017).

Höcke has many influential supporters in the party. Moreover, many others were simply wary of Petry's ambitions, and so a rift began to grow between her supporters and her detractors. At the 2017 conference, the party refused to even discuss Petry's plan for the long-term strategic development of the AfD and denied her the role of the "Spitzenkandidat". Instead, Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel led the AfD's national campaign. So far, Weidel had been counted as an ally of Petry and as a leading moderate, but given the top spot, she quickly adopted the inciting rhetoric the party base seems to demand.

After a a long campaign and a last-minute spurt, the AfD won 12.6 per cent of the vote, making it the strongest of the four smaller parties now represented in parliament, although not by a large margin. The AfD did particularly well in the eastern Länder. In the south-eastern state of Saxony, they even became the strongest party, winning 27 per cent of the list vote. Results from a special count that is stratified by state, gender, and age bracket show that the AfD garnered 32 to 33 per cent of the vote amongst East German men aged 35-59. By way of contrast, only about 9 per cent of West German women in the same age group voted AfD, with support amongst western women younger than 25 or older than 69 being at about 5 per cent. The group showing the highest overall affinity are men aged 45-59 living Saxony. About 39 per cent of them voted for the AfD.

What motivates these voters to support the AfD? Schmitt-Beck, (2017), using data collected over the course of the 2013 campaign, demonstrates that the very first

supporters of the party were primarily driven by euroscepticism. But even in 2013, anti-immigration attitudes were more important than euroscepticism for those who switched to the AfD during the last phase of the campaign. By late 2015, AfD voters were less welcoming towards refugees than other Germans, and by June 2016, these attitudes hard hardened (Hambauer and Mays, 2017). Welfare chauvinism, i.e. the wish to restrict welfare benefits to the native group was also important (Goerres, Spies and Kumlin, 2018). Finally, Arzheimer and Berning, (2019), using a very large data set spanning the whole 2013-2017 period, demonstrate that the effect of anti-immigration attitudes has become progressively stronger as the party radicalised and the saliency of the issue rose. By now, the AfD and their voters fit the somewhat stereotypical profile of a populist radical right party and its electorate.

How has the AfD changed German Politics?

The AfD's rise was facilitated by two structural changes in German Politics: partisan de-alignment (Arzheimer, 2017) one the one hand, and the CDU's move towards the political centre, mostly as a response to shifts in public opinion, on the other.[3] In turn, the AfD's emergence and establishment has an impact on German Politics in a multitude of ways. Here, I focus on three intertwined developments: changes to the way parliaments operate, problems of coalition formation, and changes to the public discourse and political agenda.

Parliaments and policy making

Policy making in Germany is characterised by a high degree of consensus, which is both required and supported by institutional arrangements. Opposition parties in parliament enjoy not just extensive rights of interpellation, but are also awarded committee leaderships in proportion to their strength and can sometimes affect policy in non-politicised matters. Under the 2005-2009 grand coalition government between the CDU/CSU and the SPD, about 22 per cent of all bills were passed unanimously after incorporating opposition views at the committee stage (Thränhardt, 2013).

The presence of the AfD's delegations in state parliaments and now also in the Bundestag has upset these often collegial procedures. To be sure, when new parties such as the Greens in the 1980s and the PDS/Left in the 1990s emerged, cultural and substantive conflicts were equally palpable. What sets the presence of the AfD apart from these earlier instances is the widespread perception amongst MPs that at least some of their new colleagues do not share the values of liberal democracy and will abuse their presence in parliament to undermine its institutions. The spectre of the Nazis' rise to power through free elections looms large. In this regard, parliamentary life with the AfD resembles the earlier tenures of the DVU and the NPD, which were ostracised in state parliaments as a matter of course.

