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Keywords

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Comments

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The Alternative for Germany's radicalization in historical-comparative perspective

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Abstract: This article chronicles the AfD's rightward repositioning and compares it with the programmatic development of three postwar German parties on the ideological wings. By highlighting factors that tilt the balance of power away from moderate reformers towards hardliners, this comparative analysis sheds light on the conditions that lead a relatively successful party on the ideological wings, such as the AfD, to radicalize its programme. Four variables stand out: whether party hardliners take the blame for the recent election loss; whether they offer a convincing programmatic and strategic alternative to the reformers; whether changes in party composition strengthen hardliners; and whether external factors enhance their weight within the party. The essay concludes that the AfD's radicalization was unusual, but not exceptional. It is however too early to conclude that the Federal Republic's distinctive institutions and political culture no longer impose significant costs on parties that shift their programmes away from the centre.

Keywords: Alternative for Germany (AfD); Right-wing populism; National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD); Greens; Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS); Left Party

In the federal election of September 2017, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) made history by becoming the first far-right party to pass the five-per cent hurdle nationally and enter the German Bundestag. To the dismay of critics at home and abroad, it captured 12.6 per cent of the vote, finished in third place and was allotted 94 seats in parliament. This was a triumph for a party that had existed for less than five years and had garnered 4.7 per cent of the vote in the 2013 Bundestag election. Initially regarded as a single-issue party, it had campaigned in 2013 on a bare-bones platform that foregrounded its opposition to eurozone bailouts (Schmitt-Beck 2017, 2). Three years later, the AfD had tacked to the far right, approving an anti-Islam, anti-immigrant programme typical of right-wing populism. The AfD's trajectory is puzzling given the Federal Republic's institutional and cultural context. By adopting a more radical programme, a German party on the ideological wings (*Flügelpartei*) faces the loss of its more moderate leaders, members and voters, extremist infiltration, risks of investigation by offices of constitutional protection, and political isolation. For vote-seeking and office-seeking reasons, successful

postwar German parties on the ideological wings generally have not drifted further toward the extremes.

The AfD's repositioning therefore stands out. Since 1969, three relatively successful parties on the ideological wings resisted, for electoral and coalitional reasons, a more extreme party programme and instead initially moderated their platforms. In 1970, the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) answered its 1969 election loss by courting conservatives with its Wertheimer Manifesto, which proclaimed its conservative rather than radical character. The West German Greens also moved toward the ideological centre after an electoral setback in 1990. After its 2002 Bundestag election defeat, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) tempered its party programme the next year by offering more nuanced positions on capitalism and UN peacekeeping. In contrast, another relatively successful party, the Left Party (*die Linke*), steered further away from the centre in 2011.

This article chronicles the AfD's rightward repositioning and compares it with the programmatic developments of other German parties on the ideological wings. In the case of the AfD, the factors that historically have ensured the dominance of reformers were largely absent and those that have historically bolstered the more extreme faction were present. The essay highlights four variables: whether hardliners took the blame for the recent election loss; whether they offered a convincing programmatic and strategic alternative to the reformers; whether changes in party composition strengthened hardliners; and whether external factors improved their position within the party. The article begins with the AfD's programmatic shift after 2013, then looks at the potential costs of programmatic radicalization in the Federal Republic. It analyzes the programmatic paths of four postwar German parties on the ideological wings to

shed light on why the AfD radicalized its programme, underscoring the factors that tilted the balance of power away from the moderate reformers towards the hardliners.

The AfD's Shift to the Right

The AfD arose as an anti-euro party, but subsequently added pronounced anti-immigration and anti-Islam planks to its programme. Founded in 2013, the party's origins lay in the eurozone crisis. By 2010, it had become clear that Greece would require massive bailouts. The Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Free Democratic Party (FDP), Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Greens all backed the bailouts by comfortable margins. Among the German public, however, frustration and anger were mounting as the euro drama unfolded. Those voicing great trust (*großes Vertrauen*) in the single currency plummeted from 44 per cent in 2009 to 32 per cent by April 2010. That month, two-thirds of Germans opposed financial assistance to Greece while only 16 per cent approved of it (Köcher 2010). A July 2012 survey revealed that most (54 per cent) regarded the euro crisis to be the most pressing problem facing their country (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2012). During this time, Bernd Lucke, an economics professor at University of Hamburg and longtime CDU member, established the "Plenum of Economists," whose 238 economics professors opposed extending the eurozone rescue fund in 2011 (Petersdorff 2013). In early 2013, Lucke, Konrad Adam, and Alexander Gauland founded the AfD. Called a "party of professors" and an "economists' club" this anti-euro party drew upon the support of numerous academics, as well as former CDU and FDP politicians, which lent it a degree of gravitas unusual for a protest party and suggested that it might make inroads among middle class voters (Gamperl 2013; Seils 2013). In addition to economic liberals, the party also attracted social conservatives and national conservatives, with

the latter focussing on political asylum, immigration, Islam, multiculturalism and “political correctness.”

