

2021

The quest for intra-party democracy in populist right parties: an ethnography of the 'Alternative for Germany'

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**THE QUEST FOR INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY IN POPULIST RIGHT
PARTIES:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE ‘ALTERNATIVE FOR GERMANY’**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend special thanks to Sofia Perez for her unwavering and invaluable support throughout all stages of my PhD. I recognize how fortunate I was to have her as my advisor and head of my committee. I am also grateful to the other members of my dissertation committee – Taylor Boas, Jeremy Menchik, and David Art – for their patience, generosity with their time and constructive feedback. Also, thank you to Liah Greenfeld for her suggestions during the prospectus-phase of my dissertation.

Thank you to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Boston University for their funding that supported my fieldwork and research. I would like to thank the discussants, fellow panelists, and audience members of the various conferences where I have presented drafts and versions of this work who offered thought-provoking comments and feedback. In particular, thank you to Daniel Kinderman, Jelle Koedam, Eva Hoxha, Seth Jolly, and Cyril Jayet.

Thank you to my peers and friends at BU, and especially thank you to Sahar Abi Hassan, Claire Seulgie Lim and Mike Luke who offered perceptive feedback on all my ideas related to the dissertation. I also owe additional thanks to Sahar Abi Hassan for visiting me in Germany while I was conducting fieldwork, and who has been a relentless supporter of all my endeavors. I am grateful to the friends with whom I spent time in the field – specifically, Camilla Szymanski, Andre Orth and Magnus Freiherr von Wangenheim. Magnus has been a close friend and vital source of nascent ideas on my research, as he has introduced me to

the intricacies of German culture and history before the start of my academic career at Boston University.

Thank you to Vidolina Yanakieva and her partner, Anita Vasileva and her family, and Ariane von Wangenheim for inviting me to live with them for most of my fieldwork year in Germany, and for being amazingly supportive and caring friends.

Thank you to my family who supported me throughout graduate school. Most of all, thanks to my parents: thank you, dad – Emil Kamenov – for always providing me with the most interesting European history books, and thank you, mom – Marieta Kamenova – for always worrying that I would never finish my dissertation.

Finally, I owe a massive and collective thank you to innumerable people in Germany who made this dissertation possible. Unfortunately, given the need to protect anonymity, I cannot name anyone here – but if they read this, they will know who they are. They not only facilitated my research, but many people welcomed me into their lives and treated me like family, and for that I will be eternally grateful.

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ABSTRACT

European populist right parties have been the subject of numerous academic studies, providing competing arguments about their appeal and success. Parties like the Alternative for Germany (AfD) have been perceived as short-lived outlets for protest voters, frustrated with the failure of mainstream parties to address issues of immigration and law and order, or as temporary byproducts of rapid and destabilizing economic change. However, such explanations overlook other roots and development of populist political movements. This dissertation focuses on the organizational dynamics in the AfD, a party which has achieved something that had eluded the radical right in Germany – a federal electoral breakthrough. Before the 2017 Bundestag Election, no populist right party has managed to pass the threshold for parliamentary representation on the federal level – a failure that can be attributed to Germany’s strong political culture of containment and civic confrontation of far right movements through large protests and anti-fascist activities. Drawing on original data from fieldwork observations and in-depth interviews with AfD party members, the research presented in this dissertation argues that the Alternative for Germany does not

follow the path of hierarchical and centralized decision-making structures, typical for the radical right parties. Indeed, I show that the AfD exhibits organizational features of intra-party participation that are mostly associated with the left and populist left party family. I examine the impact of internal democratic structures and grassroots activities on the party's ability to rally a diverse range of supporters, empower the grassroots in the decision-making processes on manifesto development and candidate selection, and discourage centralization of power in the hands of the federal leadership. The findings of intra-party democratic dynamics in the AfD can serve as an important addition to the broader literature on party organization, and specifically how populism may influence party structures. Parties that conduct their internal affairs in a 'democratic way' are able to persuade voters that they have an internal democratic ethos, instead of being entirely controlled by political elites, whether their political agenda is inclusionary or exclusionary. The perception that the 'demos' governs party decisions may add to the party's credibility as a potential government participant, and in the case of the AfD, fight off Nazi stigmatization and social exclusion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfD	Alternative for Germany
AKK	Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, CDU politician
AVA	Alternative Workers Union
BB	Brandenburg
BE	Berlin
BFA	Federal expert committee – internal party structure in the AfD
BW	Baden-Württemberg
BY	Bavaria
CDU	German Christian Democratic Party
CSU	German Christian Democratic Union
DEXIT	Germany leaving the European Union
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FDP	German Free Democratic Party
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
HB	Bremen
HE	Hessen
HH	Hamburg
IFAS	Institute for Applied Social Issues
IPD	Intra-party democracy
JA	Youth Alternative
LFA	State expert committee – internal party structure in the AfD
M5S	The Italian Five Star Movement
MP	Member of parliament
MV	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

NI	Lower Saxony
NPD	German National Democratic Party
NW	North Rhine-Westphalia
PEGIDA	Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident
REP	German Republican Party (Republikaner)
RN	French National Rally (former National Front (FN))
RP	Rhineland-Palatinate
SL	Saarland
SH	Schleswig-Holstein
SN	Saxony
SPD	German Social Democratic Party
ST	Saxony-Anhalt
TH	Thuringia
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER I

Parties are failing (...) as a result of a process of mutual withdrawal or abandonment, whereby citizens retreat into private life, while party leaderships retreat into the institutions, drawing their terms of reference ever more readily from their roles as governors or public-office holders.

(Mair, 2013, pp. 16-17)

We are liberals and conservatives. We are free citizens of our nation. We are staunch supporters of democracy.

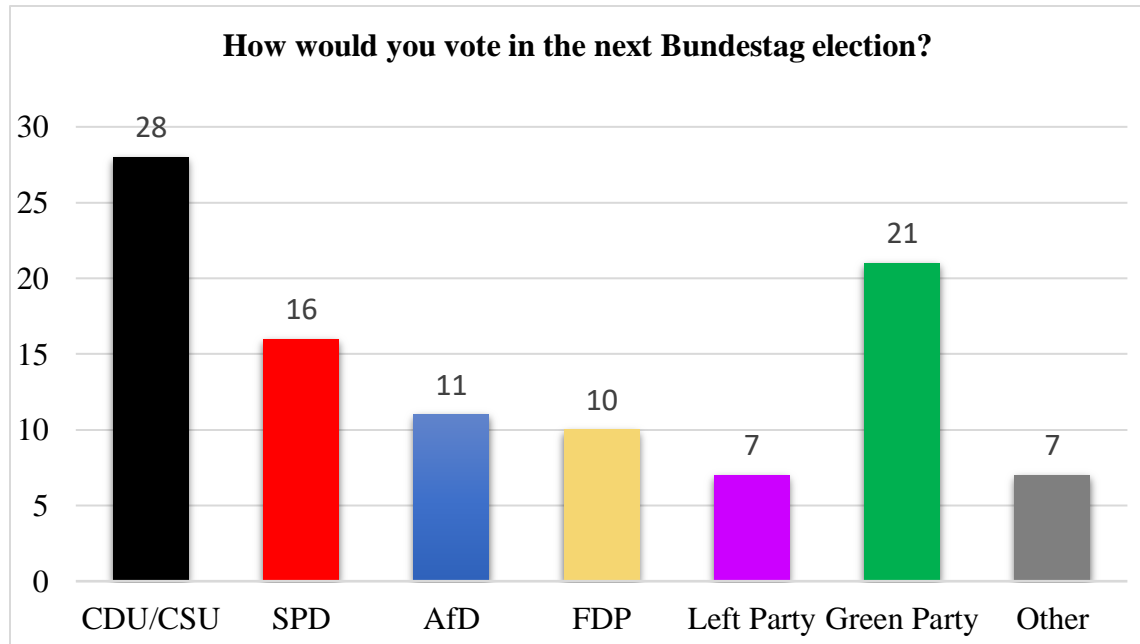
(AfD Manifesto, 2017, p. 5)

In the shadow of Brexit and the rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States, people tend to draw a straight line to an alienated white working class, angry pensioners and the unemployed. However, such economic-centered explanations overlook other roots and development of complex populist movements and do not fully grasp the support of more than 10 million voters for Marine Le Pen in the 2017 French Presidential Election, more than 5 million for the Alternative for Germany party in the 2017 German Federal Election, and recently, more than 8 million for the Law and Justice Party in the 2019 Polish Parliamentary Election. This thesis focuses on the organizational dynamics in the Alternative for Germany, a party which has achieved something that had eluded the radical right in Germany – a federal electoral breakthrough. Before the 2017 Bundestag Election, no right-wing party has managed to pass the threshold for parliamentary representation on the federal level – a failure that can be attributed to Germany’s strong

political culture of containment and civic confrontation through large protests and anti-fascist activities (Art, 2006). Every radical right party in post-war Germany – the National Democratic Party (NPD), the German People’s Union (DVU), the Republikaner (REP), the Freedom Party, and the Schill Party – has experienced a sudden rise, factional splits, and organizational atrophy, bringing themselves to a political oblivion.

Since its foundation in 2013, the AfD has attracted rapidly growing and striking levels of support. Unlike earlier right-wing populist parties in Germany which have enjoyed only ephemeral success and failed to gain more than a handful of elected representatives on the local and state levels, the AfD has managed to build a sizeable legislative base. The party is the third largest political group at the Bundestag with 89 MPs; it also has 244 incumbent state representatives among 15 state parliaments and 11 Members of the European Parliament. Recent polling on the upcoming Bundestag election on September 26 place the AfD fourth with 11% (Figure 1). In a 2019 Politbarometer survey, 14% of the respondents believed that right-wing extremist ideas were not very widespread in the party and 24% agreed that AfD is good for democracy, suggesting that the party may have achieved consistent minority support among German citizens (Politbarometer 2019). Although the AfD has experienced slight electoral decline across all states since 2020, it is too early to decide whether it has established itself as an acceptable niche political force or it would soon face the fate of previous radical right German parties.

Figure 1. The 2021 Bundestag Election in the Polls. Politbarometer, July 30, 2021.



While scholars have given due consideration to AfD voters and party ideology (Arzheimer, 2015; Schmitt-Beck, 2017; Bieber et al., 2018;), there has been little research on the party organization and its internal democratic mechanisms. This gap merits particular attention if we are to understand how intra-party democracy may enable a new populist right party to respond effectively to political opportunities and constraints and to establish itself permanently in the political arena. This research builds upon recent scholarship on organizational dynamics in populist parties (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, 2016) and suggests that the Alternative for Germany does not follow the path of hierarchical and centralized

decision-making structures, typical for the radical right parties. Indeed, this dissertation shows that the AfD exhibits organizational features enabling members' direct involvement, a level of political participation that is mostly associated with the left and populist left party family. The internal democratic structures of the AfD play an important role in the party's appeal to many of its supporters, who are attracted to what they perceive as opportunities of participation in the political processes.

Drawing on original data from fieldwork observations and in-depth interviews with AfD party members, this study examines the impact of internal democratic structures and grassroots activities on the party's ability to rally a diverse band of supporters, empower the grassroots in the decision-making processes on manifesto development and candidate selection, and discourage centralization of power in the hands of the federal leadership. The findings of intra-party democratic dynamics in the AfD can serve as an important addition to the broader literature on populism, and specifically how populism may influence party structures. Parties that conduct their internal affairs in a 'democratic way' show to the voters that they have an internal democratic ethos, instead of being entirely controlled by political elites. The perception that the 'demos' governs party decisions may add to the party's credibility as a potential government participant (Mersel, 2006), and in the case of the AfD, fight off Nazi stigmatization and social exclusion. Also, through its grassroots involvement, the AfD attempts to respond to the demand of more citizens' engagement in politics. By conducting activities intensively in local communities, the party manifests its willingness to respond to issues raised by the citizens, and indirectly sends a

message of better representation (Gherghina, 2014). This study hopes to contribute to the quest for more democratic participatory and deliberative mechanisms, if political parties want to provide meaningful political experiences to their members and enable them to engage in real deliberation and informed discussions.

The emerging success of populist parties in Western democracies demonstrates a trend of transformed political space as the post-WWII system built around the opposition between conservative and social democratic parties is waning. The new political divide is between people who still feel at home in a post-ideological world, and those who feel politically abandoned and voiceless.

This chapter will first review the origins of the Alternative for Germany and its performance in federal, state, and European elections. This will be followed by a discussion of the current state of literature on party organization and developments in existing populist parties that are most relevant to this project. Finally, I will describe the data and ethnographic methods used throughout the dissertation.

1. The Rise of the Alternative for Germany

The birth of the AfD can be traced back to 2010 when Chancellor Merkel acted in violation with the no-bailout clause of the Maastricht Treaty and supported a trillion-dollar rescue package to Greece and other EU countries. This decision angered many staunch supporters of ordoliberalism, who perceived state intervention as only necessary when creating the

legal and ethical framework of market activities. Since the 1960s, the idea of a European monetary union has been perceived suspiciously, as “German officials were particularly concerned about a situation of moral hazard, in which unlimited support would encourage other countries to run indefinite deficits while forcing Germany to accept higher inflation.” (Moravcsik 1998: 248). Merkel’s ‘*alternativlos*’¹ policies led directly to the foundation of the Alternative for Germany party, an alliance of Eurosceptic academics, economists, entrepreneurs, and dissidents from the mainstream parties. Before and during the Eurozone crisis, the policies of the mainstream parties became increasingly identical and there was little room for real political opposition. In a vocal critique of the absence of political deliberation, Bernd Lucke, the initiator of the AfD, demanded the establishment of an effective opposition against the “obvious mistakes” of the Grand Coalition government (Lucke, 2013). In this current situation of increasing democratic deficit and perceived remoteness of the political institutions, the slogan of the AfD – “Courage to the Truth” (‘Mut zu Wahrheit’) – resonated deeply with many.

The AfD had a very brief period of campaign preparation since its establishment in February 2013, and the party could not pass the 5% threshold at the Bundestag Election. However, in the context of the 2014 European elections, the party achieved its first nationwide success, winning seven out of Germany’s 96 seats.² Unlike the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the AfD did not campaign for leaving the European Union.

¹ ‘alternativlos’ – no alternative

² For reference of AfD vote shares in all elections, see Appendix.

The party's stance focused on the poor management of the Eurozone and demanded more empowerment of national parliaments in EU decision-making. The AfD offered a very simple straightforward solution to the Eurozone crisis – Germany should leave the Eurozone and return to a national currency. Then, Southern European countries would be free to borrow and default as much as they wish, while Germany would be free from any responsibility to sustain their economies. Election slogans criticized Mario Draghi, the President of the European Central Bank, and Greece's bail-out planning: 'Draghi gambles, you pay' ('Draghi zockt, Ihr zahlt') and 'Greeks lose hope, Germans pay, banks make revenue' ('Griechen verzweifeln, Deutsche Zahlen, Banken kassieren') (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. 'Draghi gambles, you pay', AfD campaign, 2014 EP election



Source: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/chronik-der-afd-schneller-aufstieg-stueckfall-13600859/dem-bundestag-ganz-nahe-13600855.html>

Figure 3. 'Greeks lose hope, German pay, banks make revenue.' 2013 Bundestag election.



Source: <https://www.pinterest.de/afdosterholz/afd/>

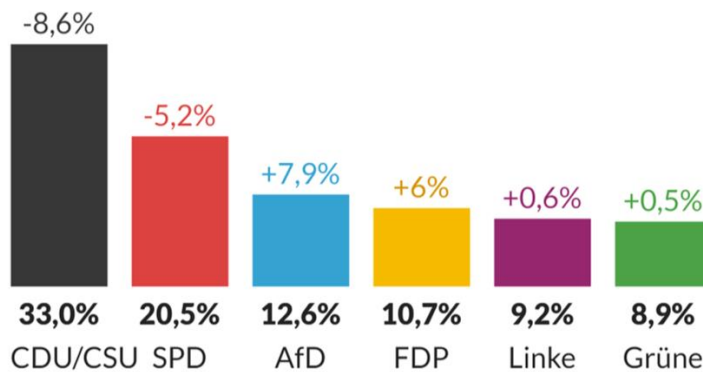
High support at the 2014 European elections provided momentum for further successful electoral performance in state elections in East Germany – 12.2% in Brandenburg, 9.4% in Saxony and 10.6% in Thuringia. Euroscepticism along with demand for stricter

immigration policies attracted both conservative and left voters. Most of the East German party members I spoke with raised concerns about Merkel's approach to turn Germany into a solidary savior of Greece, as they had first-hand experience with the economic consequences of German Unification and the unpopular "solidarity taxes" to partially ease economic stagnation in the East.

The next opportunity for the AfD to gain an electoral foothold across all state parliaments coincided with Chancellor Merkel's generous response toward refugees. Germany's open-door policy played well with the centre-left and left voters, but Merkel's position was far less popular among her conservative supporters and other European states. Since 2015, AfD's ideological stance under the leadership of Frauke Petry developed beyond its original Euroscepticism to include an anti-immigration narrative, criticizing the opening of EU borders and refugee welcoming culture, rejecting the idea of political Islam as a desirable part of German society, and stressing the importance of German *Leitkultur* ('leading' or 'dominant' culture).

The party's rise has proven stubbornly persistent, as Germans went to the polls to elect members of the Bundestag in September 2017 and the AfD rallied more than 5 million citizens. For the first time since the 1950s, a party to the right of the Christian Democrats (CDU) has entered the Bundestag. The major established parties CDU and SPD have experienced significant losses in comparison to the 2013 Bundestag election, while the AfD vote share has tripled (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Vote share and vote gains/losses per party in the 2017 Bundestag election.³



The 2017 Bundestag election demonstrated that even after twenty-seven years of reunification, the gap between East and West is very prominent. Electoral support for parties usually varies across states, but the East-West divide stands out in the AfD support, as the party came in first in half of Saxony and second in the majority of districts in Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia⁴.

However, the success of the AfD has hardly been limited to East Germany. In southern Germany, the AfD has shaken the electoral dominance of the Christian Socialist Union (CSU)⁵, coming in second in a majority of Bavarian constituencies. The CSU was down to 38% in Bavaria, a disaster by local standards, as the party's share in national elections since 1953 has usually ranged between 42% and 60% (Wagemann, 2016).