These concerns are not entirely unfounded. Since 2014, a string of state MPs have been expelled or resigned from the AfD, citing the radicalisation of the party. In the Bundestag, the newly formed AfD faction harbours well-known anti-semites, islamophobes, and apologists for the annexation of Crimea. This does not only apply

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[3]Since 2005, CDU-led governments have abolished conscription and nuclear energy, introduced a national minimum wage and subsidies for young parents that are conditional on the man taking parental leave, legalised same-sex marriages and the right to adoption for same-sex couples, and relaxed the rules on dual citizenship and naturalisation.

to the rank-and-file. Weidel, now one of the factions chairs, has become notorious for using inflammatory language on and off the floor and was formally reprimanded in parliament for defaming immigrants (Scally, 2018). Her co-leader, Alexander Gauland, declared they would "hunt down Angela Merkel" (Hanke, 2017), has claimed that the rule of the Nazis was but "a speck of bird shit in a 1000-year success story" (Deutsche Welle, 2018a) and appeared as keynote speaker at a "winter school" run by well-known right-wing extremists (Arzheimer, 2019b). About 10 per cent of the AfD's nearly 300 staffers in the federal parliament alone are members or former employees of right-wing extremist organisations (Biermann, Geisler, Radke et al., 2018; Merker, 2019). One MP even gave a job to the German co-leader of the "Identitarian movement" (Biermann, Geisler and Steffen, 2019), a group of young, internet-savvy far-right activists that operate in many European countries and have been linked to the Christchurch attacker (Wilson, 2019).

In response, the other parties have established a *cordon sanitaire*. Contact is restricted to a minimum, and the AfD's initiatives are routinely voted down. The *cordon* is most visible in the AfD's absence from the presidium comprised of the president and his deputies, who chair the plenary sessions. Under the current standing orders, each party nominates a deputy, who is then confirmed by the full house in a secret ballot. While there is rare precedent for rejecting a candidate deemed personally unsuitable, at the time of writing, the house has rejected *three* AfD nominees and it seems unlikely that they will confirm anyone from the AfD (FAZ, 2019). The party has encountered similar, if less high-profile resistance in state parliaments.

Coalition building and and party politics

In combination with the growing fragmentation of the party system, this exclusion has given the AfD what Sartori, (1976) called "blackmail potential". Ideologically homogeneous two-party coalitions have been the norm since the 1990s, with the so-called grand coalition as a fall-back option. With the continuously strong position of the Die Linke (Left party) in the eastern states and the rise of the AfD, this pattern is not longer sustainable, and three-party-coalitions have become much more frequent. The most awkward so far was established in Saxony-Anhalt in 2016, when the AfD garnered 24.3 per cent of the vote and the FDP remained just below the electoral threshold. Because the CDU and the Left party would not work together and the heavy losses for the SPD meant that even a "grand" coalition was impossible, the only remaining option was to form a government that also involved the Greens and so consisted entirely of parties that had been punished at the ballot box.

After the 2017 federal election, the situation was complicated, too. Moving the party to the left and leaving the coalition with the Christian Democrats behind had been the central plank of the SPD's campaign (Dostal, 2017). Similarly, Merkel was under intense internal pressure over her policies and was attacked in unprecedented ways by the CSU. But a centre-right coalition with the FDP was not viable because of the Christian Democrats' heavy losses, and so talks began with the FDP and the Greens about a "Jamaica" alliance, which would have been a first at the national level. Almost two months after the election, these talks collapsed, leaving Germany in turmoil (Chase, 2018b).

In the German context, swearing in a Christian Democratic minority government would have been read as a sign of defeat under the populist onslaught. Fresh elections would likely have resulted in further losses for the major parties and further gains for the AfD. And so, after an unusual intervention by the Federal President, Christian and

Social Democrats began negotiations. In March 2018, six months after the election, a (much reduced) grand coalition was sworn in. Merkel, very much the focus of the AfD's mobilisation, would stay in office.

From the onset, this coalition was even more fraught with internal conflicts than its predecessors in 1966-69, 2005-09, and 2013-17. The CSU's attacks on Merkel and the CDU had ceased during the campaign, but with the likely loss of their absolute majority in the Bavarian state elections on October 14 in sight, the CSU desperately tried to win back voters from the AfD by relentlessly pushing the immigration/refugee issue back on the agenda. The CSU's insistence on new policy initiatives aimed at curbing the number of immigrants while upping the number of deportations paralysed and nearly brought down the new government during its first six months in office (Amann et al., 2018).