In its 2013 Bundestag election manifesto, the AfD catered to all three groups, yet emphasized its economic liberalism (AfD 2013). On monetary policy, the first, longest, and most detailed section of the four-page manifesto, the party called for the eurozone’s orderly dissolution, stating: “Germany does not need the euro. The euro is damaging other countries.” This was its signature demand. The AfD backed the European Union, but opposed monetary union. It conceived of Europe as a union of sovereign states within a common market. The manifesto promised deficit reduction, reforming renewable energy subsidies, and tax simplification. The AfD also stood for more direct democracy and the strict adherence to the rule of law. For social conservatives, its manifesto emphasized the primacy of the family unit. In a brief section on immigration and integration, it accepted newcomers who were “qualified and willing to integrate” while favouring a Canadian-style point model. By objecting to the unregulated influx of migrants into Germany’s social welfare programs, the manifesto expressed welfare chauvinism (AfD 2013). And strikingly given its present platform, the party at the time espoused a commitment to political asylum for the persecuted, did not deploy harsh anti-immigrant, anti-Islam rhetoric, and generally cultivated a bourgeois public image. In 2013, 430,000 former FDP voters backed the AfD in 2013, which was the single largest bloc of defectors to the new party (Zeit-Online 2013).

In its European Parliament election manifesto (AfD 2014-2) and its political guidelines (AfD 2014-1) the AfD kept its sights in 2014 on the eurozone. After securing 7.1 per cent in the 2014 European Parliament election, the party’s seven deputies aligned themselves with the European Conservatives and Reformist group (which included the British Conservatives) rather

than affiliate with right-wing anti-immigrant parties such as France's Front National, the Netherlands' Party of Freedom or the United Kingdom's UKIP. Oskar Niedermayer concluded that "the AfD had replaced the FDP as the market-liberal pole of the party system (2015)." On socio-cultural issues, the party rejected quotas for women in the private economy and policies that blurred traditional gender identities (AfD 2014-1, 7). It maintained its qualified support for immigration and its commitment to political asylum, and again refrained from criticizing Islam, although it did stress that free speech also applied to positions on religion (AfD 2014-1, 8). The party offered its unalloyed backing of Germany's western ties (*Westbindung*), highlighting NATO's security and foreign policy benefits (AfD 2014-1, 3). The AfD distinguished itself in its programme from right-wing populists on EU membership, Islam, political asylum and immigration. That is not to say that these currents were not present from the beginning within the party, but rather that they did not (yet) define its programme.

By 2016, the AfD's programme had converged with those of anti-immigrant populist parties in western Europe. It adopted a party programme in 2016 that led off with a call for Swiss-style national referenda, in which voters could overturn laws passed by the Bundestag. It called for expanding the police, toughening punishment for criminal youth, prioritizing the rights of victims over those of perpetrators, deporting organized criminals (after claiming that most were foreigners), forming a German border patrol, and establishing border crossings and a fence in the event they were needed (AfD 2016, 27-8). In terms of foreign policy, it called for allied troops to leave Germany, the re-introduction of military conscription, and a stronger German national army. It held that "Islam is not part of Germany" and called for a ban on minarets, on the call to prayer, full-body veiling in Germany, and on head scarves for teachers and school girls. It rejected multi-culturalism and large-scale immigration. It also backed a return to

citizenship according to bloodlines, while asserting that there is no right to naturalization. It characterized the German language as “the central element of German identity” and called for its constitutional anchoring as the state language (AfD 2016, 48-50).

In 2017, the AfD approved a Bundestag election manifesto that drew upon the 2016 basic programme. Offering an alarming perspective on demographic trends in Africa and Europe, the party presented itself as the saviour of the German nation. “The goal of the AfD is the self-preservation, not self-destruction of our state and nation.” “*We want to bequeath our descendants a land, that is still recognizable as our Germany.*” It demanded that “*the borders must be closed at once to stop unregulated mass immigration to our country*” and called for “minus immigration (*Minuszuwanderung*) (AfD 2017-3, 25-6).” Calls for smaller government were now less prominent, with the party proposing additional social benefits (Altenbockum 2017). In 2017, as the Bundestag election loomed, co-chair Petry hoped to have the AfD party congress moderate the AfD’s platform by adding: “The politics of the AfD is incompatible with political-philosophical currents that develop a complete alternative to the pluralistic, democratic system. In particular, there is no place in the AfD for racist, anti-Semitic, *völkisch* and nationalistic ideologies (AfD 2017-1, 4).” The party congress, however, did not pass Petry’s motion.