The AfD has also enjoyed surprising electoral success in the states of Baden Wuerttemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia. In the districts of Pforzheim and Cawl (Baden-

³ Source: Berliner Morgenpost. <https://interaktiv.morgenpost.de/analyse-bundestagswahl-2017/>

⁴ See Appendix for a map with AfD support by electoral districts.

⁵ CSU is the sister party of CDU.

Wuerttemberg), which are usually CDU strongholds, the AfD came in second. In the Ruhr Region of North Rhine-Westphalia, the largest urban area in Germany, the dominant Socialist Democratic Party lost a significant percentage of its support to the AfD. At the 2019 state elections the AfD has managed to solidify its support in East Germany. Saxony has proven to be AfD's true heartland with 27.7%, the highest vote share of the party so far. The party performed quite well in Brandenburg (20.2%) and Thuringia (22.7%) state elections.

Overall, support for the AfD is not a simple matter. The party's vote base is a coalition of strange bedfellows. As mentioned above, East German communities formed to be the strongholds for German populism. These areas have experienced relatively low levels of immigration and income levels that are slightly below the national average. However, unemployment rate and percentage of social welfare recipients vary significantly in these constituencies. Second, the party performed remarkably well in Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg, two wealthy states with below-average unemployment and high levels of migrant population (Eiermann, 2017). Third, AfD's success in the Ruhr region of North Rhine-Westphalia, specifically the urban districts of Duisburg, Gelsenkirchen and Oberhausen, tells a story of an increasing unemployment among young people, low-income levels, and prevalent Roma migrant communities from Eastern Europe.

2. Argument: Bringing the concept of ‘intra-party democracy’ to the study of the radical right.

There is ample literature, following the growing importance of populist right-wing parties and movements and analyzing the causes of the emergence and success of such political actors. A prevalent approach is focusing on the economic, societal and cultural conditions that enable the right-wing mobilization and success. Radical right parties are often supported by people who experience a sense of anomie and insecurity from the breakdown of traditional class, family, and religious structures (Oesch, 2008; Rydgren, 2012), and perceive mass immigration and the rise of post-industrial society as threatening (Mudde, 2007; Kriesi et al., 2008). Other scholars have looked into political factors that may facilitate or hinder radical right mobilization: institutional allies that may aid or take over the proposed policies of radical right groups (Mudde, 2007; Caiani et al., 2012) and low trust and satisfaction with democratic institutions (Lubbers et al, 2002; Ignazi, 2017).

In addition to macro-level explanations, scholars have also highlighted individual factors and motivations, driving activism and support for the radical right. Exposure to nationalist or authoritarian values during childhood as well as feelings of alienation and need for belonging and identity have motivated people to join radical right organizations (Klandermans and Mayer, 2006). However, recent research suggests that when voting for radical right parties many supporters have rather ideological and pragmatic considerations (xenophobic attitudes, or disenchantment with mainstream parties) (Norris, 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2005; Rydgren, 2012).

Recent studies have also stressed the importance of organizations and leaders to explain the survival and endurance of radical right mobilization (Art, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; della Porta, 2013). For instance, Art (2011) suggests that variation in radical right success is dependent upon the parties' organizational abilities to recruit and maintain moderate and educated activists and leaders. Building on the meso-level organizational approach, I propose an additional study of party structures to understand how populist right parties offer opportunities for internal participation to their supporters, who are disillusioned with the established parties' internal dynamics and demand more intra-party democracy and accountability.

While some contend that modern democracy would not exist without political parties, it is equally argued that intra-party democracy has always been impossible to achieve (Michels, 1915; Kirchheimer, 1966). Studies of party organization demonstrate that modern parties have transformed into internal cartels led by career professionals, thus relinquishing values and practices originally associated with the mass party such as internal deliberation and leadership accountability (Katz, 2001; Blyth and Katz, 2005; Katz and Mair, 2009). Parties are gradually losing their semblance as "essential instruments of – and for – democracy and liberty, and for the general well-being of their electorate" and are experiencing increasing collapse in terms of confidence and trust (Ignazi, 2017, p. 3). When some reforms are initiated to democratize the candidate selection, they are often claimed to be attempts by party leaders to curb members' involvement in policy-making (Mair, 1997, pp. 113–14, 146–52; Katz, 2001, p. 290; Katz and Mair, 2009, p. 759). Indeed, Carty (2004, p.

13) notes that most research on catch-all, cartel and electoral-professional party organizations “appear to agree that the imperatives of modern electoral competition have worked to consolidate control of this activity [decision-making on policy and programmatic issues] in the hands of the party in public office, and often the party leadership more narrowly defined.”

The impact of party activists diminishes over time as party leaders increasingly develop policies without considering the preferences of the party on the ground. Colin Crouch (2004) paints a picture of post-democratic parties, acting like firms, replacing activists with lobbyists and grassroots campaigns with wealthy donors. The party leadership does not find as much value in the “amateur enthusiasm” of its activities, but rather tries to attract businesses, which can provide a high flow of funds for election campaigns (Crouch, 2004, p. 74). At the same time, survey evidence on party members shows strong support for more membership involvement in the policy-making and candidate and leadership selection. Members in Canadian parties mentioned perceived “under-influence of ordinary party members” as the “greatest source of discontent” (Young and Cross, 2002, p. 682). In the British Labor Party, a majority of members preferred active participatory democracy beyond simple voting on proposals, drafted by the leadership (Pettitt, 2012).

As discussed above, when party democracy is absent, parties are reduced to the status of corporate brands and voters to passive consumers of policies, crafted exclusively by the political elite. Attempting to address these issues, internal democratic mechanisms provide a sense of grassroots legitimation and allow parties to present themselves with a more

favorable and open public image (Scarrow, Webb and Farrell, 2003). Intra-party democracy is an essential part of the "broader rhetoric of democratization, re-engagement and modernization delivered to diverse audiences – both internal and external to the party" (Gauja, 2017, p. 5). Teorell (1999, p. 373) argues that internal deliberation could strengthen the linkage not only between party members and party elite, but also between citizens and government: "by opening up channels of communication within party organizations, the deliberating bodies of the state could be made "porous" (...) to the influence of deliberations expressed within civil society and the public sphere".

Comparative research on party organization has shown that some party families have ensured intra-party democracy and direct involvement of their members in the formation of party policies. Green and left-wing parties in Western democracies have been found to manifest high levels of internal democracy. They were followed closely by social democrats, while conservatives exhibited average levels of intra-party democracy (Poguntke et al., 2016, p. 672). Since the 1970s and 1980s, European green and new left parties have emerged to challenge the hierarchical nature of the established parties and introduce grassroots democracy (Rihoux, 2016). Similarly, the Workers' Party of Brazil sought to be internally democratic by employing two-stage convention processes and institutionalizing deliberation at the local level through party nuclei (Keck, 1992).

The recent success of populist parties has also caught the attention of scholars investigating how populism may influence party structures. Populism "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the

corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). At the core of populist ideology lies the promise of empowering the ‘people’ in the political decision-making processes: populists urge for the adoption of direct democratic mechanisms that would “allow unmediated relationship between the constituencies and the leader” (Kaltwasser, 2014, p. 479). Given that populist parties rely on the notion of representing the people in a more direct way, we would expect these parties to turn more extensively to internal participatory procedures, shifting the influence of decision-making from the ‘party in central office’ and ‘party in public office’ to the ‘party on the ground’ (Vittori, 2020). Party members would restrict the power of the party leadership and demand key decisions to be taken by the grassroots.

However, much work on populist right parties suggests that, despite their people-centric claims, these parties are less internally democratic and tend to implement strong personalized leadership structures. Mudde (2004, p. 558) tries to make sense of this inconsistency in the following way: he argues that populist supporters care more about responsive leadership and “want politicians who know the people, and who make their wishes come true”, rather than about meaningful participatory opportunities for the grassroots. Roberts (2007) who looks at the characteristics of populist left parties in Latin America also notes that these parties are characterized with top-down political mobilization and personalistic leadership that “challenge elite groups on behalf of an ill-defined ‘pueblo’, or ‘the people’” (Roberts, 2007, p. 5). Recently successful populist left parties

such as Podemos and the Five Star Movement have introduced novel participatory processes through digital platforms. However, in practice, such populist organizations still have limited bottom-up deliberation, while members mostly take part in the ratification of pre-arranged decisions by the leadership (Gerbaudo, 2019).

Betz (1998:9) points out that most far right parties “display a highly centralized organizational structure, with decisions being made at the top by a relatively circumscribed circle of party activists and transmitted to the bottom.” One of the best-known populist right-wing party, the French National Rally (RN)⁶ is a model of a highly centralized pyramid-like structure, where intra-party democracy is “imperfect and infrequent at best” (Marcus 1995: 46) and decision-making is done in a top-down manner (DeClair, 1999; Ellinas, 2010; Ivaldi and Lanzone, 2016). In a similar vein, the Austrian Freedom Party has undergone considerable centralization of decision-making power in the hands of the former leader Jörg Haider. While Haider significantly reduced the internal divisions and dissenting factions, the party executive has also tried to maintain good grasp of the sentiments of its rank-and-file members (Carter, 2005; Heinisch, 2008; 2016). McDonnell and Vampa also observe that for most of its existence, the Italian Lega Nord’s organization has been highly centralized, with a small elite controlling the leadership and showing lack of tolerance toward internal dissent (McDonnell and Vampa, 2016). In addition to the absence of institutionalized internal democratic mechanisms, Koopmans (2013, p. 318) observes a

⁶ The National Rally is formerly known as the National Front (FN).

lack of interest in recent populist parties to mobilize the grassroots; instead, they “rely exclusively on the mobilization of mass media attention and a strong personalization around media-savvy leaders.”

The Republikaner, as the last German right-wing populist party to gather substantial support and steadily poll 6-8% nationwide in the 1990s, has also experienced little internal democracy. Its leader, Franz Schönhuber, misjudged the importance of balance of power on the grassroots level, tolerated no opinion that deviated from the federal leadership, and prevented the formation of internal interest groups and sub-organizations such a youth organization and a republican university association (Grätz, 1993, p. 73). The REP’s party organization was highly weakened by the leadership’s inability to balance the power between the moderate and extremist members and maintain party unity (Art, 2011).

However, the Alternative for Germany does not seem to follow the conventional pattern of radical right parties as authoritarian and highly centralized organizations with minimal influence of party members on the decision-making process. Indeed, my research is guided by the hypothesis that what sets the AfD apart – and has helped it achieve the status of an ‘acceptable’ radical right party for many citizens is the emphasis on internal democratic mechanisms. At its core, intra-party democracy is about the internal distribution of power within a political party (Cross 2013) and it seems to require at least some element of participation by the ‘party on the ground’ in the selection of the leading members of the ‘party central office’ (Katz, 2014, p. 188). However, participation in the selection process of leadership and candidates is not sufficient for intra-party democracy. Ignazi (2020)

wisely points out that electoral democracy (the ability to vote for specific people) is not synonymous with proper democracy. Thus, this dissertation focuses on the following organizational elements for holistic intra-party democracy in policy development, candidate selection, and leadership selection: (1) inclusiveness of membership – all members participate in various stages of party decision-making; (2) deliberative praxis – access to discussion forums and deliberation between members, instead of simply voting on issues; (3) grassroots control over the centralization of power in the leadership.

3. The Role of Institutions: German Party Law and Electoral Law

Germany, together with Finland, Norway, Portugal and Spain, are considered exceptions in explicitly requiring political parties to adopt inclusive and democratic internal structures (Müller and Sieberer, 2006; Biezen and Piccio, 2013). Both the German Party Law and the electoral law regulate the internal life and external activities. However, prescribed state rules may not be effectively put into practice by all parties. Thus, it is important to analyze the shared experiences and perceptions of party members on the implementation of internal democratic procedures.

German Party Law contains detailed regulation regarding the influence of party members on party policy development, leadership selection, and the composition of internal organs of representation. The Law also stipulates that party members have the right to challenge internal decision and requires the establishment of intra-party arbitration boards which

must be independent from and incompatible with party executive offices (Biezen and Piccio, 2013).

Membership assemblies are the highest decision-making bodies, electing the party leadership, deciding on the composition of other party bodies (arbitration courts, auditors), and finalizing party programs, statutes, arbitration procedures, the dissolution of party or mergers with other parties (Art. 9.4; Art. 9.3, Parteiengesetz). Only decisions made at members' assemblies and delegate convention are binding, thus making the results of other participatory instruments such as membership surveys or petitions consultative in nature. Digital instruments of participation and communication (membership surveys, petitions) have not been yet found their way into the existing party law. Thus, innovative online participatory approaches employed by the Five Star Movement or Podemos are not dominant in the AfD, as the party has to maneuver around prescribed traditional forms of internal democratic procedures.

German Party Law also calls for internal democratic organization and transparency in all candidate selection decision-making processes. The Law requires that parties adopt secret and majority voting for the selection of leaders and candidates. However, the precise details of the candidate and leadership selection procedures remain a prerogative of the parties. In the case of candidate selection, the German electoral law calls for the nomination of candidates to be held by party members' assembly or delegate conventions (Section 21, Federal Elections Act).

The German Party Law was created not only in the spirit of understanding parties as agents of democracy, but also to subject them to basic democratic principles of internal organization. The legal prescription of internal democracy may limit the potential of parties to be controlled by a largely unaccountable leadership and to produce undemocratic policies. However, prescribed state rules may not be effectively put into practice by all parties. Thus, it is important to analyze the shared experiences and perceptions of party members on the implementation of internal democratic procedures.

4. A Method of Observing and Listening to AfD Activists

Cross and Katz (2013, p. 8) suggest that intra-party democracy is not simply a matter of “norms of party membership, or even patterns of intra-party participation”, but also a question of “who has real authority over what areas of party decision-making.” Therefore, we need to look beyond party statutes, and address the question of IPD through members’ evaluations of distinct features of intra-party life and analysis of grassroots interactions during real-time party events and conventions.

The results described here are based on eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork (September 2018 to August 2019) throughout Germany. I relied heavily on snowball sampling to build a network of contacts, arrange interviews, and get access to sources and locations. I have recorded and transcribed twenty semi-structured interviews and compiled

extensive notes on conversations with fifty-four additional participants⁷. Aside from pre-arranged interviews, I had many unplanned encounters during party conventions and local party events, leading to informative conversations. I did not have the opportunity to audio-record the interactions, but I would write down specific quotes and take detailed notes immediately after the events. Frequently, I had to follow up with some informants the next day over breakfast or coffee to confirm their views and get more nuanced understanding of the past conversation.

Interviews were analyzed qualitatively and the most important elements relating to the organization, deliberation processes, and grassroots mobilization were presented with illustrative quotations. The interviewees represented a wide a sample of activists, including party leaders, elected representatives in local, state, and federal parliaments, and ordinary citizens, who engage in activities beyond paying yearly party fees. Fifty-one per cent of all interviewees were normal party members, not holding leadership positions on the local, state, or federal party levels. Most members claimed they did not belong to an internal faction. Nineteen per cent identified with the radical right “Flügel” faction and thirty-six per cent with the liberal conservative “Alternative Mitte” (Table 1).

Comparing the sample of AfD members to available survey data of party membership (Niedermayer, 2018), interviewees with university degrees were overrepresented and pensioners were underrepresented (Table 1). Also, while the survey shows that most AfD

⁷ Full list of participants in the Appendix.

activists did not belong to a political party before the AfD (77%), the fieldwork results are skewed toward participants who have been previously involved in parties: 40.5% in CDU, 9.4% in FDP, 2.7% in SPD, 2.7% in the Left Party, and 2.7% in the Republikaner Party. Such sample bias can be expected in ethnographic studies, where researchers do not have full control over the random selection of participants and rely on their willingness to engage with the research project.

Table 1. Representativeness of AfD Members.⁸

	Fieldwork (2018/2019)	Niedermayer (2018)
Women	21.6%	17%
Age (20-35)	20%	18.1%
Age (36-64)	68%	60.9%
Age (65+)	12%	21%
University Degree	80%	50%
<i>Employment</i>		
Self-employed	34.2%	25%
Civil Service/Public	12.3%	13%
Private	34.2%	25%
Blue-collar	8.2%	6%
Students	6.8%	3%
Retired	4%	24%
<i>Former Party</i>		
CDU/CSU	40.5%	9%
No Party	40.5%	77%
FDP	9.4%	2%
SPD	2.7%	7%
Left Party	2.7%	1%
Republikaner	2.7%	1%
<i>Party Seniority</i>		
Leadership Position	48.7%	
<i>Year Membership</i>		
New Members 2017	13.5%	
Members 2015-2016	37.8%	
Founding Members 2013-2014	48.6%	

Participant observation was also central to my research. The selection of sites was both ‘pre-planned’ and ‘opportunistic’, as I attended scheduled party events in rural and urban districts from all sixteen states, and accepted spontaneous invitations to informal gatherings

⁸ Source: Survey data, Niedermayer 2018.

and dinners by party members. To ensure voluntary and informed consent of the participants, I obtained written or verbal consent. I have assigned pseudonyms to the informants for the purpose of anonymity. This research project was approved by the relevant university's Institutional Review Board. Qualitative research comes with some important challenges. Initially, I experienced reluctant participation from party members because they perceived me as a journalist from a left-wing media or a biased representative of a left liberal university. I explained to them my research interest in the party organizational processes. When informants shifted toward emotionally charged topics related to immigration, Angela Merkel's government, or climate change, I would take a passive role of a listener, and attempt to bring back the discussion to party policy development or candidate selection. Often, the conversations felt like no one had ever asked the party members for their thoughts and experiences with the party structures and grassroots involvement.

Since the sample of informants consisted of respondents with higher political interest than the population in general, it is reasonable to expect party members to 'perform' for the researcher in terms of masking their opinions and exaggerating their stories. To avoid socially desirable responding, I framed the questions about intra-party democracy in a neutral way and let the interviewees structure their own answers without providing them specific clues.

