

Towards a New Political Right in Continental Europe: Germany

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Why is this relevant?

- ▶ After the war, Far Right mostly a failure in Germany (electorally)
- ▶ From 1980s to early 2000s, a huge negative outlier (ML model of demand)
 - ▶ *Cordon sanitaire*
 - ▶ Easy, because of association with Nazi past
- ▶ (But attitudes, discrimination, right-wing violence & terrorism)
- ▶ Now: a return of the Führers? Normalisation? Or yet another Sonderweg?

SRP & Friends

- ▶ Anti-semitism and resentment
- ▶ Mid- and lower-tier Nazis regroup, “Sozialistische Reichspartei”
- ▶ Regional double-digit results
- ▶ Regional CDU interested, but Adenauer intervenes
- ▶ Banned in 1952, Extreme Right fragmented & ostracised, voters absorbed

The NPD (Mid-1960s)

- ▶ More “modern” approach, less openly neo-nazi
- ▶ More mixed constituency and members (workers, catholic right)
- ▶ Second half of 1960s: successful in Land-elections
- ▶ Fails to enter Bundestag in 1969 → decline and radicalisation
- ▶ (Misses out on immigration)

Unification

- ▶ Huge influx of ethnic Germans from CEE/Russia
- ▶ Huge increase (1988: 103,000, 1992: 438,000) in number of asylum/refugee applications before “asylum compromise”
- ▶ Widespread xenophobic mobilisation in Eastern Germany (and deprived parts of old West)
- ▶ Rise in patriotism/nationalism (by German standards)

Finally: Immigration and Asylum

- ▶ “New” parties DVU and REP
- ▶ NPD rebounds, becomes Eastern party
- ▶ All three (rightfully) associated with right-wing extremism
- ▶ Flash-in-the-pan successes in local & Land elections, but mostly ostracised & fragmented
- ▶ Modern right-wing populism (“Offensive for the Rule of Law” = PRO) confined to Hamburg

The AfD 2013-2014

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The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?

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Within less than two years of being founded by disgruntled members of the governing CDU, the newly formed Alternative for Germany (AfD) party has already performed extraordinarily well in the 2013 general election, the 2014 EP election, and a string of state elections. Highly unusually for German standards, it campaigned for an end to all efforts to save the euro and argued for a reconfiguration of Germany's foreign policy. This stance is close with the recent surge in far-right voting in Western Europe, and the AfD was subsequently described as right-wing populist and Europhobe.

On the basis of the party's manifesto and of hundreds of statements the party has posted on the internet, this article demonstrates that the Alternative for Germany (AfD) does indeed occupy a position at the far right of the German party system, but it is currently neither populist nor does it belong to the family of Radical Right parties. Moreover, its stance on European integration is more nuanced than expected and should best be classified as soft Eurosceptic.

Germany is unusual amongst West European countries because all relevant parties (with the possible exception of the Left party) are unwavering supporters of European integration. Moreover, while the Radical Right is now a permanent feature of many European democracies, the electoral successes of Germany's Radical Right parties have been very modest and confined to the subnational level.

However, in 2013, only months before the General Election, a new party was formed that campaigned for a dissolution of the Eurozone and a radical reconfiguration of German foreign policy. This new 'Alternative for Germany' (Alternative für Deutschland or AfD for short) came tantalisingly close to the electoral threshold of 5 per cent. Nine months on, the party polled 7 per cent in the 2014 European parliamentary election and was eventually admitted to the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR), which further soured

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- ▶ An alternative to the all-party Euro bail out coalition
- ▶ Soft(ish) eurosceptic
- ▶ On the surface, a Christian Democrats/Liberal breakaway group
- ▶ Traditional conservatives in the front row, but always very mixed bag of right-wingers
- ▶ Leadership began looking into other issues in 2014, but not yet radical, populist

The AfD 2014-2015



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- ▶ Party leader Lucke dithers, open power struggle, party divided and down in the polls
- ▶ Mid-2015: Lucke ousted over leadership style and issues, leaves the party and sets up ALFA
- ▶ Party dead in the water, then handed refugee issue
- ▶ Focus on immigration, "Islamisation"; much more like a normal Radical Right-Wing Populist Party (TM)

The AfD 2016/2017

- ▶ Currently represented in 10/16 state parliaments, up to 24 per cent (Sachsen-Anhalt)
- ▶ Nationally polling ca 15 per cent, marked east-west-differences
- ▶ Ongoing struggle over style/substance/personalities
- ▶ Not necessarily moderates against radicals

The AfD: Still not clear where party is headed

- ▶ Position vis-a-vis Pegida et al?
- ▶ Double-barrelled strategy
 - ▶ Signals for extremists (the "völkisch" debate), borrowing Pegida's style/rituals in the East
 - ▶ More bourgeois image in the west, but cf antisemitism row & split in Baden-Württemberg
- ▶ Two remaining MEPs sit with ENF (Pretzell), EFDD (von Storch)
- ▶ Large number of newly minted mid-level elites (state MPs)
 - ▶ little political experience and unknown leanings
 - ▶ difficult to control
- ▶ Leadership struggle (again)

What is Pegida?



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- ▶ "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident"
- ▶ Began as a Facebook group, weekly marches in Dresden mobilising up to 20,000
- ▶ Attempts to become national force mostly failed
- ▶ European ties (England, Netherlands, Czech Republic) mostly show
- ▶ A local phenomenon, but with a huge impact
- ▶ (NB: less than 2 per cent of the local population are Muslims)

A broader right-wing movement

- ▶ Pegida a failure outside the Dresden area, but many local initiatives against refugee shelters
- ▶ Often covertly directed against refugees/immigrants themselves
- ▶ Often associated with NPD functionaries

And yet, Germans surprisingly relaxed

- ▶ Germany has (probably) taken in one million refugees in 2015, guesstimate for 2016 is 300,000
- ▶ Lack of advance-communication, lack of leadership, sometimes shambolic organisation
- ▶ But huge wave of goodwill and volunteering

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- ▶ Lack of advance-communication, lack of leadership, sometimes shambolic organisation
- ▶ But huge wave of goodwill and volunteering
- ▶ CDU/Merkel taking heavy hit in elections and polls
- ▶ Yet roughly 50 per cent think Germany can cope, approve of policies

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- ▶ But backlash outside party-system far less dramatic than early 1990s while numbers *much* higher

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- ▶ Immigration/multiculturalism now firmly on the agenda
- ▶ But backlash outside party-system far less dramatic than early 1990s while numbers *much* higher
- ▶ AfD first modern German RRP that operates nationwide
- ▶ Possible b/c so far avoided association with Nazi past and Neo-Nazism
- ▶ Germany now “more normal”?

Outlook

- ▶ AfD success in upcoming state and national elections (2017) very likely
- ▶ Established parties will continue to isolate AfD in the medium term (at least for 1st parliamentary terms)
- ▶ Immediate consequence: coalition building immensely difficult
- ▶ Possibly permanent rift between mainstream CDU and Bavarian CSU