After 2015, the AfD followed a more openly anti-establishment strategy. Björn Höcke, as head of the Thuringia party branch, organized large street protests in Erfurt against Merkel’s refugee policies. This far-right politician envisioned the AfD as a movement party of fundamental opposition, attacked the remaining “Luckistas” who allegedly desired to be in the establishment and to enter governing coalitions as a junior partner, and stipulated that the AfD would join a government only when it held a parliamentary majority or at the least led a coalition

with a like-minded smaller party (Tagesspiegel 2017). Alexander Gauland, deputy chair and one of the party's two lead candidates in the 2017 Bundestag campaign, expressed reservations about the AfD entering into governing coalitions with the established parties while underscoring the importance of street protest for the party (Kamann 2017). In a motion to the 2017 party congress, Petry contrasted a "fundamental-oppositional strategy" (which she associated with Alexander Gauland) that sought to have the AfD exert external influence on the established parties with a "realistic political strategy," which she endorsed. Petry hoped to have the party congress affirm that: "The AfD chooses a realistic political path as a bourgeois catch-all party (*bürgerliche Volkspartei*) in order within the coming years to be fundamentally in a position to be able to achieve relative majorities at all political levels and thereby as the strongest or at the least as an equally strong partner in parliaments be able to implement trend-setting policy (AfD 2017-2)." Again her efforts came to naught. By 2017, the AfD had a very different programmatic and strategic profile than what it had just a few years earlier. Whereas it had previously stressed its economic liberalism and its bourgeois character, it now featured anti-immigrant, anti-Islam planks and articulated a deep disdain for the established parties, not just for their support of the eurozone.

The costs of radicalization

In the Federal Republic, successful parties on the ideological wings have generally avoided programmatic radicalization. Party-system dynamics, party norms, constitutional features and the legacy of the Weimar Republic made it less attractive for these parties to adopt a more radical course. Let us examine these factors in turn.

Prior to unification, scholars attributed the political moderation of West German politics in large part to the logic of its party system. Two large catch-all parties and a centrist hinge party

in the form of the FDP limited wide swings to the political extremes (Smith 1976, 395-7; Katzenstein 1987, 35-45). Although the Federal Republic's party system evolved beyond the "two and a half" system of the 1960s and 1970s, it still exhibited the features of moderate pluralism, with its bipolar competition and absence of an ideologically extreme anti-system party on each pole (i.e., bilateral opposition) that characterize polarized pluralism (Sartori 1976). In moderate pluralism, elections are generally won in the centre rather than on the wings and centripetal pressures on parties prevail, rather than the centrifugal ones of polarized pluralism (Wolinetz 2006, 57). In short, the party system tends to moderate rather than radicalize politics.

In article 21 of the Basic Law, the Federal Republic bestows upon political parties a privileged position in the democratic process: "The parties participate in the forming of the political will of the people (Grundgesetz 1993, 22)." According to Gordon Smith, West Germany's party norms, in combination with the privileged constitutional standing of political parties, brought forth a "party-state," in which the governing parties served to maintain state and legal authority (*staatserhaltend*). "It is then a small step to speak of a *Staatspartei* and to identify a party with the functions of state—with strong normative and legal connotations (401)." This dissuaded parties on the wings from embracing a full-throated populist agenda.

The Federal Republic's institutional features impose potentially high costs on parties that drift too far to the extremes. In regional and national elections, parties, with few exceptions, must reach a threshold of five per cent in order to achieve parliamentary representation. This relatively high threshold discourages radicalization since an extremist party is likely to struggle to win five per cent nationally. Article 21 of the Basic Law stipulates that parties opposed to the democratic order are unconstitutional, and may be banned pending a decision of the Federal Constitutional Court (Grundgesetz 1993, 22). Even if never banned, extremist parties may be subject to

investigation by federal and state offices of constitutional protection, damaging their reputation among voters. In 2017, the Bundestag amended article 21 so that undemocratic parties would no longer be eligible to receive public financing, even if the Federal Constitutional Court chose not to ban them.

To ensure that parties are not constituted along such authoritarian lines as the “leadership principle” or “democratic centralism,” they must have democratic statutes that guarantee membership rights. Because its members vote the programme, a small party on the ideological wings faces an ever present risk that extremists will infiltrate and push it away from the centre (Decker 2016, 8). This encourages parties to erect firewalls to keep out political extremists, whether through programmatic red lines or stringent membership requirements.

Germany’s disastrous path in the 1930s and 1940s set ideological parameters in the Federal Republic. The postwar division of Germany marginalized the far left and reinforced the notion of the left as “anti-national (Smith 1976, 402-4).” Moreover, the Weimar Republic showed the perils of bringing extremists into government. Whereas in other European democracies far-left parties have joined national government, they have not in the Federal Republic (Olsen, Koß and Hough 2010). The NSDAP formed nearly a century ago, but its shadow still looms large: “Due to Germany’s history of the ‘Third Reich,’ all new parties on the political right are automatically stigmatized as heirs of National Socialism (Berbair, Lewandowsky and Siri 2015, 160).” Right-wing populists have entered governing coalitions or tolerated minority governments elsewhere in Europe, but German rightists have until now floundered in national elections and, when locally successful, struggled to find coalition partners.

In short, given the party system's moderate pluralism, well-established postwar norms, instruments of state sanction, and the risk of extremist infiltration, viable parties on the ideological wings generally have tried to advance their vote-seeking and office-seeking goals by resisting programmatic radicalization. The AfD's hard right turn is unusual in the postwar German context.

Historical Cases

In light of the Federal Republic's institutions and political culture, the leaders of successful parties on the ideological wings have had an incentive not to support a more extreme party programme. In three cases, party moderates faced down hardliners and successfully avoided programmatic radicalization.