Before conducting interviews, I established rapport with the informants by attending political events and informal gatherings with their families and friends. Good rapport and

trust are associated with more honest answers, as respondents would feel more comfortable to disclose sensitive information (Garbarski et al., 2016; Kühne, 2018). To put into perspective the gathered data, I also relied on participant observation of state and federal party conventions, local party meetings, and informal citizens' meetings 'Stammtisch' or 'regulars' table'), as well as on analysis of party documents and media reports.

5. Plan of the Dissertation

In this introductory chapter, I have discussed the central puzzle and proposed argument, presented explanations from the existing scholarship on party organization, and described the research approach and methodology. In Chapter II, I discuss in detail anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes in Germany as the most commonly analyzed demand-side explanations for the rise and success of the radical right and argue that in addition to fear of immigration, the AfD responds to another important set of citizens' demands – dissatisfaction with the overall quality of democracy and frustration with the absence of intra-party participation opportunities in the political establishment.

Chapter III deals with AfD's internal democratic procedures on policy development, enabling grassroots participation in different stages of designing, deliberating, and approving the party program. In addition to analyzing the three main stages of program development, I discuss deliberative practices and diversity of dissenting opinions in the case study of the 2018/2019 Federal Convention for European Parliament Elections.

Chapter IV demonstrates candidate selection is highly decentralized and inclusive. As observed in the Federal Convention for the European Parliament Elections, candidate selection reflects the internal make-up of the party, maintaining power balance between the factions and allowing for grassroots members and delegates to express themselves freely. Party members do not shy away from showing their displeasure with the previous and current leadership if they experience problems with accountability and absence of respect from the party elite.

Chapter V shows that grassroots members and local party elites have consistently encouraged diffusion of power at the local level and maintained collective leadership. The party factions have also served as a constraining mechanism against party elites who attempt to concentrate power in their own hands and diminish grassroots' influence in the decision-making. These features have allowed the AfD to satisfy the members' expectations for representation in the intra-party structures.

CHAPTER II

The Bigger Picture: Immigration, Political Distrust, and Yearning for Direct Democracy

Populism remains a politics of hope, i.e., the hope that where established parties and elites have failed, ordinary folks, common sense and the politicians who give them a voice can find solutions.

(Akkerman et al., 2017, p. 380)

The strength and success of a party are determined by a combination of demand and supply factors. Like any other political movement, the Alternative for Germany has to engage with the following issues: (1) whether the party address a problem people are concerned about; and (2) whether there a need for a party on these issues. This chapter discusses immigration and Islamic fundamentalism as the most commonly cited demand factors for the rise of right-wing populist parties and argues that these two issues do not completely explain the motivation of many Germans to join and support the AfD. Rather, frustration with absence of grassroots participation and internal democratic procedures in the mainstream parties provides a more nuanced account of why certain citizens found a suitable political home in the AfD.

The immigration issue has been central to the rhetoric of many radical right parties. Since the 1980s, immigrants, and in particular Muslim immigrants, have become the key players in the ‘politics of resentment’, pursued by populist right actors (Betz, 1993). Immigration skepticism has been argued to be a significant reason for why citizens supported the radical

right (Lubbers et al., 2002; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008). However, considering German ‘exceptionalism’ with regard to radical right party success in the recent past, it becomes clear that the existence of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes is an important but incomplete explanation for the rise of the AfD. While the AfD’s success did strongly overlap with the 2015 asylum crisis, it began before and independently of it. I argue in this chapter that immigration in and of itself cannot account for the AfD’s appeal. Instead, the AfD’s appeal can be explained by other aspects of citizens’ experiences, in particular the desire for direct political participation and grassroots empowerment.

1. Immigration and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

1.1. The Gastarbeiter Program – 1955-1973

Germany has evolved into one of the most important destinations for migration in Europe and is now considered to be a ‘country of immigration’ - even though this term has been often rejected by politicians from all hues for a long time. In addition to the migration of forcibly displaced persons and war refugees in the post-war period, the starting point of the immigration surge since the 1950s was the recruitment of foreign migrant workers, especially from Mediterranean countries (Schmid, 1983; Muenz et al., 1997). This was followed by family reunification of migrant workers, immigration of ethnic German resettlers (‘Aussiedler’) and the entry of asylum seekers.

The Federal Republic (FRG) had to master the first immigration wave shortly after the end of the Second World War. By 1950 around 12 million ethnic German refugees and

displaced persons, primarily from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, fearing retaliation by the Red Army had moved to West Germany (FRG) and East Germany (GDR). Unfavorable living conditions, which could not be avoided in the course of so-called 'involuntary accommodation' of refugees at local families, religious and cultural differences that occurred between displaced persons and locals, and fear of job competition in times of high unemployment led to integration difficulties. In West Germany, integration of the ethnic German refugees proved to be successful as they provided skilled labor in the context of the 'economic miracle' that began in the 1950s. (Muenz et al., 1997; Muenz and Ohliger, 1998)

The economic boom in the Federal Republic in the 1950s and 1960s created a high demand for labor and brought in another massive wave of immigration, namely the immigration of 'Gastarbeiter' (guest workers). Until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, East German refugees were an important source of supply – between 1949 and 1961, a total of 3.8 million people emigrated from the GDR to the FRG. As the influx of East Germans was abruptly constricted with the Berlin Wall, the Federal Government started 'Gastarbeiter programs', recruiting and 'rotating' foreign workers who would leave after their temporary contracts expired. The first bilateral agreement was signed with Italy in 1955. At that time, only 0.4 percent of all workers were foreigners. In 1960, contracts with Greece and Spain followed, in 1961 with Turkey, in 1963 with Morocco, in 1964 with Portugal, in 1965 with Tunisia, and 1968 with Yugoslavia. The official number of guest workers grew from 80,000 in 1955 to 2.6 million in 1973, representing 12 percent of the workforce. By 1976, the three largest labor exporting countries to West Germany were

Turkey, whose nationals comprised of 27 percent of all foreign workers; Yugoslavia (16 percent); and Italy (14 percent) (Schmid, 1983).

The worldwide recession and the oil crisis in 1973 prompted the government to stop state-organized recruitment of foreign workers. Although there was a significant drop in the number of employed migrants, the total number of alien residents further increased. Migrants became more hesitant to leave West Germany and searched for permanent stay, bringing their families in. It is not a coincidence that anti-foreign sentiments have been recorded precisely during the recession of 1966-1967. In June 1966, the Institute for Applied Social Issues (IFAS) conducted a survey on attitudes toward foreign workers (Rose, 1969, p. 109). More than half of the respondents agreed that Gastarbeiter are a problem for them, suggesting that German natives felt uncomfortable with foreigners (Table 2). The survey showed that most concerns were related to the foreigners' behavior in the community, rather than at the workplace – 70 percent agreed that Gastarbeiter were noisy; 53 percent that they are after German women; 41 percent that foreigners start fights whenever there is an opportunity. Widespread immigrant stereotypes also circulated in the German press, where the foreign worker was depicted as dirty, inept and stupid, yet at the same time aggressive, cunning, and disruptive to the social fabric of the native Germans. Interestingly, Yugoslavs and Spaniards enjoyed a less negative press coverage than Turkish and Italian migrants (Delgado, 1972).

Table 2. 1966 IFAS Survey, percentage responding positively to each question.

Are Gastarbeiter a problem for us in Germany?	67
Do you think Gastarbeiter are hard-working?	46
Much of the public fears today that the increasing employment of Gastarbeiter will bring difficulties for the Germany economy. Do you personally also hold this opinion?	57
Occasionally one hears that these difficulties can best be solved by firing all Gastarbeiter. Do you personally think that this is a good suggestion?	35
Others believe that at least no further foreign workers should be admitted into this country. Do you think this is a good idea?	73
Would you personally be willing to work an hour more a week – of course for regular pay – if the hiring of Gastarbeiter could be avoided by such an action?	51
Are the foreign workers reliable?	25
Wherever they appear, there is lots of noise.	70
They are after our women and girls.	53
They start fights and knifings whenever there is an opportunity.	41

At the time, the National Democratic Party (NPD), a radical right party with strong Nazi influence, reached high support, stepping in to respond to the growing disillusionment with the CDU government, slowing down of the economic miracle, increasing unemployment, and criticisms of paying for stationing of American troop in West Germany. By the end of 1967, the NPD had seats in six out of the ten state parliaments in West Germany but could not pass the 5 percent threshold in the 1969 Bundestag election (Table 3). The rise of the party was a warning signal to the political establishment about the emerging discontent with the politics of the reconstruction era. The NPD fulfilled the desire of many Germans for a true anti-parliamentary “opposition of the outsider to the satisfied complacency of the insiders” (Nagle, 1970, p. 176).

Table 3. Percentage of NPD Vote in Bundestag and State Elections, 1965 – 1972.

State	1965 Bundestag	1965-1969 State Elections	1969 Bundestag	1969-1972 State Elections
Baden-Wuerttemberg	2.2	9.8	4.5	0.8
Bremen	2.7	8.8	4.4	0.5
Bavaria	2.7	7.4	5.3	0.7
Hamburg	1.8	3.9	3.5	0.4
Hessen	2.5	7.9	5.1	0.6
Lower Saxony	2.5	7.0	4.6	0.5
North Rhine-Westphalia	1.1	–	3.1	0.3
Rhineland-Palatinate	2.5	6.9	5.2	0.8
Saarland	1.8	–	5.7	0.8
Schleswig-Holstein	2.4	5.8	4.3	0.5

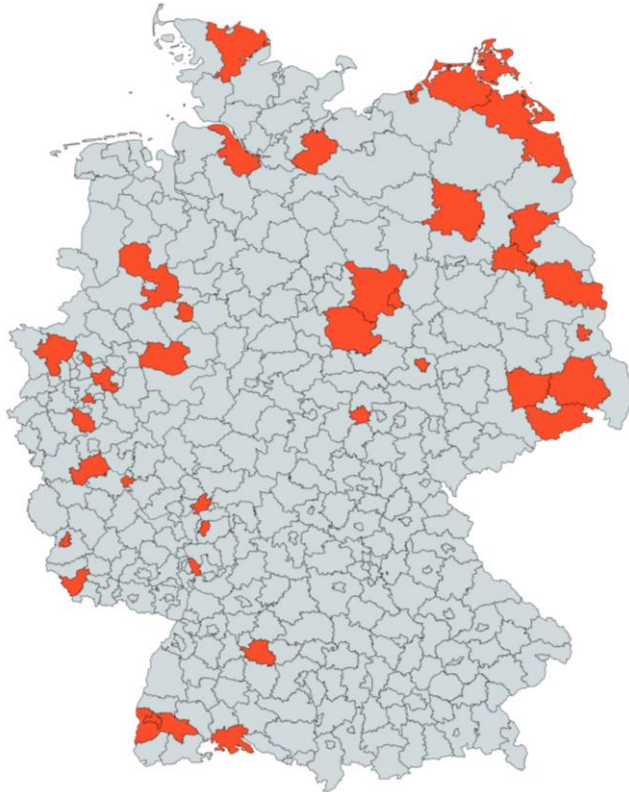
1.2 Late Aussiedler and Asylum-Seekers – 1988-1993

In addition to post-war refugees and foreign migrant workers, late ethnic German resettlers (Aussiedler) have been another significant group of immigrants. Over the centuries, German-speaking settlement areas emerged in Hungary, Poland, Romania, former Czechoslovakia, former Republic of Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union. Legal discrimination and social exclusion of ethnic German minorities were quite common until the 1970s, even decades after the Second World War. With the fall of the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s, immigration of German repatriates changed drastically: 1.5 million came between 1988 and 1992, with a maximum of 400,000 people each in 1989 and 1990. (Muenz et al., 1997)

During the same period, Germany received a record number of asylum seekers. The number of asylum applications increased from 5,289 in 1972 to 121,318 in 1989, to more

than 322,599 in 1993. The majority of refugees came either from Eastern Europe or Asia: the top ten countries of origin in the 1990s were former Yugoslavia, Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Iraq, Iran and Sri-Lanka. With more than 1.2 million immigrants in total, 1992 was the year of the strongest immigration in the history of the Federal Republic. In times of high unemployment and rapid societal changes after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the high influx of foreigners generated resentment among parts of the German population, including xenophobia and racist attacks. The 1991 Eurobarometer results showed that 58 percent of West Germans and 45 percent of East Germans felt there were too many immigrants. In 1992, German nationals reported that their main fears were 'too much immigration' (44 percent), 'opening borders to drugs and crime' (43 percent), and 'having to pay for others' (42 percent) (Eurobarometer, 1992). Anti-immigrant sentiments were most pronounced against Arabs, Africans, Poles, Turks and Roma. Violent attacks (homicides, arson and bombings, assault, property damage) against foreigners were scattered across unified German but surprisingly, large-scale rioting was highly concentrated in East Germany, considering the small number of non-German residents (Friedrich and Schubarth, 1991) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Violent xenophobic attacks across Germany, 1990-1993.⁹



One of the most severe incidents was the riot against a refugee hostel in Hoyerswerda, Saxony between 17 and 22 September, 1991. At the peak of the rioting between 50 and 100 local youths and neo-Nazis attacked the foreigners' housing with bottles, baseball bats and Molotov cocktails while hundreds of people watched, cheered and hindered the police. As the authorities could not secure safety and order, they organized the evacuation of all inhabitants with migrant background, making Hoyerswerda – in the jargon of the neo-Nazi activists – ‘foreigner-free’ (*ausländerfrei*) (Kleffner and Spangenberg, 2016).

⁹ Source: Verfassungsschutzbericht 1990; 1991; 1992; 1993 (Annual Report on the Protection of the Constitution)

Another shocking event was the arson attack on a refugee housing in Hünxe, North Rhine-Westphalia, in October 1991, where two little children were severely burnt (Verfassungschutzbericht, 1991). Again, in August 1992, 150 youths attempted to storm a refugee shelter and attacked a neighboring hostel for Vietnamese workers in Lichtenhagen-Rostock, while being watched by a crowd of bystanders shouting ‘Germany for the Germans’ (Verfassungschutzbericht, 1992). The most serious example of ethnic violence since German reunification was a firebomb attack on a Turkish housing in May 1993 in Solingen, North Rhine-Westphalia, resulting in the deaths of two women and three children. In response, May and June 1993 were marked with continuous peaceful demonstrations and full-scale rioting of Turks in Solingen, Bonn, Cologne, Hamburg and Bremen (Verfassungschutzbericht, 1993).

To a large extent, the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War of 1992 contributed to the rising asylum crisis, and subsequently motivated the 1993 German Constitutional Reform. Faced with increasing immigration pressures, the Bundestag amended Article 16 of the Basic Law and passed the so-called “Asylum Compromise”, severely restricting the absolute right to asylum. Since then, people who came from a persecution-free country of origin or travelled through a safe third country (including all EU member states) could no longer rely on the fundamental right to asylum under Article 16a (Farsi, 2014).

The radical right Republikaner Party (REP) was quick to take advantage of the dramatic increase in the number of new arrivals of ethnic German resettlers and political refugees and started a campaign against the threatening ‘foreignization’ of Germany. Between

October 1989 and February 1990, a majority of Republikaner supporters favored the reduction in the number of Aussiedler (53 percent) and refugees (63 percent) (Betz, 1990). The party arrived on the political scene in 1989 by securing 7.1% at the European Elections. Electoral support was distributed unequally, as the Republikaner's strongholds were the economic powerhouses Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria and not the declining industrial regions. In the sixteen state elections the party contested between 1990 and 1996, it only surpassed the 5 percent threshold in Baden-Wuerttemberg (10.9 percent) (Table 4).

Table 4. Percentage of Republikaner Vote in Bundestag, European and State Elections, 1989 - 1996.

Election	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Bundestag		2.1				1.9		
European	7.1					3.9		
Baden-Wuerttemberg				10.9				9.1
Bavaria		4.9				3.9		
Berlin	7.5 ¹⁰	3.1						
Brandenburg		1.1				1.1		
Bremen								
Hamburg			1.2		4.8			
Hessen			1.7				2.0	
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern		0.9				1.0		
Lower Saxony		1.5				3.7		
North Rhine-Westphalia		1.8					0.8	
Rhineland-Palatinate			2.0					3.5
Saarland		3.4				1.4		
Saxony						1.3		
Saxony-Anhalt		0.6				1.4		
Schleswig-Holstein				1.2				
Thuringia		0.8				1.3		

¹⁰ West Berlin only

1.3 EU citizens from the Eastern Enlargement and the 2015 Refugee Crisis – 2004-2018

Spikes of xenophobia and concerns over immigration can be seen also in 2004 and 2005, coinciding with the Eastern Enlargement of the EU and the corresponding discussion about immigration of workers from new member countries such as Poland. In 2005, 38.2 percent of West Germans and 43.8 percent of East Germans were worried about increased immigration (Lübke, 2019). The 2000s saw a rise of small right-wing citizens' movements in support of strong anti-Islam positions – Pro-Deutschland in 2005 and Die Freiheit in 2010; however, they did not become electorally significant.

With the EU accession of Hungary in 2004 and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, their citizens gained access to unrestricted work and travel mobility to Germany, including Europe's largest and poorest minority – the Roma. The newly obtained EU citizenship rights for the Roma minority raised concerns and public discussions, with the media depicting them as 'poverty migration' and 'freeloading on social benefits' (Spiegel, 2013). In 2013, the Federal Minister of the Interior Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) suggested an "entry ban" for southeast European citizens who travelled to Germany to take advantage of the social welfare program (Becker et al., 2013). The poverty-stricken district of Neukölln, Berlin is one of the many places with high concentration of migrants which are seen as problematic "parallel societies". A 2011 survey showed that 40 percent of Germans perceived Roma people as a problem if they resided in their neighborhood, and 44 percent believed the Roma to be involved in criminal activities. In 2016, more than half of the surveyed Germans supported these views (Table 5). In 2012, the radical right movement

Pro Berlin (part of the Pro Germany Citizens' Movement) distributed around 50,000 flyers about the 'gypsy problem' occupying the Hartzler Street apartment complexes. Many of the Roma families remain unemployed and rely on child allowances, which are twenty times higher than in Bulgaria and Romania (Gezer, 2013).