Things came to a head late in the last week of August 2018, when a German man was killed in the eastern town of Chemnitz and the suspects turned out to be asylum seekers (Isenson, 2018). Thousands of right-wingers took to the streets and attacked people who looked like leftists or non-natives to them. For several nights, the police could not, or would not, uphold public order. Merkel and other coalition politicians decried the violence as racist man-hunts, but in an extraordinarily development, the chief of the domestic secret service, Hans-Georg Maaßen, publicly contradicted their assessment and claimed that a video showing a racist attack had been doctored. Although it quickly emerged that the video was genuine and that Maaßen and the service had no privileged information on the situation in Chemnitz whatsoever, Horst Seehofer, the Home Secretary and leader of the CSU backed Maaßen, who had previously argued that asylum seekers posed a security risk, and even tried to further promote him (Shelton, 2018).

Once more, this almost brought down the coalition, but the tide was now turning against Seehofer. Against the backdrop of declining numbers in the polls, Bavaria's Prime Minister Markus Söder made a last-ditch effort to soften his image and to shift attention to regional issues unrelated to immigration. He also set in motion a process through which he would succeed Seehofer as party leader in January 2019 (Brady, 2018).

Chemnitz was also a turning point for the AfD. Less than a year after they had entered parliament, one new MP justified the violence in streets as "self-defence". Gauland stood by this judgment and said the unrest was a "normal reaction" to a murder (FAZ, 2018). Höcke and other prominent members of the "Wing" even took part in a "silent march", alongside members of self-styled militias, Neo-Nazis and well-known right-wing extremists, which alerted a wider public to the many links between the AfD and the extreme right (Deutsche Welle, 2018c).

Six weeks later, the CSU lost its absolute majority in Bavaria but was able form a coalition with a smaller conservative party. Favourable conditions not withstanding, the AfD garnered just 10 per cent of the vote while the Greens won 17.5 per cent, more than twice their previous result. Exit polls suggest that at least some of their new strength was due to liberal-minded CSU voters deserting their former party over its hard line on immigration. The biggest loser of the election was the SPD, whose support dropped below ten per cent for the first time in Bavaria's post-war history (Mudge, 2018).

Agenda setting and public discourses

Two weeks later, the state election in Hesse brought different but similar results: 13 per cent for the AfD, almost 20 per cent for the Greens, and double-digit losses for the CDU and the SPD. In response to these, Merkel announced that she would step down as party leader in December and would not run for parliament in 2021 (Deutsche Welle, 2018b). Her successor as leader (and potentially also as chancellor) is Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (Chase, 2018a). While Kramp-Karrenbauer was known as an ally of Merkel, she has since tried to re-establish the CDU's credentials as a socially conservative party. In a bid to heal the rifts within the CDU that Merkel's immigration policies have left, she has also organised a large-scale listening exercise. While it seems unlikely that Kramp-Karrenbauer will reverse all of Merkel's moves towards the centre of the socio-cultural dimension, she will most certainly push for some changes in style and content in the years to come.

The rise of the AfD has clearly rattled the CDU and the CSU, and it has contributed to the current popularity of the Greens. But it would be misleading to assume that the AfD and their inciting rhetoric have completely changed the public discourse of the Federal Republic. Arzheimer and Berning, (2019) show that attitudes on immigration have hardly shifted since 2013 but became more salient, particularly in 2016. Since then, the importance of these issues has declined, although they still rank high on the public's agenda and will likely retain this position.

One of the AfD's biggest assets was the respectability of its first leader. Since 2015, the media have become much more cautious in their dealing with the AfD then they were in the past, Journalists are very much aware of concepts such as agenda setting and the "Overton Window", and public reflection on the relationship between populists and the media has become almost a trope in the quality press.

The strong presence of he AfD on social media, particularly on Facebook, has therefore become a bigger concern. The AfD's central Facebook page has more likes than the ones of the CDU and the SPD combined and has become a focal node of the wider far-right online network in Germany (Arzheimer, 2015b; Stier et al., 2017). More recently, the party has expanded into YouTube and Twitter and also seems to rely more and more on WhatsApp groups, which are not accessible to outsiders.[4]

Has German Politics changed the AfD?