The NPD in 1970:

Like the AfD nearly a half century later, the NPD had success soon after forming in 1964. By combining hyper-statism, virulent anti-Communism, integral (*völkisch*) nationalism, and a law-and-order message, it targeted national conservatives, former NSDAP members, neo-Nazis, and conservative Catholics (Schmollinger 1986, 1929). Led by Adolf von Thadden from 1967 until 1971, it claimed to uphold the Federal Republic's free and democratic basic order, even though its 1967 programme and the background of its leaders, many of whom like von Thadden came from the NSDAP and the extremist German Reich Party (DRP), cast doubt on its commitment (Botsch 2017, 42-7). As the Federal Republic entered into recession in 1966, the party achieved success as a protest party, clearing the five-per cent hurdle in seven Länder between 1966 and 1968. The grand coalition of CDU/CSU-SPD and the FDP's centrist repositioning had opened up party-system space on the right wing that the NPD leadership aimed to fill by presenting itself as a viable alternative to the established parties (Schmollinger 1986,

1935). Grand coalition and recession together created opportunities for extreme parties and movements. On the far left, students led an extra-parliamentary movement (APO) that demanded radical societal reforms. On the far right, the NPD decried the supposed breakdown in law and order and accused the grand coalition of betraying German national interests. To the alarm of many, the NDP seemed likely to join the Bundestag in 1969. However, an improving economy, the lengthy debate over whether the federal government should or should not ask the Federal Constitutional Court to ban the party as anti-democratic (it chose not to), and NPD violence during rallies cost the party support. It won 4.3 per cent, which set the stage for its rapid decline and prolonged crisis.

Following the election, a centre-left government replaced the grand coalition and the CDU/CSU moved to the right. The Christian Democrats attacked Chancellor Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and in so doing reabsorbed previous NPD voters and members. The NPD's factionalism heightened. Extremists demanded an aggressive, "actionist" reconstitution as a nationalist movement party. Von Thadden and the NPD leadership opposed the radical wing, called for "de-Nazifying" purges within the party, and rejected an "APO from the right" model (Dudek and Jaschke 1984, 294; Schmollinger 1986, 1937). At the Wertheim party congress in 1970, the NPD publicly proclaimed a conservative rather than radical direction. In its Wertheimer Manifesto '70, it underscored its support of the free-democratic basic order, condemned all war crimes, opposed war as an instrument of politics, called for a European federation of states, and even accepted the western alliance system (NPD 1970, 100-1). The manifesto asserted that: "The NPD is conservative. It fights emphatically for the preservation of timelessly applicable ideals that are still deeply rooted in the nation (NPD 1970, 101)."

Why had the NPD backed the more moderate Wertheimer Manifesto in 1970, even as its extreme wing was clamoring for radical action? For starters, von Thadden and reformers attributed the narrow loss to the establishment's alleged defamation of the NPD as violent and undemocratic and now hoped, as a condition for an electoral comeback, to improve its reputation among voters wary of resurgent national socialism in postwar Germany (Schmollinger 1986, 1936). This meant passing a less extreme programme, establishing greater distance from militants and fanatics and putting to rest concerns over whether the party should be banned. Secondly, were the NPD to maintain its ideological distance to the rightward-shifting CDU/CSU, then it would have to further radicalize, something its leadership wanted to avoid given West German culture and institutions (Schmollinger 1986, 1936). The Wertheimer Manifesto was intended to build bridges between conservatives and lay the foundation for a unified opposition to Brandt's Ostpolitik (Schmollinger 1986, 1936; Brandstetter 2016).

The Greens in the early 1990s:

Arising out of the social movements of the 1970s, the West German Greens had two main factions in the 1980s. A "fundi" wing was radical ecological and generally anti-capitalist, critical of West Germany's political institutions, and committed to internal party rules (such as rotation, separation of party office from elected office) designed to ensure "grassroots-democracy" (*Basisdemokratie*). The early Greens had been subject to investigation from the office of constitutional protection. In contrast, "realos" were less left-wing on economic issues, more focussed on parliamentary work, eager to join governing coalitions if the opportunity arose, and in favour of professionalizing party structures. In the 1990 Bundestag campaign, the West German Greens lacked a clear position on national unification, an overriding concern to many, and called for policies, such as open borders, that failed to resonate with the electorate (Probst

2013, 175). The party won 4.8 per cent in the west in 1990 and fell out of the Bundestag; its inability to address voter concerns and its intense factionalism had left its future in jeopardy (Müller-Rommel 1991, 448-50).

The Greens responded by professionalizing their leadership structures and situating themselves nearer the centre. Given Germany's institutional and cultural features, this promised greater opportunities for the party to win over centrist voters and to join governments. At the 1991 Neumünster party congress, realos implemented internal reforms to move beyond the amateur-activist party model (Frankland 2008). In its Neumünster declaration, the party declared itself open to forming Red-Green governments with the SPD and described itself as an "ecological reform party (Greens 1991, 2)." Prominent left-wing Greens, among them Jutta Ditfurth, quit the party in protest, which tilted the internal balance further toward the reformers. In January 1993, the Greens merged with Alliance 90 to form Alliance 90/The Greens. The former East German civic activists braced the western realos' moderate course. In its Association Agreement, the merging party presented itself as a better defender of the Basic Law's norms than the established parties and as a democratic reform party prepared to govern (Alliance '90/The Greens 1993, 8, 18). In the 1994 Bundestag campaign, the Greens' manifesto positioned the party closer to the centre on economic issues (Bukow 2016, 127-8). The election result of 7.4 per cent vindicated the party's now dominant realo wing.