Table 5. Perceptions of Muslims, Sinti, Roma and Asylum-Seekers, 2009-2016.¹¹

Perceptions of Muslims	2009	2010	2011	2014	2016
Muslims should be prohibited from immigrating to Germany.	21.4	26.1	22.6	36.6	41.4
Because of the many Muslims here, sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country.	32.2	38.9	30.2	43.0	50.0
Perceptions of Roma					
I would find it problematic if Roma and Sinti lived in my neighborhood.	-	-	40.1	55.4	57.8
Roma and Sinti should be banned from the city center.	-	-	27.7	47.1	49.6
Roma and Sinti tend to be involved in crimes.	-	-	44.2	55.9	58.5
Perceptions of Asylum-Seekers					
The state should not be generous when examining asylum applications.	-	-	25.8	76.0	80.9
Most asylum seekers do not really fear from being persecuted in their home country.	-	-	46.7	55.3	59.9

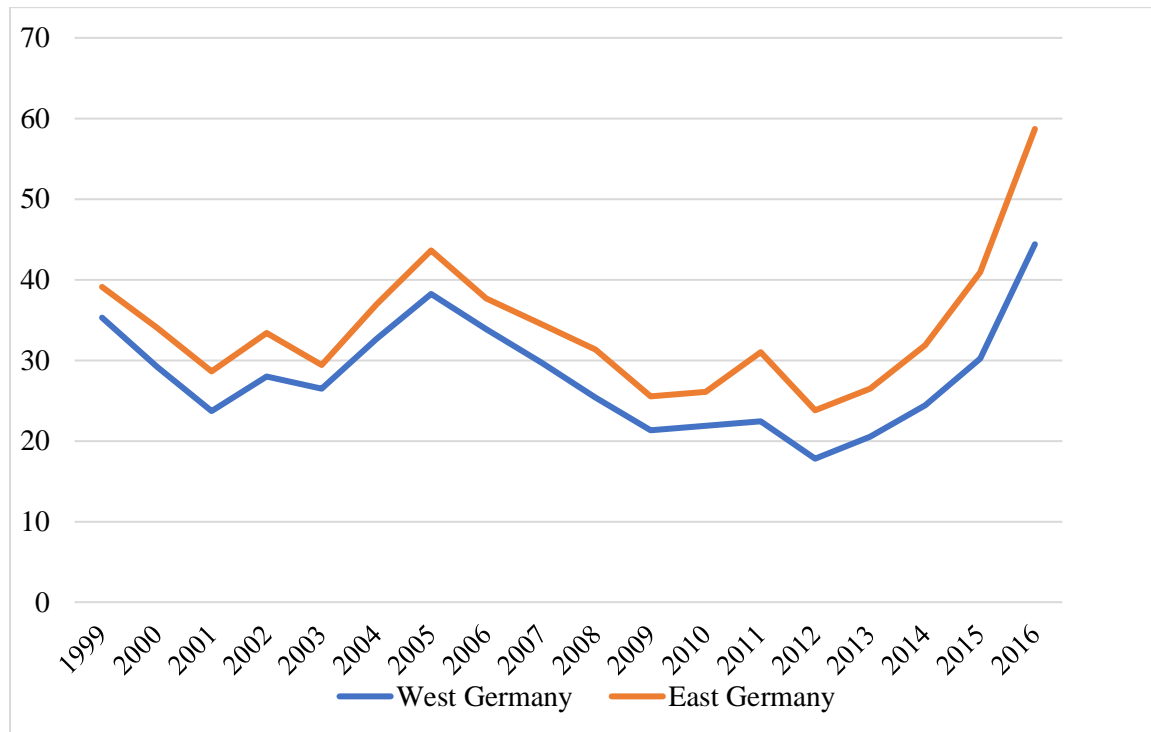
Negative attitudes toward Muslims and Islam also emerged as a trend in the 2000s. In 2006, 40 percent of surveyed Germans perceived themselves as strangers in their own country

¹¹ Mitte Studie, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

due to the increased number of Muslims. The number went down to 30 percent in 2011 and climbed up to 43 percent in 2014 and 50 percent in 2016. In 2012, Volker Kauder, the leader of the CDU/CSU faction in the Bundestag, argued that “Islam is not part of our tradition and identity in Germany and so does not belong in Germany”, while carefully adding “Muslims do belong in Germany. As state citizens, of course, they enjoy full rights.” (Kauder, 2012). His statement was closely resembling the views of many AfD politicians today.

From 2014 to 2016, the share of people with immigration concerns rose to 44 percent in West Germany and 59 percent in East Germany (Lübke, 2019, Figure 6). A deciding factor for this drastic change was the increased immigration of refugees, especially from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2015 around 480,000 people applied for asylum, while the number reached 750,000 in 2016 (BAMF, 2018). The sheer amount of migrants and the absence of structures to process and integrate the new arrivals have left the country to respond quickly only to basic needs such as food and shelter.

Figure 6. Immigration Concerns in East and West Germany, 1999-2016.¹²

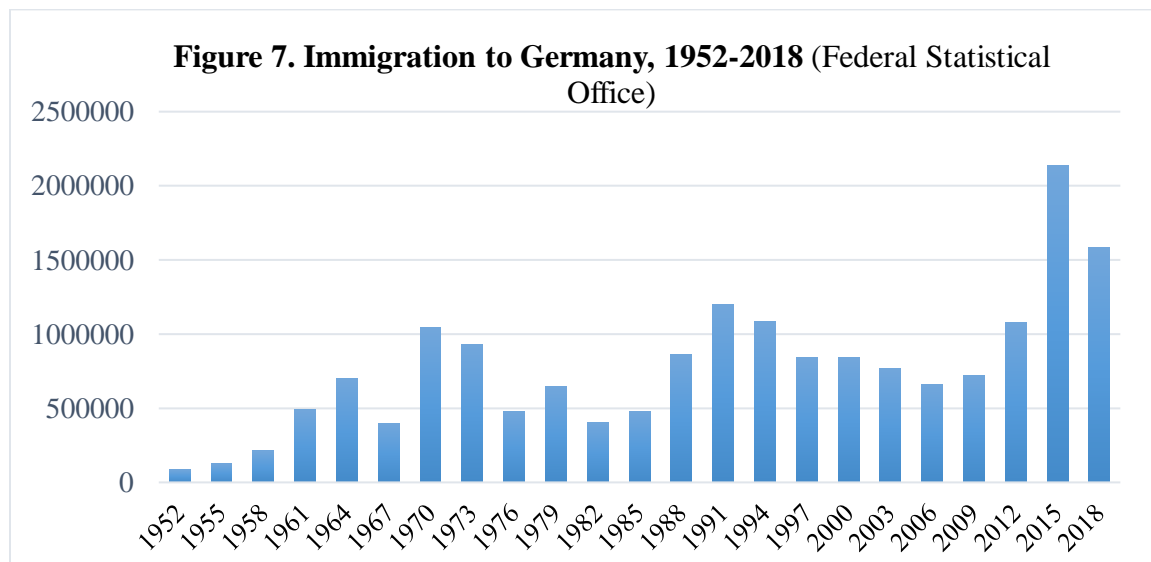


At the core of the most recent immigration debate lies the tension between Chancellor Merkel's firm belief that Germany can accomplish the acceptance and integration of hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers, while voices from the populist right vocally disagree with the 'welcoming culture' approach. There has been simultaneously a rise in civil-society support for refugees and growing skepticism toward immigration and hate crimes against refugees (Spiegel, 2015). A majority of the population had negative perceptions of the asylum seekers – 76 percent of the surveyed in 2014 and 81 percent in 2016 agreed that the state should not be generous with accepting asylum applications. More than half of the respondents also expressed doubt that the asylum seekers are fleeing

¹² Source: Lübke 2019, SOEP v. 33.1 survey

because of fear of persecution in the home country (Table 5). The populist right-wing party Alternative for Germany has rapidly gained support across all states since with seats in every state parliament, the Bundestag, and numerous local parliaments. Since 2015, Germany has also experienced proliferation of anti-immigrant social movements such as PEGIDA, Identitarian Movement, Hooligans against Salafis, Pro NRW.

The challenge of immigration is not a new topic in Germany. As Figure 7 shows, migration spikes occurred in the 1960, 1970, 1990s and most recently, since 2015. All these periods of high migrant influx have also coincided with the rise of the radical right.



However, none of the previous radical right actors maintained consistent success after the fall of immigration numbers. The AfD, on the other hand, has kept its position as a successful new opposition party on both state and federal levels, even after the refugee crisis has subsided, pointing to the need for other arguments, explaining the party success. In the following section, I discuss a continuous trend of political alienation and rising

demand among citizens for more direct democracy and grassroots participation. Based on conversations with AfD activists, I also show that negative experience and disappointment with the mainstream parties' internal processes have motivated some citizens to join and support the AfD.

2. Anti-Establishment Attitudes and Declining Trust in Political Institutions

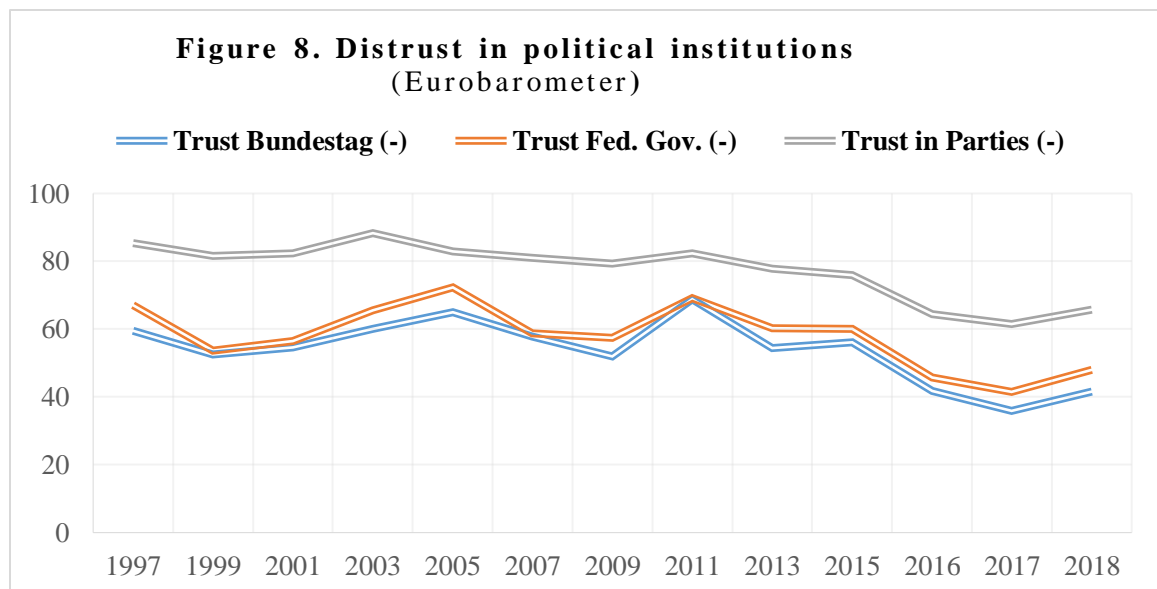
A number of important changes in the citizens' evaluations about the performance of democracy have been consistently observed since the 1970s: (1) a trend of eroding trust in democratic institutions (Norris, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2009); (2) diminished attachment and active participation in political parties (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002; Wiesendahl, 2011); (3) reduced satisfaction with the current state of democracy and increased demand for direct democratic mechanisms (Völkl, 2006; Campbell, 2012).

Empirical studies have shown that low political trust often leads to demand for more direct democracy among the citizens, because of their desire to control and hold the political elites accountable (Kaina, 2002). Citizens evaluate the trustworthiness of politicians and political parties based on their perceptions of the normative behavior of the elites and the experiences citizens have from concrete results of political actions (Lipset and Schneider, 1987; Kaina, 2002; Dalton, 2009). Based on information from media coverage or personal experiences of office patronage, decision-making scandals and oligarchy in intra-party structures, citizens become disaffected with politics and parties. Political parties appear less assertive and willing to react to social problems. Fewer and fewer individuals and

social groups feel that their interests are adequately represented by any of the established parties. (Wiesendahl, 2011).

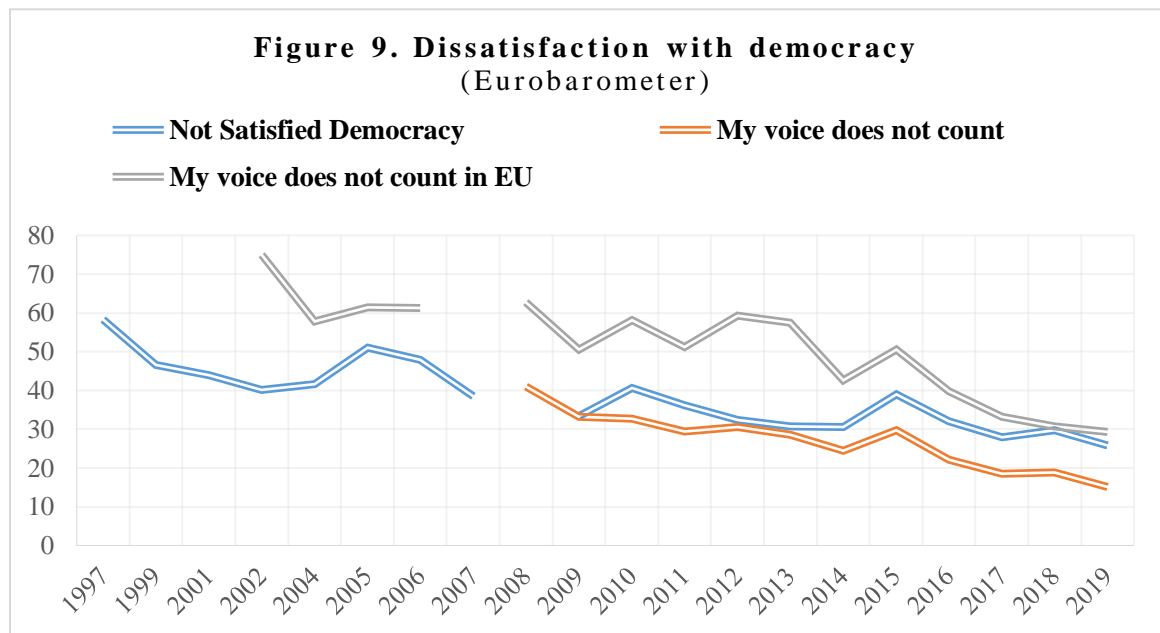
An important indicator of citizens' disenchantment with the political parties is the loss of party membership. In 1990 the two major mainstream parties SPD and CDU had around in 943,000 members and 790,000 members respectively. Between 1990 and 2018, both CDU and SPD lost around 50 percent of their members – in 2018, CDU had 415,000 members and SPD – 437,000 members) (Statista Research).

The trajectory of distrust in 'partisan institutions' between 1997 and 2011 – the national parliament, the federal government and political parties – was of slow decline, with an average of 58 percent of citizens having no trust in the Bundestag, 62 percent in the federal government, and 83 percent in the parties. Since the Alternative for Germany entered the political scene in 2013, there has been a significant increase of trust in the institutions. Between 2013 and 2018, only 46 percent of citizens on average had negative views of the



parliament, along with 51 percent for the government, and 69 percent for the political parties (Figure 8).

Since 2015, Eurobarometer surveys have also registered considerable decrease in anti-system attitudes: 29 percent of German citizens on average were dissatisfied with the current state of democracy, while 18 percent and 33 percent on average would feel voiceless in the decision-making processes at national and EU levels respectively (Figure 9). These are strikingly low numbers of distrust for Germany since the 1990s, raising the question whether the emergence of a right-wing populist party, championing direct democracy may have influenced a significant share of citizens to regain their ‘voice’ back and be encouraged in political engagement.



Attempting to satisfy citizens’ demand for more direct political involvement through intra-party democratic structures may have also helped the AfD create an ‘acceptable’ image of a right-wing populist party in a country, marked with extremely negative experiences of

far-right militancy. In the following subsections, I discuss common trends of dissatisfaction with the overall condition of German democracy and the perceived absence of democratic procedures in the established parties.

Discontent with Democracy – Conversations with AfD Grassroots Activists:¹³

Understanding populism as a rejection of the political establishment would oversimplify a phenomenon that has managed to quickly mobilize millions of citizens across Europe. A populist vote should be seen not only as a vote against something, but also for something. “Populism remains a politics of hope”: hope for filling the widening gap between democratic aspirations and democratic satisfaction through direct participatory mechanisms (Akkerman et al., 2017, p. 380). At the core of populist ideology lies the promise of empowering the ‘people’ in the political decision-making processes: populists urge for the adoption of direct democratic mechanisms that would “allow unmediated relationship between the constituencies and the leader” (Kaltwasser, 2014, p. 479).

The qualitative accounts provided by members enable us to explore their reasons for joining the AfD. In virtually every interview, activists expressed deep concerns about the lacking internal structures of the mainstream parties and strong commitment to referendums inside the party and for all citizens, following the Swiss democratic model.

Rejection of the established parties and their hierarchical structures of operation has been one of the principal arguments employed by AfD leaders to appeal to voters. The

¹³ Table with interviewees’ details in Appendix

overarching goal is to ‘bring politics back to the people’ who have lost influence over the parties and the government. Accounts of party activists show the following common themes about democratic performance that served as central motivation for joining the AfD: (1) strong desire for direct participation in the political processes on federal, state and local levels; (2) disillusionment with the mainstream parties’ internal structures and processes.

a. Trusting the people, not the parties: “Democracy does not consist of every four years being allowed to make a cross on paper.”¹⁴

Most AfD members expressed feelings of exclusion from the circles of power and disillusionment with the current state of democracy. Existing studies have shown that calls for more direct democratic procedures are often motivated by frustration with representative political institutions and political outcomes (Dalton, 2004; Pauwels, 2014). Like most interviewees, when explaining his perception of functioning democracy, Dominic drew attention to the commitment to people-centered politics:

“In the end, people are the measure... We have to be there for them. Not for me. Not for the party. That is not important. The people are important. We are not important. We are only an instrument. We are nothing more than the tool.”

(Dominic, TH¹⁵)

¹⁴ Interview with William, Baden-Wuerttemberg

¹⁵ German state abbreviations in Abbreviations Page.