In European multi-party system, challenger parties face a fundamental choice: they can retain their status as outsiders, appealing to core voters and members but affecting policy only indirectly, or they can tone down their message in a bid to appeal to more mainstream voters and potentially taking political office. During the last two decades, radical right parties in Europe have often opted for the latter. The "de-demonisation" of the National Rally in France (Mayer, 2013) and the transformation of the Sweden Democrats (Jungar, 2016) are two prominent cases in point.

The AfD, on the other hand, is the rare case where parliamentary representation has lead to further radicalisation. The party's many links to openly extremist actors have led to calls for closer scrutiny. In an extraordinary press conference held on January 15, 2019, the new head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution presented the headline findings from a preliminary investigation (Euractiv, 2019). He

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[4]There have been repeated leaks of racist and defaming posts from closed AfD WhatsApp groups, see e.g. Der Westen, (2019).

declared that there was enough evidence of unconstitutional tendencies within both the "Wing" and the AfD's youth organisation to justify their covert observation, which could include wiretapping and email hacking, subject to strict legal constraints. This could, in principle, even apply to sitting MPs including Gauland, who has co-signed the "Wing's" founding manifesto and regularly attends their meetings. More generally, the office would continue to compile publicly accessible information on the party, with a view towards building a case for bringing the AfD as a whole under surveillance.

A couple of months later a donation scandal resurfaced. Meuthen, Weidel, and Guido Reil, all members of the national executive, have received a total of more than 130,000 Euros from Swiss businesses. German parties may only accept donations from EU citizens, so the AfD presented a list of alleged German donors, who then turned out to be straw men. The party was subsequently fined 403,000 Euros, and further investigations into their finances are under way (Henry, 2019).

Finally, in April 2019 the BBC published excerpts from a Russian strategy paper, calling for the Kremlin to support Markus Frohnmaier. In return, Frohnmaier, now an MP for the AfD, could be "absolutely controlled" after the election (Gatehouse, 2019). Frohnmaier denies any Russian involvement in his campaign, but the allegations chime with his controversial journeys to Crimea and the Donbass, the AfD's pro-Russian positions, and the Kremlin's entanglement with the West European Radical Right (Shekhovtsov, 2018).

In short, winning national representation has had no moderating effect on the AfD. Instead, the party has become even more of an outsider.

State of play: what is the outlook for German Politics?

These developments have made co-operation between the AfD and the other parties even less likely. National voting intentions, however, have been largely unaffected so far, and still hover in the range of the AfD's result in 2017. The AfD's expected vote shares in three upcoming eastern state elections are considerably higher, and they might even become the strongest party in their stronghold of Saxony, although they are far from an outright majority. These survey data are also confirmed by the result of the European Parliamentary election on May 26, 2019. While the national result of 11 per cent was disappointing for the AfD, they became the strongest party in the states of Brandenburg (19.9 per cent) and Saxony (25.3 per cent) and scored between 17.7 and 22.5 per cent in the other eastern states.

The rapid rise of the AfD is not so much an expression of a change in national mood: by and large, public opinion data suggest that Germany is still a remarkably tolerant and overwhelmingly pro-European society. In line with international trends, it rather signifies a rise in party system fragmentation, segmentation, and polarisation.

Against the backdrop of the AfD's radicalisation, the centre right have not even contemplated the possibility of any future co-operation with the party. But this could change in the near future. It is likely that the CDU/SPD coalition in Saxony will lose its majority in the upcoming state elections, and that the AfD will become the second strongest or even the strongest party. Because the CDU in Saxony is particularly conservative, it is by no means a given that they would form a coalition that includes the Greens or the Left party. Instead, they may be tempted to negotiate a confidence-and-supply arrangement or even a formal coalition with the AfD, which in turn would give unprecedented legitimacy to the AfD and would change the coalition arithmetics in the eastern states (but probably not in the west or at the national level).

Either way, German politics is already much more unstable and unpredictable than it was five years ago and will remain that way as long as the AfD is a relevant player at the national and the state level. Paradoxically, in a system with as many veto points as the German, this means that the status quo will become even more entrenched. Therefore, my prediction is that as in other countries, the rise of a right-wing populist party will make Germany less flexible and more inward looking than it already is. This does not bode well for German and for European Politics.

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