Why had the Greens moderated their programme after the election defeat? Bolstered by electoral success in the Hesse region in early 1991, where a Red-Green government was elected, realos made the case that the party's internal divisions, its lack of professionalism, and its inability to address real world concerns had contributed to the 1990 loss. The fundis were on the defensive. Social movements had declined as a basis for viable grassroots opposition; the

winding down of the Cold War upended traditional left-wing foreign policy and anti-capitalist assumptions; and a small new party, the PDS, created competition for Greens activists on the far left. In short, for many the realos presented the more credible path forward for the party. With an exodus among the left wing, and the arrival of centrist East Germans, the reformers' upper-hand, buffered by streamlined party structures, found expression in a moderate party programme.

The PDS in 2002-03:

As the successor to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), the PDS made a career in unified Germany as a left-wing eastern regional party (Hough 2002, Patton 2011). Echoing the "fundi-realo" conflicts in other parties, it contained a far-left and a reform socialist wing. The former was avowedly anti-capitalist, willing to defend the former GDR (even at times its controversial aspects), was intent on grassroots opposition, and was skeptical of governing with the SPD. Offices of constitutional protection investigated the party's far left, especially its Communist Platform. Anchored in local and regional assemblies throughout the former East Germany while heading the national party, the reform socialists prioritized parliamentary work, a more open accounting of the GDR's crimes, and efforts to reform rather than end capitalism in the short-to-medium run. They sought to broaden the appeal of their party among centre-left voters and prospective coalition partners.

In the 2002 Bundestag election, the PDS won only four per cent of the national vote. As in 1969 (NPD) and in 1990 (Greens), electoral defeat brought with it a showdown between factions. At its Gera party congress following the election, delegates blamed the reformers, especially those in regional governments in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Berlin, for sacrificing principle for power, for trying to turn the PDS into another social democratic party, and for accepting neo-liberal policies. Although herself a reformer, the party chairwoman, Gabi

Zimmer, delivered an emotional address, in which she won over left-wing delegates with scarcely veiled jabs at her colleagues in regional government, calling for the PDS to be a party of “formative opposition (PDS 2002).” Zimmer was re-elected as chair, while leftists assumed key positions in the party executive. The PDS emerged from Gera badly divided and left-wing office holders Dieter Dehm (deputy chair) and Uwe Hixsch (treasurer) disrupted the workings of the party executive. Zimmer stepped down as party chair in June 2013 and was replaced by Lothar Bisky, a centrist, modernizer and former chair. The reform socialists were firmly back in charge and the left wing, which was blamed for the post-Gera dysfunction, lost influence.

At its Chemnitz party congress in October 2003, the PDS approved a more moderate party programme. It now accepted the UN Security Council’s right to use military means to preserve world peace and stated its support for an “alliance of the centre and left” to oppose neo-liberal hegemony (PDS 2002, 16-7, 32). Instead of strident anti-capitalism, the party now conceded that “entrepreneurial activity and the profit motive are important conditions for innovation and economic efficiency (PDS 2002, 3).” In short, the PDS had tempered its party programme.

The reform socialists argued that the party’s future lay not with GDR-nostalgia nor as a protest party, but rather with delivering benefits to voters. In regional assemblies, they had ended the party’s isolation and brought it into positions of responsibility where it acquired governing experience. Under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the SPD-Greens government had tacked to the centre, creating an opportunity for a left-wing party (Patton 2006).” In contrast, it seemed unlikely that the far left’s extra-parliamentary activism, fundamental opposition to capitalism, and uncompromising pacifism would turn things around for the struggling party. Although the

left had faulted the reform socialists for the Bundestag defeat, it was subsequently held to account for the post-Gera crisis in 2002-3 that had set the party further adrift.

The Left Party: 2007-2011

The AfD's adoption of a more radical programme was unusual, but not exceptional in postwar Germany. A leftist party had done this less than a decade earlier. In 2004-5, disgruntled Social Democrats and trade unionists, mostly in the west, founded the Electoral Alternative for Social Justice and Jobs (WASG) in opposition to Chancellor Schröder's cuts to long-term unemployment benefits (the Hartz IV reforms). In summer 2004, the WASG and PDS backed large anti-Hartz IV demonstrations; Gregor Gysi, a prominent PDS politician, and Oskar Lafontaine, the past SPD chair and future WASG leader, each spoke at the rallies. They were key figures in their parties' decision to cooperate in the 2005 Bundestag election (in which the Left Party.PDS won a record 8.7 per cent) and to merge into a new party, *die Linke*, in 2007. The partnership made sense: both parties opposed the Schröder government's welfare state reforms as well as Germany's military missions abroad (Dietzel, Hoffmann and Woop 2005.) The merger pointed to an influential centrist bloc within the new party (Micus 2007). Yet the Left Party's Programmatic Cornerstones, which served as the basis for the 2007 fusion, were as left-wing, if not more so, than the PDS's Chemnitz programme (Hough and Koß 2009, 82; Neu 2007, 11; Coffé and Plassa 2010). The party's 2011 programme, with its calls to nationalize the energy and banking sectors, legalize all drugs and dramatically expand the welfare state, contained position to the left of the former PDS (Bortfeldt 2011). Described by Jürgen P. Lang as "very radical, significantly more radical than all the programmes of the successor party PDS ever were" (Tagesschau.de 2011), the party programme also established tough conditions on when the Left Party might enter into federal government (Left Party 2011).