Switzerland and the United States were often identified as a reference point for a democratic system that Germany should emulate. For Dominic, Switzerland serves as a lighthouse of direct democracy, while Markus, a former CDU member, invoked the popular legitimacy of the U.S. President and lamented the interdependence between the German government and the mainstream political parties:

“It’s not like in America where the President is elected by the people. Here, parties get together and form a coalition and then, *they*¹⁶ elect the Chancellor....To have a better say and better control over the system, it could be good if we had popular votes.” (Markus, BW)

When arguing in favor of referendums, Anton called upon the principle of ‘political will-formation’ [politische Willensbildung] in the German Constitution as the core of democracy (Anton, BY). While some informants see limits to direct democracy in terms of overuse of referendums, the general view is that “politics start from the basis upwards” and “basic decisions should be decided by the people”. (William, BW; Olaf, NW)

Political dissatisfaction stemmed from the resistance of the established parties to introduce more participatory elements of democracy for all citizens when important political decisions are at stake. As former CDU, CSU and FDP members, Mathias (NW), Mikaela (BY), Alfred (BB), and Sven (SN) shared that the party leadership would dismiss suggestions for direct democratic mechanisms as “unworkable”, “chaotic” and

¹⁶ Emphasis was requested by the informant.

“anarchical”. Political elites were criticized for being unresponsive and not willing to implement sovereign will.

There is a growing feeling of political alienation and loss of sovereignty over democratic decision-making. Frequently mentioned concerns focused on inaccessible institutions and ideological convergence between the CDU and SPD. Many arguments revolved around the perception that voting has no impact and mainstream parties did not care to change even when they were faced with low turnout and increasing membership exits. William and Markus expressed their exasperation over the lack of political opportunities in between elections and alluded to autocratic tendencies of the governing coalition:

“Democracy does not consist of every four years being allowed to make a cross on a paper. This is not democracy. You have nothing to say in between these four years. We call it dictatorship.” (**William, BW**)

“There was the co-founder of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) – Walter Ulbricht. He said when he came from Moscow after the War to set up the base for the German Democratic Republic, “It must look democratic, but we must have the full control over it.”...This is a tendency that this government is doing – the Leftist, the Greens, the Christian Democrats, they are all clapping. They are all in the same boat.” (**Markus, BW**)

Following the same pattern, a majority of East German party activists – reminiscent of 1989 – see their involvement in the AfD as a struggle for democratic self-empowerment of the citizens against the mainstream establishment and especially the CDU that moves

toward the direction of a ‘GDR 2.0’ – another authoritarian German Democratic Republic. The alleged involvement of Chancellor Angela Merkel as an unofficial collaborator with the Stasi Regime was a hot topic of discussion among four party members at a regular meeting in the picturesque little town of Bernau near Berlin. Hans stressed that ‘Erika’ [Merkel’s alleged Stasi code name] has no legitimacy to govern mainly because of her participation in the GDR regime (**Hans, BB**). In the same vein, Gerhard, a seasoned party activist from Leipzig shared his frustration that he risked his life participating in the ‘1989 Peaceful Revolution’ and now, again he has to fight for democratic change, because local CDU politicians act like lords, forgetting they have to serve the citizens and they have “degraded us to voting cattle” (**Gerhard, SN**).

b. Disillusioned with the intra-party organizations on the mainstream: “the other parties have increasingly neglected this [internal] democratic process”¹⁷

German mainstream parties tend to present themselves as monolithic units with little to no internal divisions. Nevertheless, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Social Democrats (SPD) and the Free Democrats (FDP) have experienced an enduring loss of members, urging scholars to look into the reasons behind members’ disillusionment and party exits. Since the 1990s, the mainstream parties have attempted to introduce reforms for organizational consolidation and innovation with mixed successes. Conversations with

¹⁷ Interview with Christof, Bavaria

former CDU, CSU and FDP members also depict a disappointing experience with political activism and perceived deficit in opportunities for intra-party participation.

In a 1989 report, the CDU noted that “members do not want simply to carry out decisions by the board; they want to partake in political decision-making processes” (CDU, 1989, p. 460). In 2003, a CDU party initiative, aimed at promoting a model of “citizens’ party” (‘Buergerpartei’), introduced amendments to the party constitution to strengthen the ability of members, rather than delegates, in selecting candidates and executive boards as well as deciding on policy matters. In practice, the hurdle for all-member ballots was set high as one third of all party units had to request such a ballot, with the approval of a majority of the relevant executive board (district, state or federal) (CDU, 2003). Participation of party members in decision-making was determined by the party leadership. In 2004, for example, Angela Merkel insisted on rejecting the proposal for the membership to determine the chancellor candidate in the 2006 Federal Election (Jun, 2009).

The CDU and SPD parties have enjoyed unitary congresses with overwhelming party support for one candidate during leadership election. Data from forty-one party conventions of the CDU and SPD between 1983 and 2018 show that party leaders would receive 90.6 percent support on average (Ceron, 2019). Open leadership competition in party conventions is uncommon, as “party executives or smaller circles of party notables usually agreed upon a candidate who was then presented to the party conference for coronation” (Astudillo and Detterbeck, 2018, p. 3).

Only recently, coinciding with the rapid success of the Alternative for Germany, leadership selection in the established parties has experienced reduced support. In the SPD, Sigmar Gabriel (2015 election) and Andrea Nahles (2018 election) received 74 percent and 66 percent from the delegates. In December 2018, the Christian Democrats held their first contested leadership election since 1971, with three candidates competing for the chairperson position. This novelty in the history of the CDU raised doubts about party unity as Angela Merkel's preferred candidate Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK) secured only a narrow majority of 51.7 percent against the pro-market liberal candidate Frederich Merz (48.2 percent). Recalling his twenty-years-long membership experience in the CDU, Rudi (BE) pointed out that the party was not taking internal democracy seriously. However, in 2018, it was not politically feasible for Merkel to influence the internal leadership succession due to rising discontent and party exits of many CDU activists. Dominic, a staunch CDU supporter until 2005, revealed a similar story of dissatisfaction with party elite's involvement in the 2018 CDU leadership election:

“Merkel is not gone...She is the boss. And AKK is nothing more than Merkel 2, a copy of Merkel. And she says, “Mom, can I do that?”, and Merkel says, “Mommy¹⁸, yes, you may.” That's why there were many in the CDU, almost 50%, who wanted a change [Frederich Merz for a party leader]...and that has split the CDU. There are a lot of CDU members in Gera, who have left the CDU. They told us, “I'm not

¹⁸ In German culture, mothers refer to their child as “mommy”, which is a term of endearment.

in the CDU anymore because that [the leadership election] did not work out.”

(Dominic, TH)

His view was also echoed by party activists and interested citizens during informal ‘Stammtisch’ meetings in Thuringia, alluding to the reason why many former CDU voters gave up on the party and turned the districts of Altenburger Land, Gera, Greiz and Saale-Orla into AfD strongholds.

Interviewees often pointed to the absence of debating culture and intolerance toward internal dissent as motivating factors for leaving the Christian Democrats. Thomas, a former CDU district chairperson in Baden Wuerttemberg, was extremely dissatisfied with the increasing difficulty to share dissenting opinions at informal meetings and party conventions. Because of this negative experience, he insisted that the AfD would continue fostering long and controversial discussions internally (**Thomas, BW**). Markus described a similar situation during CDU party conventions on electoral program decisions and argued that AfD members do not like to follow blindly the instructions of their party leaders:

“There was not much debate and a pretty quick voting. But with the AfD usually it would take longer because there is no general agreement on everything.

[...]

In the AfD, members don’t care what Joerg Meuthen or Alice Weidel say...And in the CDU, I remember we often wanted to stop funding for gender studies research, and then, one person from the executive board came and with all authority said,

‘No, we cannot do this, because we will lose a lot of voters. We’ve decided on that, so please don’t vote on that.’” (**Markus, BW**)

Several activists hinted at sanctions for CDU members, such as being denied promotions, seats on the executive board, or selection on the candidate lists, if they shared dissenting opinions. Johan contended that in the CDU “if I don’t shut my mouth, then I cannot go on. Either you adapt or your career is over” (**Johan, HE**). Like Johan, Robert also recalled how dissenting behavior was not welcome, especially if members aimed at higher positions than a local activist:

“Even if you managed to make a small speech [for candidate selection] at a party congress, you would be history, because the words would not be positive about the eternal chairperson.” (**Robert, HE**)

There has been a shift toward involving membership to a limited degree in candidate and leadership selection. Nevertheless, the results of these erratic and ambivalent efforts at intra-party organizational reform are rather disenchanting. The accounts of former CDU members show consistent perceptions of grassroots members having relatively little say over policy decisions and of party elites thwarting movement in the direction of more internal democracy.

Conclusion

The answers offered by the AfD activists and supporters that I interviewed between September 2018 and August 2019 show that the AfD is recruiting citizens who feel deeply

disillusioned with the internal workings of the established parties and seek refuge in a party that promises direct democracy inside its organization. Fear of immigration, economic deprivation and left-wing climate change policies were frequently mentioned topics in the interviews, which partially support scholarly arguments that radical right parties benefit from the rise of immigration and refugees. However, we cannot solely rely on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments as an explanation for the AfD rise and continuous success. All AfD interviewees were clearly worried about the hierarchical structures of operation inside the mainstream parties and the perceived absence of democratic participation opportunities for the citizens.

Given members' demands for more direct political participation, I expect the AfD to provide internal democratic procedures, shifting the influence of decision-making from the 'party in central office' and 'party in public office' to the 'party on the ground' (Vittori, 2020). In the following chapters, I discuss the extensive grassroots participation in party policy development (Chapter III) and candidate selection (Chapter IV), as well as the internal dynamics restricting centralization of power in the hands of the leadership (Chapter V).

CHAPTER III

Internal Democracy in Populist Right Parties: The Process of Party Policy Development in the Alternative for Germany

The age of party democracy has passed. Although the parties themselves remain, they have become so disconnected from the wider society, and pursue a form of competition that is so lacking in meaning, that they no longer seem capable of sustaining democracy in its present form.

(Mair, 2013, p. 1)

European radical right parties have been the subject of numerous academic studies, providing competing arguments about their appeal and success. Some see parties like the AfD as a short-lived outlet for protest voters, frustrated with the failure of mainstream parties to address issues of immigration and law and order; others view such parties as a temporary by-product of rapid and destabilizing economic change, fueled by recessions, European integration and the crisis of the welfare state; and still others argue that radical right supporters are driven by latent racist attitudes and perceptions of threat (Betz, 1993; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Evans, 2005; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2007).

While scholars have given due consideration to AfD voters and party ideology (Arzheimer, 2015; Schmitt-Beck, 2017; Bieber et al., 2018), there has been little research on the party's mechanisms of intra-party democracy. Drawing on original interview and participant observation data of federal party conventions, this chapter argues that the AfD is characterized by diverse mechanisms of internal democracy in policy development and increased grassroots involvement in local communities. The party has adopted a

collaborative approach toward policy development, where members participate in distinct stages of designing, deliberating, and approving the party program.

1. Populist Parties and the Question of Intra-Party Democracy

Studies of party organization demonstrate that modern parties have transformed into internal cartels led by career professionals, thus relinquishing values and practices originally associated with the mass party such as internal deliberation and leadership accountability (Katz and Mair, 1994; 2009; Katz, 2001; Blyth and Katz, 2005). Over the course of the late 20th century, traditional postwar parties have gradually lost their semblance as ‘essential instruments of – and for – democracy and liberty’ and they are experiencing increasing collapse in terms of confidence and trust (Ignazi, 2017, p. 3). At the same time, survey evidence on party members shows strong support for more membership involvement in policymaking, as well as in candidate and leadership selection. Members in Canadian parties mentioned perceived ‘under-influence of ordinary party members’ as the ‘greatest source of discontent’ (Young and Cross, 2002, p. 682). In the British Labor Party, most members preferred active participatory democracy beyond simple voting on proposals, drafted by the leadership (Pettitt, 2012).

In response to growing political discontent and declining levels of institutional trust, parties have focused on encouraging participation of members and sympathizers in decision-making processes through the adoption of procedures such as membership ballots and primaries (Seyd and Whiteley, 2004; Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Cross and Blais, 2012).

Nevertheless, there is a continuous trend of party elites retaining significant control over the decision-making processes of leadership and candidate positions (Cross, 2013; Scarrow, 2015). Increased political participation in parties is “atomistic”, as “individuals are isolated from one another and engaged in direct communication only with the party center, in a fashion that inhibits their ability to act in common with each other” (Carty, 2013, p. 19).

Intra-party democracy (IPD) is an essential part of the ‘broader rhetoric of democratization, re-engagement and modernization delivered to diverse audiences – both internal and external to the party’ (Gauja, 2017, p. 5). IPD relates to various organizational aspects such as policy decision-making, candidate selection, leadership elections, and intra-party conflicts. In a recent study, Berge and Poguntke (2017) divided IPD into assembly-based deliberative processes, emphasizing open-ended and participatory discussion, and into plebiscitary mechanisms such as membership ballots and referendums. Internal democracy could strengthen the linkage not only between party members and party elite, but also between citizens and government: ‘by opening up channels of communication within party organizations, the deliberating bodies of the state could be made “porous” ... to the influence of deliberations expressed within civil society and the public sphere’ (Teorell, 1999, p. 373).

Comparative research on party organization has shown that some party families have been better at allowing direct participation of their members in the formation of party policies. Green and left-wing parties in Western democracies have been found to manifest high levels of internal democracy. They were followed closely by social democrats, while

conservatives exhibited average levels of intra-party democracy (Poguntke et al., 2016). Since the 1970s and 1980s, European green and new left parties have emerged to challenge the hierarchical nature of the established parties, strongly encourage grassroots involvement in internal decision-making and foster participatory linkages with social movements (Poguntke, 1987; Tsakatika and Lisi, 2013; Rihoux, 2016). Similarly, the Workers' Party of Brazil sought to be internally democratic by employing two-stage convention processes and institutionalizing deliberation at the local level through party nuclei (Keck, 1992).

When it comes to the populist right party family, scholars have usually agreed on the absence of such internal democratic mechanisms. Most radical right parties 'display a highly centralized organizational structure, with decisions being made at the top by a relatively circumscribed circle of party activists and transmitted to the bottom' (Betz 1998, p. 9). One of the best-known populist right-wing party, the French National Rally (RN) is a model of a highly centralized pyramid-like structure, where intra-party democracy is 'imperfect and infrequent at best' (Marcus 1995, p. 46) and decision-making is done in a top-down manner (DeClair, 1999; Ivaldi and Lanzone, 2016). In a similar vein, the Austrian Freedom Party has undergone considerable centralization of decision-making power in the hands of the former leader Jörg Haider (Carter, 2005; Heinisch, 2016). The last German right-wing populist party to garner substantial support and steadily poll 6-8% nationwide in the 1990s, the Republikaner, also experienced little internal democracy. Its leader, Franz Schönhuber, misjudged the importance of balance of power on the grassroots level, tolerated no opinion that deviated from the federal leadership, and prevented the

formation of internal interest groups and sub-organizations, the establishment of a youth organization and a republican university association (Grätz, 1993, p. 73).

Despite this general finding, other scholars have noted of cases of radical right parties that offer exceptions to this rule, including the Sweden Democrats and the Italian Lega Nord. The Sweden Democrats have focused on collective leadership and provision of limited grassroots involvement in policy formation during party conventions (Jungar, 2016). Daniel Albertazzi (2016) also notes that the Lega has adopted an organizational model similar to the mass party, encouraging members to be actively involved on the local level. In 2013, the Lega also moved for the first time to elect its party leader, Matteo Salvini, through closed primary elections, after twenty-two years of leadership under Umberto Bossi (Sandri et al., 2015; McDonnell and Vampa, 2016). Nevertheless, these same authors also suggest that intra-party democracy is very limited in the Sweden Democrats and the Lega. Populist right parties may frequently present themselves as champions of people-centered democracy; however, empirical findings show that the decision-making is predominantly in the hands of the party leadership and membership participation is usually rare.

Other recent scholarship highlights an important unifying feature of populist party behavior, regardless of political ideology – incorporation of social movement practices and encouragement of participatory venues outside the electoral arena (Caiani and Cisar, 2018; Pirro and Castelli Gattinara, 2018). Movement-electoral interactive dynamics have significantly affected the radical left and left political organizations, as we have observed with practices of citizens' mobilizations in Syriza and Podemos after the 2008 euro-debt

crisis (Della Porta et al., 2017). Yet the same has also been observed in the case of the French National Rally and its relationship with the Ordre Nouveau and other extremist movements (Frigoli and Ivaldi, 2018), or the close relations between the populist right party Lega Nord and the neo-fascist movement CasaPound Italia (Pirro and Castelli Gattinara, 2018).

The people-centered nature of populist parties thus may be visible in their behavior as hybrid collective actors, using both the electoral arena and movement repertoires to involve the grassroots. However, the radical right party family has been hesitant about engaging with plebiscitary politics and assembly-based organizational processes – contrary to their ideological platforms on direct democracy and empowerment of the membership (Berge and Poguntke, 2017). The question remains whether populist right parties, and the Alternative for Germany in particular, actually provide favorable circumstances for meaningful participation of their party members in internal decision-making, and how partisan deliberation looks in practice.

2. Empirical Approach: Grassroots Participation in Party Program Development

Early field research carried out from June to August 2017 in the states of Baden-Wuerttemberg and North-Rhine Westphalia suggested that many AfD members joined the party because they were dissatisfied with the current political establishment, and particularly with the absence of grassroots involvement in them. The introduction of direct democracy and referendums is a dominant topic in the AfD manifesto and electoral

programs on local, state, and federal levels. In its most recent program for the 2021 federal election, the party describes direct democracy as “indispensable means to putting a halt on the authoritarian and partially totalitarian behavior of government politicians” (AfD Bundestagwahl Program, 2021, p. 12) and advocates for the “people as sovereign to be the bearer of such fateful decisions [currency crises, migration, Islamization or the energy transition] with direct participation” (AfD Bundestagwahl Program, 2021, p. 14). Slogans like ‘Direct Democracy instead of Lobbyism’, ‘Referendum: Who is afraid of responsible citizens?’, and ‘Referendums following the Swiss Model’ were frequently employed in federal and state elections (Figure 10). Since direct democracy and active citizens’ involvement in politics are central claims of the party ideology, should we expect the AfD organization to incorporate internal democratic principles, empowering the grassroots in the decision-making processes?