To summarize, the NPD, Greens, and PDS resisted radicalization following lost elections. Overcoming those calling for fundamental opposition, party leaders, aware of the Federal Republic's institutional and cultural context, favoured a "realistic" course that moderated rather than radicalized the party programme. The case of *die Linke* differed; it did not follow a narrow election defeat, nor did it involve changes to an existing programme. When the new party formed, left-wing forces prevailed over reformers and drafted a programme to the populist left of the PDS's 2003 programme.

Why the AfD radicalized its programme

In late summer 2014, the AfD had done well in three eastern regional elections after stressing issues of immigration and integration (Decker 2016, 8-9). The AfD won 9.7 per cent in Saxony in late August, 10.6 per cent and 12.2 per cent in Thuringia and Brandenburg, respectively, in mid-September. This bolstered the party's national conservative wing led by Frauke Petry, who was co-federal party chair, chair of the Saxony AfD and caucus leader in the Saxony regional assembly; Alexander Gauland, the AfD caucus chair in the Brandenburg regional assembly; and the far-right Björn Höcke, who headed the Thuringia party branch and served as chair of the AfD's caucus in the Thuringia regional assembly. Their ascent challenged the position of Bernd Lucke whose authoritarian leadership style and support for the party's economic liberal camp made accommodation difficult (Decker 2016, 7-8).

At this time, eurozone bailouts had receded as a political issue while immigration had acquired salience. In 2014, an anti-Islam protest movement arose in Dresden, calling itself "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident (Pegida)." It mobilized tens of thousands including many AfD members and voters. Although the party's economic liberal wing generally sought to keep Pegida at arm's length, as it tried to shield the party from open

association with anti-immigrant and anti-Islam extremists, national conservatives, who preferred a populism that fed on grassroots cultural protest, regarded the issues raised by Pegida as important for the party to stress. In March 2015, Höcke and André Poggenburg (head of the AfD Saxony-Anhalt) presented the Erfurt Resolution, which faulted Bernd Lucke's AfD for, among other things, distancing itself from "civic protest movements," and adapting itself to the establishment's alleged cowardice, technocracy and betrayal of national interests (Flügel 2015; Kellershohn 2016, 191-4). Soon thereafter, the AfD caucus in the Saxony regional assembly, which Petry chaired, lauded the Pegida rallies as "important and essential for urgently needed political changes in our home region of Saxony and in all of Germany (Korsch 2016, 125)."

At the AfD's party congress in Essen in July 2015, the national conservative wing won a comprehensive victory. Marcus Pretzell, chair of the North Rhine-Westphalia branch, had declared at the congress that the AfD was both an "[anti-] euro-party" and a "Pegida-party." Lucke was met with derision when he countered that this was not party policy (Badische Zeitung 2015). In the election for party chair, Petry soundly defeated Lucke, who, along with many others from the party's economic liberal wing, left the party. With the national conservative wing ascendant, the path was cleared for the party to reorient its programme in an anti-immigrant, anti-Islam direction. The 2015 refugee crisis and widespread concerns over Chancellor Angela Merkel's open door policy, as well as terror attacks in France, Belgium and Germany, boosted the AfD in the polls and seemingly vindicated those who pushed for the anti-immigrant agenda. Whereas the party had managed a lackluster 6.1 per cent and 5.5 per cent in regional elections in Hamburg and Bremen in February and May 2015, in 2016 it surged to 15.1 per cent in Baden-Württemberg, 12.6 per cent in Rhineland-Palatinate, 24.2 per cent in Saxony-Anhalt, 20.1 in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and 14.2 per cent in Berlin. After the July 2015 Essen party

conference, the party had polled at three per cent nationally (Forsa 2015). By late September 2016, it had soared to 14 per cent (Forsa 2016).

Insert table 1 here

Of the five parties, as table 1 shows, only the AfD and *die Linke* adopted more radical programmes. What accounts for the differing outcomes? In the AfD and the Left Party, the hardline faction: 1) did not take the blame for the election loss; 2) offered a credible electoral path forward based on social movement activity, regional elections, and patterns of partisan competition; 3) had been bolstered by changes in party membership 4) and were fortified by external developments. In contrast, hardliners in the NPD, Greens and PDS took the blame for election defeat or post-election stagnation; did not have a strong case for fundamental opposition on the basis of social movements, regional elections and the national party system; had been weakened by party membership changes; and were not aided by external events. Let us briefly look at each factor in turn.

Neither national conservatives in the AfD nor the left wing of *die Linke* took the wrap for a lost election. Bernd Lucke and the party leadership had contested the 2013 election primarily along economic liberal lines and narrowly missed their goal of joining the Bundestag in what was widely seen as a strong showing. On the populist left, Oskar Lafontaine and the WASG led the Left Party.PDS to 4.9 per cent in the west (and 8.7 per cent nationally) in 2005 and *die Linke* to 8.3 per cent in the west (and 11.9 per cent nationwide) in 2009. These strong showings bolstered Lafontaine and his left-wing populist strategy at the expense of former PDS-reformers who had long proved incapable of attracting western voters.

In contrast, in 1969, 1990 and 2002-3 hardliners were directly or indirectly linked to either election setbacks or ensuing stagnation. Von Thadden and the NPD leadership laid their party's loss at the feet of those who had labeled the NPD extremist and undemocratic, a label that stuck due to the violence and overheated rhetoric of party extremists. After 1990, the Greens assigned blame to the fundis for the lost election. In the PDS, hardliners attacked reformers for 2002, but in turn took flak for subsequent paralysis in the national party executive, which provided an opening for Bisky and the reformers to advance their programme.

Second, hardliners in the AfD and the Left Party bolstered their case for a more radical programme on the basis of social movement activity, regional election results, and party-system dynamics. In regard to social movements, a key component of fundamental opposition, Pegida shored up the national conservatives by demonstrating that opposition to Islam and asylum-seekers had great mobilizing potential. As Helmut Kellersohn notes, "Without doubt Pegida strengthened the national conservative wing in the AfD (2016, 191)." In April 2016, Höcke credited this anti-Islam movement for its invaluable contribution to the party's success and described it as the AfD's "extra-parliamentary partner organization (*Vorfeldorganisation*) in Dresden (Zeit-Online 2016)." Concerned that open fellowship with Pegida would scare off moderate voters, Petry and the AfD party executive later attempted but failed to ban AfD members from speaking or displaying party symbols at Pegida rallies (Meisner 2016). In comparison with Pegida's importance in the AfD's transformation, the anti-Hartz IV demonstrations in 2004 had helped forge the PDS-WASG partnership, but had ebbed by the time of the Left Party's first programmatic document in 2007.

The results of the eastern regional elections of summer 2014 showed the electoral promise of anti-immigrant populism, which the national conservatives had foregrounded, and

bolstered Frauke, Höcke, and Gauland in their effort to reorient the party in a national conservative direction. Likewise, the Left Party performed strongly in western regional elections from 2008 to 2010, including its result of 21.3 per cent in Saarland, which enhanced Lafontaine's prestige and revealed left-wing populism's appeal. The former SPD chair played a key role in drafting the new party's 2011 programme (Bortfeldt 2011, 502).

Finally, in regard to party-system dynamics, the post-2013 constellation presented the AfD's national conservatives with both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the CDU/CSU-SPD governing coalition faced a centre-left party (the Greens) and a far-left one (*die Linke*) in the Bundestag. This configuration, with the CDU/CSU in the centre, and the FDP sidelined, meant a non-extremist right-wing party, like the Lucke-AfD of 2013, might fill a vacuum to the right of the CDU/CSU. On the other hand, because the CDU and the more conservative CSU were in government, they supported (albeit reluctantly) the government's controversial refugee policy in 2015. Had the Christian Democrats been in opposition, then the AfD would likely not have emerged as the main critic of the refugee influx. In comparison, the grand coalition from 2005 to 2009 kept the SPD in the centre, which dovetailed with a combative Left Party programme that attacked the Social Democrats for being part of a neo-liberal consensus.

In contrast, declining social movements, regional elections, and patterns of partisan competition all favoured reformers in the NPD, Greens, and PDS. After 1969, the NPD either could undergo radicalization in order to distance itself from the rightward-tacking CDU/CSU, surely a losing proposition for an already fringe party, or, as von Thadden envisioned, join forces with the mainstream right by underscoring its conservative credentials. By 1991, Green fundis no longer rode the social movement wave that had earlier lifted the party, while their realo rivals

could point to success in regional elections and government as a blueprint for achieving national relevance. In 2002-3, absent a widespread protest wave, the PDS's left wing still preferred fundamental opposition. Even though reform socialists had struggled in regional government, they held a realistic perspective on effecting policy change.

In regard to our third factor—changes in party composition—, the exodus of Bernd Lucke and economic liberals in 2014 set the stage for the hardline AfD programme. In the Left Party, the former WASG proved “the considerably more radical part of the new party (Bortfeldt 2007)” and shaped the programme accordingly (Patton 2013). Those on the left had a powerful champion in co-chair Oskar Lafontaine whose insistence on rolling back welfare state reforms and ending German military involvement in Afghanistan was consistent with an oppositional social-movement party (Bortfeldt 2011, 2). In contrast, the departure of fundis, followed by the addition of former East German civic activists, tilted the balance of power toward the Green party reformers.