Figure 10. Direct Democracy Slogans, AfD



To explore the role of intra-party democracy in the AfD, I focus on mechanisms of participation, deliberation, and pluralism of dissenting opinions during the process of party

policy formation. At its core, intra-party democracy is about the internal distribution of power within a political party (Cross, 2013) and it seems to require at least some element of participation by the ‘party on the ground’ in the selection of the leading members of the ‘party central office’ (Katz, 2014, p. 188). Substantial participatory opportunities strengthen channels of communication from the grassroots and enable party activists, informed by the demands of their local communities, to directly influence and devise party policies (Teorell 1999; Gauja, 2013; Wolkenstein, 2016).

Although participatory mechanisms involve both assembly-based (deliberation) and plebiscitary (ballots and referendums) modalities, deliberative practices, in particular, are essential to the improvement of intra-party democracy. Intra-party deliberation may correct problems such as how increased membership inclusiveness or plebiscitary methods (membership ballots and referendums) has reinforced and consolidated the power of the party leadership (Katz and Mair, 2009; Cross and Pilet, 2015; Ignazi, 2018). Through deliberative interactions at local party meetings as well as at state and federal party conventions, members can share their opinions, critically evaluate the party line, and develop policy statements, informed by the concerns of their local communities, while the party leadership has limited role in influencing the formation of preferences and directing the choice of the membership.

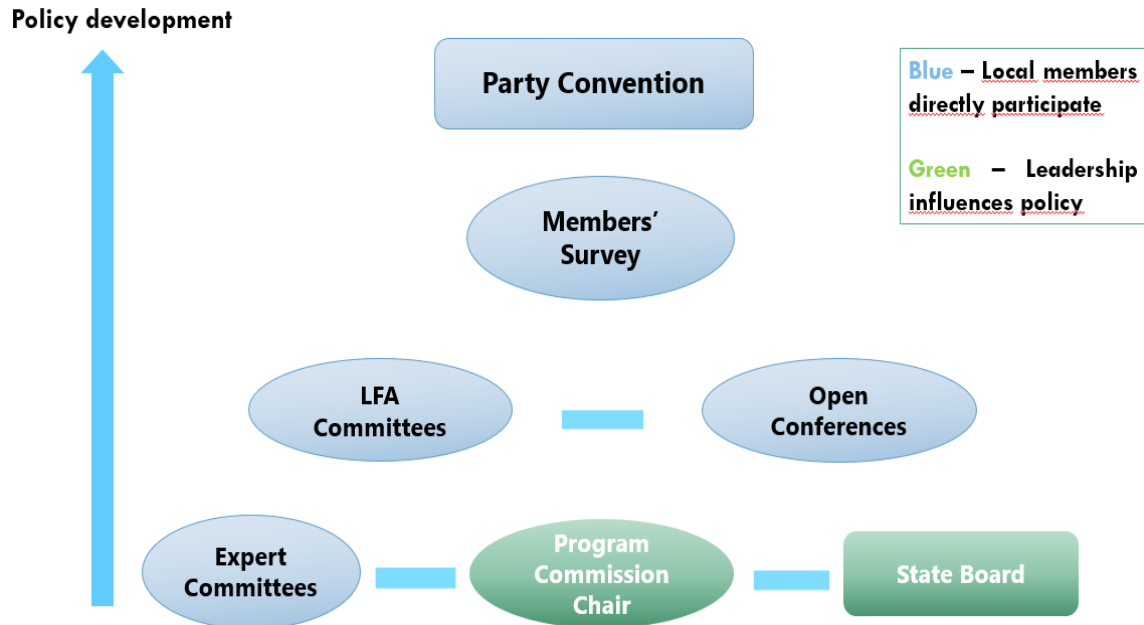
In addition to discursive practices, pluralism of dissenting viewpoints “ensures that the issue under deliberation is considered from multiple angles” (Hendriks et al., 2007, p. 366). Preferences of the AfD members are not largely aligned and they frequently disagree on the shared principles of the party. Internal mechanisms, supporting forums of discussion

and debate, help members voice their dissenting opinions, refine their preferences through discourse, and reach a compromise on final party programmatic decisions.

Such inclusive intra-party procedures, emphasizing deliberation and diversity of viewpoints, send an important signal to the members that their preferences are taken seriously in the process of policy formation and markedly diverge from the perception of parties as hierarchical bureaucratic leviathans with little membership empowerment.

In the following analysis, (1) I examine the participatory opportunities available to members in the three main stages of party program development; and (2), I discuss deliberative practices and diversity of dissenting opinions in the case study of the 2018/2019 Federal Convention for European Parliament Elections. The AfD party employs a combination of direct participation of members and delegate participation depending on whether election programs are decided on the local, state or federal levels. Policy formation consists of three main stages: (1) first, local policy groups, state expert committees (LFAs) or federal expert committees (BFAs) develop the programmatic statements, and a ‘Program Commission’, consisting of the chairs from each expert committee, assembles a policy draft document; (2) second, the expert committees organize membership survey on the programmatic statements; (3) finally, the draft is approved by a ‘Party Convention’. AfD members have the opportunity to influence policy development in all three stages: first, during the initial stages of the development process by drafting policy proposals in the local branches and by being members in expert committees (LFAs/BFAs); second, by participating in membership surveys; and third, by deliberating, amending and voting on party policy at party conventions (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Stages of policy formation at the AfD.¹⁹



a. Direct Participation in Expert Committees at the State (LFAs) and Federal (BFAs) Level

According to party statutes across all sixteen federal states, expert committees develop programmatic statements and advise the state and federal party leadership on policy points. Every member can apply to participate in the respective LFA. Usually, there are 12 thematic committees in each state, consisting of 15 to 25 members each. In September 2019, I met with Olaf in the Berlin party office. He worked on the organization of expert committees for the 2017 North Rhine-Westphalia state election program and was also a member of the LFA on Social Issues. Olaf observed that around half of the party members

¹⁹ Source: AfD party statutes

from the state branch would attend regularly local policy meetings and at least 10 per cent were constantly participating in the state expert committees (**Olaf, NW**).

Participation in expert committees is on a volunteer basis, despite some variation in the selection process across states party branches. Generally, members send their applications directly to an LFA coordinator, appointed by the state party leadership. Most party activists who participated at least once in an expert committee since 2014 described the selection process as merit based. For Hannah, the invitation to participate at the LFA on Education, Research and Culture hinged upon her knowledge of the education system and first-hand experience as an elementary school teacher in the Karlsruhe district (**Hannah, BW**). Nevertheless, there were some disapproving voices about the recruitment process. William, a district party leader from Baden-Württemberg, argued that not expertise but rather personal interests motivated the selection procedures:

“I have a military career as a reserve officer. I have international experience, which nobody has in this country here. I am not allowed to participate in the Expert Committee for Security and Foreign Affairs...They have no international experience and they talk about foreign policy. And now, they are afraid if someone is coming in with a little bit more knowledge, they might not be important anymore.

This is a personal competition, so they try to close the doors.” (**William, BW**)

Bavaria, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and North Rhine-Westphalia, however, do not follow the general model of candidate self-nomination, but rather involve the local

members in the selection process. Local party branches²⁰ organize elections where all members choose one representative for each district to be sent to the state party leadership for final approval. This way, party members provide a limited pool of democratically elected candidates for the leadership to choose from, thus reducing the likelihood of clientelist politics as suggested by the previous quote.

Party members see themselves as effective participants in an inclusive bottom-up policy development process, based on aggregated grassroots preferences. Stefen describes this process as ‘co-determination’:

“That’s the DNA of our party too, that co-determination. Our program is not written by five people, but anyone who is interested can say, ‘Yes, I’m familiar with a topic very well. I’m a doctor, I’m a cop, I’m a lawyer. I bring along my experience, I go to state committees and develop positions’...That means there’s no program from above. Just the other way around, it grows, so to speak.” **(Stefen, RP)**

When asked whether party members could still take part in the LFA work even if they were not selected, Olaf responded that the expert committees are ‘not a closed shop’ and all members can bring in proposals and engage in the discussions without voting rights **(Olaf, NW)**. After the Program Commission has assembled a program draft, all party members would be invited to deliberation conferences (Landeskonferenz) at each LFA to discuss and give suggestions for changes. Such conferences are another opportunity for interested

²⁰ In North Rhine-Westphalia, selection procedures happen on the regional level (Bezirk), as sometimes local branches (Kreis) are too small.

activists to contribute informally to policy development before a final draft of the election program is sent to a party convention.

b. Membership Consultation through Online Voting

Membership surveys play a major role in the intermediate stages of policy formation, after the expert committees have prepared a draft program but before finalizing it at a party convention. Such intraparty surveys are not common in German parties. One of the few such instances was in 2015 when the Berlin party branch of the Christian Democrats (CDU) held an intraparty referendum on the legalization of same-sex marriage – the first issue survey in the history of the CDU (Wuttke et al., 2017).

At the AfD party, membership surveys are frequently employed tools for empowering the party base in the policy development process. Several interviewees who have participated in both state and federal expert committees emphasized that LFA/BFA participants often would not reach a majority agreement on a policy thesis. Thus, all the available alternatives to a thesis would be presented to the whole membership for a vote (**Sylvia, ST**). The Bavarian party branch also provides clear instructions for the content of membership surveys:

“If at least a third of the members of the LFA jointly support an alternative programmatic position, this ‘qualified minority’ can demand that the position be prepared and presented as an alternative draft resolution on an equal basis.” (**LFA Rules of Procedure**)

Although the statutes of all state branches mention membership surveys, only Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia regularly make use of them. Only larger state branches have the financial means to organize these kinds of polls frequently (**Sylvia, ST**). Nevertheless, membership surveys are always conducted for the Federal and European Election Programs. Although such polls are not formally binding, party members and delegates tend to cite the results when defending their proposals at party conventions. I observed such an instance, when attending the AfD European Elections Convention in January 2019. There was a heated discussion whether the electoral program should demand ‘reduction’ or ‘abolition’ of sanctions against Russia. While the Program Commission defended extensively the original draft formulation, one party delegate insisted on the ‘abolition’ alternative, invoking the importance of the grassroots democratic decision-making process (Figure 12). His proposal passed with great majority support.

“We said when writing the program that we should let the members decide with the member survey, and the option of ending the sanctions received 94% support.”

(Delegate, Federal Assembly for the European Parliament Election)

Figure 12. Results from the 2018 Members’ Survey on the European Election Program²¹

‘A stable peace order in Europe is only possible with the involvement of Russia. We do not consider the sanctions imposed on Russia to be effective. The AfD is working to end sanctions and normalize relations with Russia.’ Yes (Ja) or No (Nein).

2.) Nur unter Einbeziehung Russlands ist eine stabile Friedensordnung in Europa möglich. Die gegen Russland verhängten Sanktionen sehen wir als nicht zielführend an. Die AfD setzt sich für ein Ende der Sanktionen und eine Normalisierung der Beziehungen mit **Russland ein.**

Ja/Nein

Antwortoptionen	Anzahl	Prozent
Ja	6039 / 6405	94,29
Nein	220 / 6405	3,43
Keine Antwort	136 / 6405	2,12
Frage übersprungen	10 / 6405	0,16

Most interviewees perceived the membership referendums as an enrichment to the deliberation culture of the party. There was a high expectation for the AfD to deliver on its promise for more inclusive decision-making practices. While such practices were perceived to be absent in the political culture of the mainstream parties, the AfD party was unique in its grassroots approach of relying on membership surveys (**Dominic, TH**).

c. The Final Step: Party Conventions

Party conventions are the highest decision-making party institutions. The purpose of such conventions is ‘to establish a representative democratic link between the final policy

²¹ Source: 2018 Members’ Survey on the European Election Program, AfD

adopted by the party and its grassroots membership’ (Gauja, 2013, p. 66). Several interviewees stressed the fact that final decisions are not made by the state or federal party leadership (**Mathias, NW; Mikaela, BY**). Rather the ‘democratic base’ holds all the power and party leaders must accept the outcome even if it displeases them:

“Sometimes a position goes into the program, which does not suit a federal chairperson, at the time Frauke Petry. That happens, but if the members have decided with a majority, then you have to just accept it as a federal chairperson. Frauke Petry had to live with it, inevitably. She could not say, ‘This will be removed.’ Well, then people would have reprimanded her.” (**Sylvia, ST**)

The party statutes outline two possible types of conventions: member assemblies (Mitgliederversammlung) and delegate assemblies (Delegierteversammlung). Local party leaders from Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate try to organize members’ general assemblies to the highest possible level and avoid using delegates. Marcus mentioned that although all members are invited to state conventions and 400 to 500 activists would attend on average. In February 23, 2019, the State Convention in Heidenheim had the biggest turnout for the state branch with over 750 members, which was still manageable without introducing a delegate system (**Markus, BW**).

While member assemblies are the general rule for party conventions, the federal party branch and three state branches – Hessen, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland – have opted to organize delegate assemblies, citing large membership size and financial and

venue constraints. Wilhelm was proudly reminiscing about the uniqueness of member inclusiveness at the early AfD federal conventions:

“Before, we had members at the federal level as well. That was the largest party convention in the Federal Republic of Germany after WWII. It was our AfD party convention in July 2015, in Essen, where the showdown between Lucke and Petry happened. There were 3,500 members.” (**Wilhelm, BY**)

In a similar vein, Sylvia described the 2016 Federal Convention in Stuttgart, attended by more than 2,000 members, as ‘an insane organizational and logistical achievement’ and suggested that if members were to continue exercising their right to direct participation, the AfD would have to rent a stadium (**Sylvia, ST**).

Local branches elect delegates to attend the conventions on their behalf and delegate entitlement is adjusted according to membership size. Most of the party members I interviewed participated as members or delegates in at least one state or federal convention. As delegates agreed that they were exercising no agency. They were chosen to convey the interests of the local members, rather than to make individual policy decisions. Andre, a leader of a ‘youth wing’ party branch in North Rhine-Westphalia, advocated for the involvement of more ‘youth wing’ members as delegates. He argued that local party branches in North Rhine-Westphalia set a good example of representing diverse interests by incorporating various rank-and-file members, rather than just sending the local chairperson and deputy chair to conventions (**Andre, NW**).

Depending on the type of party convention, all members or delegates have the right to vote and to submit proposals for changing the program draft. Several interviewees specifically stressed on the fact that party leadership can propose motions as well but cannot vote unless they serve as delegates. The party seeks to facilitate a link between grassroots discussion and policy outcomes by circulating the convention agenda, the program draft and a proposals' book to all local branches several weeks in advance.

As the final stage of policy development, party conventions play a key role in ensuring the representation of diverse opinions within the AfD. Despite party efforts to incorporate widespread membership consultation in the process of program-writing, the initial stage of policy formation at LFAs and BFAs is not entirely representative of the interests of the general membership. Expert Committees consist of party volunteers who are passionate about a certain topic and have the time and means to attend such meetings regularly. While most members tend to agree on core party topics about the European Union and immigration, when it comes to positions on 'fringe issues' such as the environment or family values, party conventions serve as the essential final step to creating a program that satisfies the majority of the membership. Andre described two such situations where the program draft produced by expert committees did not align with the beliefs of the general membership and the delegates made final changes at the party convention:

“At the very beginning, Bernd Lucke’s sister was part of the LFA on Family Issues. She was more like a modern woman, pro-choice and sending the child to day-care and going to work. Then, you had the very conservative members who were really fired-up, and they always clashed at the conventions.”

“The federal expert committee on the Environment brought in a moderate program. Probably moderate for our party and in the USA probably too. In Germany, where every party is more or less green, it was already right-wing. But then our crazy guys [referring to the delegates] came and threw it out and made it really hardcore. And it was a vote of 55% to 45%.” (Andre, NW)

d. Case Study: Deliberative Dynamics at the Federal Convention for European Parliament Elections²²

The analysis of IPD through members’ eyes thus far showed perceived opportunities of meaningful involvement in programmatic decision-making processes. To put these evaluations into perspective, I examined the practices of internal deliberation during the 2018/2019 European Election Assembly. AfD members generally valued the party convention as a discussion forum, inducing fruitful and productive exchange of diverse dissenting viewpoints, with the possibility to find common ground between the internal factions.

In November 2018 and January 2019, the party held a federal convention in the East German cities of Magdeburg and Riesa, selecting thirty candidates for the 2019 European Parliament Election and deliberating on the election program. Several left-wing demonstrations took place on during the convention, but the police kept them within the city center, several kilometers away from the convention location. Each person had to go

²² The federal convention can be also viewed online at the AfD Facebook page under ‘Europawahlversammlung’

through airport-like security as well as membership identification and invitation checks. Private security guards, who were also party members, were situated at the entrances and each corner of the conference hall. Aside from these tight security measures, social interactions were relaxed and amicable. Party leaders, delegates and guests would move around freely and converse openly with each other.

The majority of the 550 delegates were men. There was a considerable share of delegates who also belonged to the youth wing of the party – ‘Youth Alternative’ (JA). A few weeks before the convention, all delegates had the opportunity to submit proposals for changes in the election program draft. There were 73 proposals in an 81-page long proposal book. Some of these motions were written jointly by members from different regional associations, suggesting a level of ‘horizontal integration’ (Duverger, 1954), with delegates from East German state associations being the most active in proposing changes.

While most of the motions dealt with minor suggestions, such as replacement of phrases or fixing the wordiness of a paragraph, heated discussions took place on one of the core Eurosceptic policies of the AfD – ‘DEXIT’ or Germany leaving the EU. The program section on DEXIT provided for a two-hour long deliberation between two opposing camps – the Program Commission, supported by hardline conservative delegates on one side and on the other side, the federal party chair and MEP Dr. Jörg Meuthen, backed by moderate party members. The original formulation demanded a DEXIT as a ‘*necessary*’ response if reforms at the EU cannot be realized ‘*within one legislative period*’ of five years. Dr. Meuthen, however, suggested more temperate phrasing so that a withdrawal from the EU

should be deemed *‘worth considering’* instead of *‘necessary’* and should happen within *‘reasonable indefinite time’* (SN-3, Antragsbuch Europawahlversammlung 2019).