Fourth, external factors animated hardliners in both the AfD and Left Party. The 2015 refugee crisis, high-profile terrorist attacks, and surging right-wing populism in Europe empowered AfD national conservatives who appeared as part of a mighty anti-establishment wave. To this end, Frauke Petry met with Marine LePen (Front National), Geert Wilders (Party of Freedom) and Matteo Salvini (Northern League) in Coblenz, Germany in early 2017 in support of the far-right EP group, “Europe of Nations and Freedom.” External factors also influenced the Left Party's programmatic course. By 2010, the eurozone crisis was fueling left-wing populism in Europe. In its 2011 programme, the Left Party sharpened its attack on the banks and drew upon the anti-austerity discourse of the European left. For left-wing Greens, in contrast, the events of 1989-90 had undercut anti-capitalist, pacifist shibboleths and exposed the

limits of prioritizing highly ideological positions (such as “Never Again Germany!”).

Conclusion

This article has compared the AfD with four other parties on the ideological wings in order to understand the conditions for the AfD’s radicalization. In each case, leading reformers faced hardliners who favoured fundamental opposition, social movement protest over office-seeking, populist, anti-establishment messaging, and more radical policy demands. Whichever side prevailed then shaped party programme and strategy along its preferred lines. The AfD’s programmatic radicalization was unusual, but not exceptional. Similar factors contributed to a Left Party programme that was further to the left than that of the PDS, its primary predecessor party. In the short term, both parties surged by claiming to offer real alternatives in the eurozone and refugee crises. As a result, German party politics has arguably become more “normal” with left-wing and right-wing populist parties finding in Germany the kind of success that they have enjoyed elsewhere in Europe.

Notwithstanding the AfD’s strong showing in the 2017 Bundestag election, it would be premature to conclude that the Federal Republic’s distinctive institutional and political-cultural features no longer punish those that shift their programmes away from the centre. The AfD for instance has lost considerable political talent in the wake of its rightward track. Following the national conservatives’ triumph over Bernd Lucke at the Essen Party congress in 2015, approximately 2,000 members, mostly in the Lucke camp, abandoned the party. Allies of Lucke put the number at nearly 3,000 (Steffen 2015). The party also bid adieu to numerous politicians who quit over its far right politics. Five of the seven AfD’s European Parliament deputies turned their back on the party in 2015. Between 2014 and late February 2017, nine of the AfD’s 153 deputies in regional parliaments withdrew from their party’s caucus (Schroeder, Weßels, Neusser

and Berzel, 27-8); an additional three deputies split off from the AfD's caucus in Saxony-Anhalt in spring 2017 (Volksstimme 2017). In fall 2017, additional AfD politicians abandoned the party or its legislative caucuses (Fiedler and Meisner 2017). Most cited its hard-right course as the reason. All the while the AfD has struggled to keep out or expel far-right extremists, while state constitutional protection agencies have begun investigating individual party members (Zeit-Online 2017). After failing to moderate the AfD's strategic orientation and programme in 2017, co-chair Frauke Petry chose not to be part of the AfD's Bundestag caucus after the federal election and left the party. In a sense, the revolution had devoured its own children: first Bernd Lucke and then Frauke Petry. Hans-Olaf Henkel, a former industrial group leader and former AfD deputy chair, lamented that he had "helped create a real monster (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2015)."

In spring 2017, 74 per cent expressed doubts that the AfD was a normal, democratic party—a 12 percentage point increase over the past two years. On a scale of 1 to 100 (with 100 being furthest right), voters located the AfD at 82, up 9 percentage points from 2015 (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2017). Overall the party had far higher unfavourable ratings than it had had in 2013. Whereas according to pre-election polls in 2013 its favourability rating had stood at minus 1.4 (the same value as the Left Party and just a half a point below that of the centre-right FDP) on a scale of 5 to minus 5, its standing had fallen sharply to minus 2.8 in 2017—far worse than any other party (Forschungsgruppen Wahlen 2017). In the Bundestag election, only a third of the AfD's voters had backed the party out of conviction while two-thirds were upset with the other parties. More than a third of its voters believed that the party was not distancing itself sufficiently from right-wing extremism, whereas 86 per cent of the electorate thought this the case (Steppat 2017). After storming the Bundestag in fall 2017 with the third largest caucus, the

Alternative for Germany faces parliamentary isolation given its controversial programme and personnel.

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TABLE ONE: Party Programmatic Radicalization?: Five Parties on the Ideological Wings

	NPD, 1969-71	Greens, 1990-3	PDS, 2002-3	Linke, 2007-11	AfD, 2013-17
Was there a party programme radicalization?	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
1) Did hardliners take the blame for loss and/or for post-election crisis?	YES	YES	YES	N/A (Lafontaine camp took credit for election wins)	NO
2) Did hardliners offer an attractive path forward?	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Conditioning factors					
a) Did the state of social movements favour fundamental opposition?	NO	NO	NO	NO, Anti-Hartz IV protests in decline	YES
b) Did regional electoral developments vindicate fundamental opposition?	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
c) Did party-system dynamics support fundamental opposition?	NO	NO	NO	YES (2005-09)	NO
3) Did departures or additions strengthen the hardliners?	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
4) Did external factors strengthen the hardliners?	NO	NO	NO	YES (eurozone crisis after 2010)	YES