A passionate Euro-critic and supporter for direct democracy, Werner Meier (**BY**) was the spokesperson of the Program Commission on the DEXIT issue and deemed Dr. Meuthen’s suggestion too soft and not representing the will of the German people. Conservative delegates followed suit and called the proposal a product of utopian thinking, because the EU cannot be reformed:

“The citizens who suffer from the EU expect clear deadlines from us.” (**Delegate #1 during deliberation**)

“The EU elite is not trustworthy, and we cannot expect to change anything with them, so we should push for our original claim.” (**Delegate #12 during deliberation**)

On the other side, moderate delegates emphasized the importance of taking measured actions, instead of hastily dismissing reforms and jumping into another prolonged ‘Brexit’:

“We must maintain our legitimacy. We cannot go into something important with a breakneck speed. We have to reform the EU and only when all means have failed, then we say it is reasonable to go.” (**Delegate #8 during deliberation**)

Some members were not against an immediate DEXIT but believed it was unrealistic to achieve it, because the AfD had only 15% to 20% support and could not successfully dominate the national debate. Martina Boeswald suggested the AfD use the opportunity to

network with other Eurosceptic partners at the European Parliament and evaluate the European structures from within before convincing the public of their failure:

“We should make a review report in 2021. We should prove to the public that the EU is just a tool for UN world politics, and then even the Euro-friendly citizens will wake up to the message.” (**Martina Boeswald, delegate from Baden-Württemberg**)

At the end, the Program Commission offered a compromise between the two formulations that received a majority support from the delegates: ‘If our fundamental reform approaches in the existing EU system cannot be implemented *in reasonable time*, we consider *Germany's exit...to be necessary*’ (European Election Program 2019: 12).

In the guest section where I was observing the process, many AfD members disappointedly commented that the party should act now on a DEXIT, as ‘reasonable time’ would only delay necessary change. During lunch break, I also had a short conversation with Jakob, a delegate from Hamburg and a member of the ‘Youth Alternative’, who did not understand why so many party members were afraid of an immediate DEXIT. For him, DEXIT is also a reform and should not be postponed anymore because the German government has already given up too much sovereignty for the past thirty years (**Jakob, HH**). While not content with the outcome, Jakob still expressed satisfaction with the AfD delivering adequate opportunities for members to engage in deliberation and influence policy decisions.

A month after the Federal Assembly, I met with Dominic, a local party leader from East Thuringia and a close friend to Björn Höcke, leader of the radical right ‘Flügel’ faction. Dominic was actively involved in drafting the party program for the upcoming local elections. He also closely followed the online streaming of the Assembly and was profoundly dissatisfied with the outcome of the DEXIT debate. Nevertheless, he supported the majority decision because it was democratically made. While generally not sympathizing with the federal party leadership, including Dr. Meuthen, Dominic agreed that in the case of DEXIT party rhetoric should be moderate:

“I do not want to dictate to the citizens that we need a DEXIT now...That is also one of our demands – grassroots democracy. The citizens should decide, and not me as a politician to say, ‘We need a DEXIT now.’ That is why, I understand the liberalization of the program in this respect, the point Mr. Meuthen was making.”

(Dominic, TH)

Deliberation at party conventions is highly supported by the party members. All interviewees perceived it as a necessary component in a party, whose core programmatic value is direct democracy and the empowerment of the local members. Time-consuming debates and quarrels are an integral part of the conventions, but that is a price many AfD members are willing to pay. Otherwise, they could join the CDU, where ‘if I do not shut my mouth, then I cannot go on; well, either you adapt, or your career is over.’ (**Johan, HE**). In the same vein, Sylvia jokingly pointed out that what is special about the AfD membership is that ‘we are very dissentious and even, as Gauland said so beautifully, we are ‘a fermenting bunch’.’ (**Sylvia, ST**)

Conclusion

The AfD in its core ideology rejects the hierarchical nature of the established parties and their absence of responsiveness to demands made by rank and file and ordinary citizens. Thus, the party turns to grassroots democracy, emphasizing the power of party members rather than party leadership. Participant observation of party meetings and conversations with AfD members suggest that the party relies on significant participation and deliberation by members in the process of policy formation. Policy development in the AfD involves complex multi-stage procedures, which are open to the general membership and allow only limited involvement of the leadership in terms of consultation and logistical organization. While a smaller, less representative share of party activists is involved in preparation of the program drafts in expert committees (LFA/BFA), all members can participate in the final stages through online surveys and state party conventions. Prolonged deliberations at conventions, as the DEXIT debate has shown, indicate the presence of internal democracy and foster a sense of grassroots legitimation. Even though some members were dissatisfied with the outcomes of the policy debates, they still evaluated positively the party efforts to promote democratic deliberation and direct participation. Inclusive decision-making procedures develop a sense of empowerment among party activists, especially when a majority have expressed skepticism about their political influence in previous mainstream parties.

This chapter makes a two-fold contribution to the existing literature. First, it expands our knowledge on party organization and directly speaks to scholarly work on the renewal of internal participation in green and left-libertarian European parties in the 1970s and 1980s

(Pogutke, 1987; Kitschelt, 1989;), radical left-wing parties in Latin America in the 1990s (Keck, 1992), and more recently, movement-parties after the European debt crisis (Della Porta et al., 2017; Caiani and Cisar, 2018). The Alternative for Germany displays a high degree of members' participation and deliberative practices – an important but contrasting addition to the comparative research on radical right parties, which fail to sustain a democratic internal organization and consistently adopt mechanisms to centralize power in the leadership (DeClair, 1999; Carter, 2005; Heinisch and Mazzoleni, 2016).

Second, this study has important implications for future research on populism, in terms of examining how populism may influence party organization and introduce new ways of strengthening political representation through referendums and deliberative democracy. Recent scholarship on the populist Five Star Movement and Podemos has explored the introduction of novel participatory methods for members and the possible negative impact of digital platforms on the functioning of intra-party democracy. Both the M5S and Podemos organize online deliberative forums, but their decision-making structures are still highly centralized, and members have limited access to space for horizontal discussions (Sandri et al., 2015; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2019). The study on the AfD party organization adds to this new research in terms of understanding how deliberative democratic processes work in practice and to what extent the federal party leadership dominates the decision-making processes. The findings from the field research suggest that populist parties may provide venues for internal deliberative practices to improve members' satisfaction with political participation and to invigorate the connections between citizens and their party representatives (Teorell, 1999; Wolkenstein, 2016).

Certainly, we should also consider the limits of intra-party democracy in populist organizations. The AfD party statutes, observed practices, and shared experiences by party members may suggest that the party is internally democratic and empowering the grassroots. However, we should pay special attention to the dynamic interactions between the party in public office and rank-and-file members. Caiani et al. (2021) have recently suggested that seemingly democratic internal processes in M5S and Podemos may enhance the influence of party elite in public office over key decisions in policy-making and candidate selection. Thus, the current study on the AfD has its limitations as it has not explored whether and how the party in public office may use the rhetoric and practices of grassroots democratic deliberation to gain autonomy in decision-making and possibly dominate the party on the ground. What my field research suggests is that the AfD's participatory mechanisms help persuading many voters that their voices are more effectively heard in the AfD than in other parties, from which they feel alienated.

CHAPTER IV

Gatekeepers and Intra-Party Democracy in Candidate Selection Procedures

“CDU politicians degraded us to voting cattle. People are extremely exhausted from living poor in one of the richest European countries.”

(Gerhard, Saxony, candidate for the 2019 State Elections)

Numerous personal reasons motivate ordinary citizens to join a populist party and even to go further with their party commitment by putting their faces on electoral campaigns and obtaining public offices. In most conversations I had with AfD activists, they shared an acute sense of political abandonment from the established parties and political institutions. But the disenchantment with the very idea of politics became a driving force for these party members to put their names on the ballots and to convince long-established CDU or SPD constituencies to choose the AfD. This chapter aims to unpack the black box of candidate selection in populist parties and understand whether and to what extent the AfD employs internal democratic procedures for candidate selection.

1. Standards of Democratic Candidate Selection in European Parties

Populist parties frequently depict politicians from the political establishment as distant and removed from the real concerns of the citizens and as having gone back on their promise to act as agents of the people: “They are professionals, entrenched in office and in party structures. Immersed in a distinct culture of their own, surrounded by other specialists and

insulated from the ordinary realities of constituents' lives.” (Pitkin, 2004, p. 339) To respond to the growing political disillusionment, parties have started opening their candidate selection processes to wider selectorates (Scarrow et al., 2000; Bille, 2001; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). Some studies, albeit limited, have shown that more intra-party democracy in candidate selection is positively correlated with satisfaction with democracy and higher voter turnout (Calcagno and Westley, 2008; Norell, 2008). In the same vein, Kenig (2009) suggested that democratic procedures would increase participation, as well as improve competitiveness and legitimacy. Directly involving members in the candidate selection processes can reinforce the grassroots' perceptions of party-specific political efficacy and contribute to the improvement of the party image as a democratically run organization (Wuttke et al., 2017).

More than seventy years ago, Schattschneider suggested that candidate selection would be 'one of the best points at which to observe the distribution of power within the party'. Understanding the intra-party processes of candidate selection requires for scholars to look into two separate dimensions: first, candidacy inclusiveness and competitiveness; and second, selectorate inclusiveness and decentralization of the selection process. Candidacy requirements (who can run for an office) vary across countries. Gallagher (1988) and Thiebault (1988) observed that candidacy in conservative parties has been more inclusive, while left-wing parties have adopted more stringent requirements. In U.S. primaries, candidacy is in principle open to all citizens, while in most European countries, parties require candidates to be members for a specific period of time (Rahat, 2013). In their founding years, the German Greens established a rotation rule for candidates, where

incumbents could not run for a second mandate if they did not secure at least 70% of the party base support (Ware, 1987). Thus, the Green Party was aiming to avoid concentration of power in specific party elites and promote new faces in public office.

In general, only in limited cases political parties can be defined with very high candidacy inclusiveness where any citizen can run for a position. No matter the extent of inclusiveness, competitiveness remains an essential aspect of candidate selection processes. After all, highly inclusive candidacy procedures can be characterized with coronations of a pre-determined candidate, therefore, reducing the effective political participation of diverse citizens. Competitiveness is vital for the democratic process, as it allows challengers with new ideas and competencies to emerge and urges incumbents to be more responsive and accountable to their electorate. But heavy competition can have a downside as well: “High turnover can also affect the ability of the representatives to accumulate experience and thus function better in their legislative and executive posts: (Somit et al., 1994).

Using Hazan and Rahat’s framework, party selectorates can be divided into the following categories: highly inclusive body consisting of either all citizens (open primaries) or party members (closed primaries); an in-between selectorate of party delegates; and an exclusive selectorate with party leadership or a small circle of party elite dominating the process (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). When party organization scholars discuss internal democracy, they frequently focus on how selectorate inclusiveness may impact candidate competitiveness. Rahat et. al (2008) have found a curvilinear relationship between selectorate inclusiveness and candidate competition: processes involving party members

tend to produce average level of competition, while delegate selectorates have higher degree of competition. On the other hand, exclusive selectorates favor lower level of intraparty competition (Vandeleene and Sandri, 2019). Still, Put et al. (2015) argue that incumbents are more likely to remain as top candidates when chosen by less inclusive selectorates (leaders or delegates) than by more inclusive bodies of voters or members.

Even if we are familiar with the particulars of selectorate inclusiveness, we still have to determine the extent of decentralization of the selection process, or how widely party members and voters are involved and whether decisions can be made as close as possible to the grassroots. Bille (2001, pp. 365-6) states that “true democratization requires reforms that make both the candidacy requirements and the selectorate more inclusive at the local level.” In the most decentralized selection processes, we should expect the power of candidate nominations to be in the hands of all local members or citizens (Norris, 2004). For Balmas et al. (2014), such ‘decentralized personalization’ allows more decision-making control and influence for the grassroots than for the party leadership. Nevertheless, we should consider that the national party elite may still maintain the right to veto the decisions from the local level (Scarrow et al., 2000).

Even if decentralized selection procedures may empower the grassroots, they tend to favor incumbents over new candidates. Centralized processes allow for higher turnout, introducing new challengers into viable positions (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Vandeleene and Sandri, 2019). In the same vein, Put et al. (2015) analyze a tendency of local selectorates to select incumbents to more top and realistic list positions, especially because incumbents

have already developed personal connections with the grassroots by occupying key positions in the party hierarchy and having political experience.

Most research on candidate selection, as previous discussed, has primarily focused on the elements of candidate competitiveness, as well as selectorate inclusiveness and decentralization in European mainstream parties. But of great interest is also the question of candidate selection in populist parties, especially when their key ideological attribute is to question the competencies of the political establishment to provide effective mechanisms of participation and decision-making power to party members and ordinary citizens. Candidate selection research on the radical right has been rather limited. For instance, only Thiebault (1988) provided a detailed study of the French National Front party organization, concluding that candidate selection was mostly controlled by the party leader Jean-Marie Le Penn and the party general secretary. Candidate selection in the Danish People's Party was also highly dependent on pre-approval from the party leadership: a regional nominating committee had the authority to produce a candidate list which was sent to party members for a final approval (Art, 2011).

Only more recently party organization scholars have turned to examine the internal procedures in new successful populist parties such as the Five Star Movement (M5S) and Podemos. The general agreement among scholars is that M5S is 'hyper closed' and very exclusive in terms of selectorate and candidacy, while the party leader exercises strong pressure on the outcome of primaries (Lanzone and Rombi, 2014; Seddone and Rombi, 2018; Mikola, 2019). Sandri and Seddone (2021, 110) described the first online primary for selecting a party leader and a prime ministerial candidate as "more a coronation than a

real election”, with vague procedures, strict candidacy rules and arbitrary decisions. Deseriis and Vittori (2019) also observed that candidates had to receive the endorsement of the party founder Beppe Grillo if they wanted to be successful. In a comparative study between Podemos and M5S, Caiani (et al., 2021) found that both the M5S and Podemos were characterized with higher centralization of power in the hands of the leader in all decision-making areas and decreased control of the grassroots over the candidate selection and the party in public office.

Formally, the Alternative for Germany operates within the boundaries of the German Party Law which enables high inclusiveness (participation of party members) and decentralization in the decision-making of candidate selection. The party also attempts to keep grassroots empowerment and reduce leadership control over the organizational procedures, unlike in the above-mentioned populist parties. Nominees for candidate lists usually need to have proven themselves to the grassroots, as local party members hold the initial decision to elect them and to gather support for them on the state or national level party structures. In addition, party members frequently show to the national leadership that any interference in grassroots decision-making is unwelcome.

2. The Intra-party Road to Mandate in Germany

There are two different candidate selection levels within the German parties, corresponding to the mixed-member proportional electoral system. In the 2017 Bundestag election, 299 MPs were elected in single-member districts, while 410 MPs entered via closed party lists.

Both the electoral law and the party law stipulate secret voting for the two types of nominations, done in party conventions. It is up to each party, however, to decide on the selectorate mode of the conventions.

For the nomination of constituency candidates, most party statutes leave it to the local party branch to decide on the selectorate mode. However, some state party branches have explicit statute rules – the Free Democrats, CDU in Saxony, and the Left Party in Brandenburg require members' assemblies, while CDU in Thuringia and SPD in Bavaria organize delegate conventions. In practice, the CSU carried out only delegate conventions, followed by the SPD with around 80% of its local meetings in a delegate selectorate. On the other hand, the AfD and the Greens exclusively relied on members' assemblies, while the CDU opted for the same selectorate mode in two-thirds of its district branches (Höhne, 2017; Schindler and Höhne, 2020).

In the case of list candidates, party lists for the large parties are usually selected by delegate conventions on the state level. The principle of grassroots involvement clearly dominates only in the AfD: the party organized members' assemblies in 14 out of 16 state branches. On the other hand, FDP and the Left Party exclusively held for delegate conventions, while the Greens opted for delegate selectorate in 80% of its state branches (Table 6). Höhne (2017) observes that less inclusive decision-making processes in the large parties come at a cost of reducing the decision-making autonomy of the grassroots members who are actually responsible for recruitment and campaign activities. In many cases the ranking of candidates on party lists is pre-determined through informal negotiations between local party elites and state party elites (Schüttemeyer and Sturm, 2005; Detterbeck, 2016).

Table 6. Members’ assemblies and delegate conventions for the nomination of party list candidates for the 2017 Bundestag election.²³

	AfD	CDU/CSU	FDP	Greens	Left	SPD
Baden-Württemberg	M	D	D	D	D	D
Bavaria	M	D	D	D	D	D
Berlin	M	D	D	M	D	D
Brandenburg	M	D	M	D	D	D
Bremen	M	D	D	M	D	D
Hamburg	M	D	D	M/D	D	D
Hessen	M	D	D	M	D	D
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	M	D	D	D	D	D
Lower Saxony	M	D	D	D	D	D
North Rhine-Westphalia	D	D	D	D	D	D
Rhineland Palatinate	M	D	D	D	D	D
Saarland	D	D	D	D	D	D
Saxony	M	D	D	D	D	D
Saxony-Anhalt	M	D	D	D	D	D
Schleswig-Holstein	M	D	D	D	D	D
Thuringia	M	D	D	D	D	D

Note: M – Members’ Assembly; D – Delegate Convention.

Formal party rules and practices show that only the Green Party and the AfD most frequently offered inclusive selectorate modes where all party members could decide on candidate selection. To get a more nuanced picture of candidate selection inclusiveness, we should also consider how party members evaluate the party procedures. Table 7 and Table 8 show results from a survey conducted prior to the 2017 Bundestag election on the members’ opinion on the preferred selectorate for nominating candidates. At first look, open primaries are highly valued only by AfD members, although it is only a small percentage of the respondents – 9% for district candidate nominations and 8% for party list nominations. Since the German party law only allows open primaries to be advisory, with

²³ *Source: Party statutes and data from state party offices.*

the final decision made by party conventions, it not surprising to see very little interest from party members to demand for such highly inclusive modes.

Table 7. Party members’ preferred level of inclusiveness for district selection (in percent) (2016-2017).²⁴

Level of inclusiveness	All citizens	Party members	Party delegates	Party leadership
All respondents	5.6	60.8	32.6	1.0
AfD				
▪ Non-delegates (100)	9.2	80.8	10	0
CDU				
▪ Delegates (39)	3.4	34.7	60.6	1.3
▪ Non-delegates (61)	7.7	80.9	9.5	1.9
CSU				
▪ Delegates (100)	2	20.7	75.7	1.7
FDP				
▪ Non-delegates (100)	7.4	78.4	12.7	1.4
Greens				
▪ Non-delegates (100)	4	88.3	7.1	0.6
Left				
▪ Delegates (25.9)	0	40.4	59.6	0
▪ Non-delegates (74.1)	5.9	86	7.4	0.7
SPD				
▪ Delegates (86.2)	5.8	45.1	48.7	0.5
▪ Non-delegates (13.8)	9	78	13	0

Table 8. Party members’ preferred level of inclusiveness for list selection (in percent) (2016-2017).²⁵

²⁴ Note: From “No Need for Wider Selectorates”, D. Schindler and B. Höhne, 2020, Springer VS.

²⁵ Note: From “No Need for Wider Selectorates”, D. Schindler and B. Höhne, 2020, Springer VS.

Level of inclusiveness	All citizens	Party members	Party delegates	Party leadership
All respondents	4.7	42.2	52.2	0.9
AfD				
▪ Delegates (33.3)	7.6	44.5	47.2	0.7
▪ Non-delegates (66.7)	8.5	81.7	8.9	0.9
CDU				
▪ Delegates (100)	2.3	29.3	66.8	1.5
CSU				
▪ Delegates (100)	0	13.3	83.3	3.3
FDP				
▪ Delegates (86.2)	4.6	29.9	64.4	1.1
▪ Non-delegates (13.8)	5.9	84	7.6	2.5
Greens				
▪ Delegates (90.5)	2.4	30.9	66.7	0
▪ Non-delegates (9.5)	6.6	92.1	1.3	0
Left				
▪ Delegates (100)	4.9	39.4	55.2	0.5
SPD				
▪ Delegates (100)	4.8	37.7	56.4	1.1

For district candidate nominations, party members show a preference for the selectorate that they currently employ (Table 7). Most respondents from the AfD, CDU, FDP, the Greens and the Left Party favor inclusive selectorates such as members' assemblies. Only the preferences of the Social Democrats are mismatched: respondents who served as delegates are divided between supporting members' assemblies and current delegate conventions.

For state party list nominations, party primaries are a desired selectorate mode for most AfD members, regardless of whether they served as delegates. Least supportive of more

inclusive procedures are the CSU, CDU and the FDP, which exclusively use delegate conventions. However, we should not overlook the fact that a large minority of party delegates in the Left and the SPD prefer party primaries over the current delegate conventions.

In terms of competitiveness for both district nominations and party lists, incumbents generally face minimal opposition (Detterbeck, 2016; Höhne, 2017). From the 17th Bundestag (2009 – 2013) to the 18th Bundestag (2013 – 2017), the CDU parliamentary group retained around 81% of its incumbent MPs; the rate is slightly lower for the Social Democrats and the Left party with 70% and the Greens with 66% (Höhne, 2017).

In the following section I discuss the practices of candidate selection described by the AfD interviewees and analyze the field observations from the 2018/2019 Federal Assembly for the European Parliament Election.

3. Candidate Selection in the AfD: Challenging or Following the ‘German Road to Mandate’?

An important motivation for many interviewed AfD activists to join the party was their dissatisfaction with the internal proceedings of the mainstream parties. The absence of meaningful grassroots participation in decision-making processes or the informal pressure from party leadership were frequent topics of conversation. Whether deciding candidate lists for state-level or local elections, for Heiko and Johan, both long-time CDU members,

the mainstream parties had little actual understanding of how democratic grassroots participation should work:

“With the old parties, the list of candidates is purely a matter of form, because the list places have already been figured out and usually nobody dares to shake them.”

(Heiko, RP)

“We have too many applicants for the candidate lists and it is so time consuming. But that is of course a problem that the CDU doesn’t have. There, the state executive board decides on a list; they put it up and it’s done. Of course, they keep the list open to any member formally, otherwise the state election commissioner would not approve it. But over the years in these old parties, a certain practice has been established and that’s just the case – if you do not have the support of certain people, no need to compete. And that’s not the case with us, yes.” **(Johan, HE)**

Scheduled interviews with local party leaders or state and federal level politicians carry the constraints of time and formality, especially when members in prominent positions attempt to present their party in a positive way. Understanding how the party structures really work for the ordinary party members can be also observed when immersing oneself in local party events. One of my very first visits of an AfD regulars meeting was on September 28th, 2018 in the Brandenburg town of Bernau, just 10 km away from Berlin. Party events in East German localities carry one important advantage: there, the AfD is perceived as ‘socially acceptable’ enough not to face the wrath of anti-fascist and far-left groups. Therefore, all local meetings are open to the public and do not require special registration. In the territorial

district of ‘Barnim I’, where the town is situated, the AfD achieved second place (20%) in the 2017 Bundestag elections.

The topic of the Bernau regulars meeting was on restriction of the social system and reform of the labor market, led by the Bundestag representative Springer, René. After the presentation, informal conversations shifted to the organization of candidate selection for the local elections in May 2019. Jens suggested that good candidates would be those who know the local problems and who come from the working class: “We don’t need experts like other parties always select. We need normal people like us to work for us.” (**Jens, BB**) Then, I asked why ‘expert’ candidates from the other parties would be bad, if the party members liked them and therefore, selected them on the party list. My question started unexpected discussion among the party members who vehemently rejected the idea that the established parties actually allowed grassroots members to have a say in candidate selection. Alfred and Thilo made implicit comparisons between the current CDU structures and the dictatorial regime in East Germany:

Alfred (BB): “You know, the former Stasi regime got integrated into the new system. Merkel is an ‘IM’²⁶ with the name of “Erika” and that is why the system needs to change....No democracy in the CDU. You know, members only listen and follow, or they’re out.

²⁶ An unofficial collaborator (Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter) – informant for the Stasi in the German Democratic Republic.

Thilo (BB): The local party leaders [CDU] would make Erich Honnecker²⁷ proud [laughter]... They decide all the candidates behind closed doors and members just rubber-stamp it.

Ingo (BB): [nods in agreement] The same with the Sozis [SPD]. I've witnessed deliberate behind-the-scenes guidance by the party leadership when voting for candidates.”

In October 2018, I visited an AfD rally in Schlüchtern, for the Hessen state parliament elections. This small, picturesque town has always been dominated by the two large parties CDU and SPD, but since the 2014 European elections, the AfD has settled in as a third force, reaching almost 17% of the 2017 Bundestag vote. Aside from the expected discussion topics on local problems of immigration and support for the handcraft and SME sector, I heard yet another story conveying the party members' perceived distance between their expectation of internally democratic proceedings and real practices of candidate selection. Manfred raised an issue about how local CDU party elites would blatantly disregard grassroots deliberation, discourage competitiveness, and impose pre-approved party lists for formal approval:

“I still remember a CDU general meeting of my district association in 2006, where 35 candidates for local elections were chosen. Right at the beginning there was a list of proposals from the executive board for all 35 ballots. A friend of mine dared to run against the proposal of the board of directors for the 8th place. The chairman

²⁷ General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the GDR.

personally advertised and demanded the election of their candidate, that my friend did not stand a chance. You know, you cannot go against the board if you want a political future. At the end, the candidate list was made exactly as the board wanted.” **(Manfred, HE)**

These were only a few exemplary anecdotes showing the overall experience of AfD members with the mainstream parties. Participation of rank-and-file members at the candidate selection processes can enhance their sense of party-specific political efficacy, as members perceive themselves as capable of influencing internal party decisions (Wuttke et al., 2017).

3.1 The intricacies of candidate selection

After the selection of the first half of European Parliament candidates during the 2014 Federal Convention in Aschaffenburg, Jörg Burger (then, a North-Rhine Westphalian state speaker) published a statement describing the qualities an AfD party candidate should possess:

“In addition to outstanding technical competence and convincing rhetoric, candidates also need visible approval from the state association in which they were previously active. Those who could not win the party friends in their home state, certainly have no chance at a higher level. Too much bickering, calculated moves,

and personal ambition, resulting in lack of party unity will make a candidacy unsuccessful!” (**Jörg Burger, Chair NRW**)²⁸

This statement shows two important features, which were confirmed by interviewees: (1) outsiders, not well-known to the party on the ground, would not be able to convince the party convention, regardless of their expertise; (2) party unity and cohesion are highly encouraged.

In October 2018, during the preparation for the Hessen State Elections, I met with Robert, a member the Hessen ‘Youth Alternative’ (JA) group, who described the process to become a state candidate as “much more flexible” than in the CDU and “you can easily reach the top within a year”, even if you are a young activist. However, because of social pressure and stigmatization, many young AfD members were afraid to become a public figure:

“I would especially recommend it to retirees and high-net-earners who want to give something back to their country. They have nothing to risk, but a lot to win and the time to do so. On the other hand, young people risk a lot. Not only their reputation, but political commitment also eats a lot of valuable time.” (**Robert, HE**)

But if you have the courage to run as a candidate, anyone is welcome and allowed to take the podium and present their views:

“There are great candidates but there are also candidates where you think "Ohh, rather not!" One member came on stage... I admit it was summer, but he had pink

²⁸ From: Alexander Häusler. *Mut zur Wahrheit? Entstehungskontext, Entwicklung und gesellschaftspolitische Positionen der „Alternative für Deutschland“*.

shorts. And then he pulled out a palm branch, waving it, and said he was the president of Love-Land and wants to run for office now. Well, that was ...[laughter] not much more different than the candidates you will see on a party assembly of the Greens.” (Klaudia, BE)²⁹

Still, there is a certain pattern of rhetoric that can help a party member get a spot on the candidate list; a pattern that I also confirmed during my participant observation of the Federal Assembly for the 2019 EP election. For the 2018 Bavarian State Election, the AfD had an electoral program focusing on diverse topics ranging from ‘Immigration’ to ‘Real Estate and Infrastructure’. Uwe, who was one of the candidates running for a list position, tailored his presentation speech to the topic on ‘Real Estate’ and gave proposals for solving current city development problems. Uwe was not successful, although he was a prominent local leader since 2013 and had support from district branches in Munich and Upper Bavaria:

“Now there were a lot of members attending the general assembly...and they wanted to hear something different. They wanted to hear anti-Islam. And then I realized that it is important to be populist. It's not about making it clear in a speech where you have a competence yourself. So, it's not about experience.” (Uwe, BY)

Most members I spoke with were content with the AfD’s ability to maintain candidacy inclusiveness, but there was apparent frustration that party conventions were costly and time-consuming. Assemblies for candidate lists on state elections would last two days,

²⁹ Anecdote about the Party Convention for the 2016 Berlin State Elections.

while conventions for the European Parliament Election candidates would run for at least four days:³⁰

“We are expecting between 150 and 300 people to apply to go to Brussels, and we need only 15 to 20 candidates...the bad thing is that each one of them has 10 min of presentation...and there will be complaints. People already complain at our state convention [NRW] that candidates talk too much and say the same things.”

(Mathias, NRW)

“That’s the price of democracy. Then, a stranger comes to the stage, no one know him, but he is a party member, so he is allowed to run. That’s just democracy. Very exhausting, democracy is exhausting. [laughter]” **(Johan, HE)**

“But because of such hopeless unknown candidates, we lose precious time as the assembly. Because you have 15 nominees and half of them get 4-5 votes, and then we have to do a runoff or set up a new list all over again. But that is democracy, everyone can try.” [Conversation with **Anton (BY)** at the European Federal Assembly]

In terms of selectorate inclusiveness, the AfD tries to be as inclusive as it is allowed in the German Party Law. Currently, 12 out of 16 state branches organize party conventions open to all members for the formation of state candidate lists (Table 9). For the selection of constituency candidates, each local party branch holds members’ meeting, where two to three members usually compete for the district candidacy. In most cases, the successful

³⁰ The assembly for the 2019 EP election lasted for 8 days – one weekend in November and one in January.

district candidate is already a local party chair or holds another position in the executive board.

Table 9. Selectorate Inclusiveness in AfD state branches.

Selectorate Mode	2021	Changes over time
Baden-Württemberg	M	
Bavaria	M	
Berlin	M	
Brandenburg	M	
Bremen	M	
Hamburg	M	
Hessen	D	Delegate convention since 2017
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	M	
Lower Saxony	M	
North Rhine-Westphalia	D	Delegate convention since 2017
Rhineland Palatinate	M	
Saarland	D	
Saxony	D	Delegate conventions since 2020
Saxony-Anhalt	M	
Schleswig-Holstein	M	
Thuringia	M	

Note: 'M' – members' assemblies; 'D' – delegate conventions

When it comes to producing candidate lists for the Bundestag or the European Parliament elections, the AfD has opted exclusively for delegate conventions. Many interviewees suggested that highly inclusive selectorates are the desired form for state-level and local candidate selections, but the party has to be practical for national elections. Delegate conventions can be more advantageous on the federal level as delegates are more aware how to produce a candidate list, which reflects the internal balance of the factions (**Johan, HE; Sylvia, ST; Dominik, TH**). Members' assemblies are also impractical on the federal level because of the high costs of renting convention space and possible geographic bias of

representation, as the convention location will not be easily accessible for all party members and some state branches will have more control over the decision-making (**Markus, BW; Anton BY; Christof, BY; Ursula, NW**). In the case of geographic bias of representation, Wolfgang specifically referred to the empowerment of East German states and the ‘Flügel’ faction, since the party has been able to easily rent convention halls closer to the East German state branches: Magdeburg in 2018, Riesa and Braunschweig in 2019 (**Wolfgang NW**).

3.2 Candidate Selection at the Federal Assembly for the European Parliament Election

For two long weekends in November 2018 and January 2019, the East Germany cities of Magdeburg and Riesa hosted AfD federal delegates who deliberated on the party program for the 2019 European Parliament Election [See Chapter III] and selected electoral candidates. The delegate attendance varied from 450 to 550 delegates each day. The seating was arranged according to state blocks, as delegates from the same state party association sat together during voting but moved freely in the hall during deliberation or breaks. Around 140 nominees were running for 30 candidate positions. Each nominee had a 7-min presentation time and answered three questions from the delegates

Before moving to analyzing the findings from this participant observation and conversations with party delegates, I will briefly compare the candidate selection results from the 2019 EP list with the 2014 EP list, when the AfD was still under the leadership of

Bernd Lucke and had a predominantly Eurosceptic focus³¹. Originally, the AfD was labeled as a party of academics. This is confirmed on the 2014 EP list where 39% of all positions were occupied by academics. In 2019, the party still attempted to present itself as “a party of experts” (**Mathias, NW**): 36% of the party members on the 2019 EP list had a doctorate or professorship.

In terms of women representation, the AfD has not established formal gender quotas in its statutes. The 2019 EP list is slightly more male-dominated than its 2014 counterpart: five women were selected in 2019 and six in 2014. However, when we look into the realistic positions women occupy, only two women from each list would have been able to enter the European Parliament. Beatrix von Storch (#4) and Ulrike Trebesius (#6) could pass the 7-8%³² electoral forecast in the 2014 election.

For the 2019 EP election with expected 11-12% vote, only Christine Anderson (#8) and Dr. Sylvia Limmer (#9) had a realistic chance, and their nomination and selection were not without its challenges. Before the voting for position #8, a delegate from Bavaria made a proposal that the convention should consider selecting women for the following two places: “Smart delegates should nominate only women.” After the first election for #8, Michael Adam (BE) withdrew his candidacy for the runoff, allowing for two women to compete for the first time: Christine Anderson and Dr. Sylvia Limmer. For position #9, the delegates decisively voted in favor for the only female candidate on the list – Dr. Sylvia Limmer. After that, female candidates only managed to win positions on the bottom of the list: Dr.

³¹ See Appendix for 2014 and 2019 European Parliament candidates

³² For more information on electoral forecasts: <https://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/europawahl.htm>

Verena Wester in #13, Uta Opelt in #18, and Rebecca Weissbrodt in #30. It is interesting to consider how this guided delegate behavior here is any different from the imposition of gender quotas by other parties; in this case, the AfD was attempting to fulfil certain ‘informal’ quotas as well.

It is not surprising to have a male-dominated candidate list in a male-dominated party, especially when there are no formal gender quotas. In March 2019, I visited several district party branches in Thuringia, which were preparing for the local elections in May 2019. I spoke with Dominik, a local party leader, about the AfD challenge appealing to women’s political participation. In his district branch, he claimed to have about 30% of women members. But when confronted with the question of why the party has very few female candidates on either the European Parliament list or local party lists³³, Dominik suggested that the fear factor of exposing yourself as an AfD supporter played a big role:

“They do not dare because of the responsibility for their family. People are also afraid. It is still like that. If you hang your head out of the window, sometimes it gets windy. So, a lot of wind blows on us [AfD members][Laughter].” **(Dominik, TH)**

Some party branches attempt to rectify the decreased women involvement. In May 2018, party members from Saxony district branches have established a ‘Women’s Network’ and an ‘Alternative Women in North Saxony’ association, which aim to engage with female AfD supporters (members and non-members) and invite them to draft policy points for the

³³ An example of a local party list in the Appendix.

party programs in local and state elections. Under the slogan “Our strong women of Saxony entirely without quotas and coercion”³⁴, one of the network organizers Gudrun Petzold describes the project as a political opportunity for women to stand up for women’s rights against the mainstream parties’ “misunderstood feminism” (Alternative Frauen in Verantwortung). Nevertheless, whether the efforts of Saxony branches would increase female participation in the AfD is a matter that needs further observation.

State representation is perceived as a more important issue than women’s participation. Most interviewees described candidate selection for state, federal and European elections as a game of dominance between the two main factions, which happen to be geographically distributed: national-conservative ‘Flügel’ candidates from East German state associations and Hessen, and moderate euro-sceptic candidates from West and Southern party branches. On the 2014 EP list, only one person with position 26 represented an Eastern state – Mecklenburg Vorpommern. On the 2019 EP list, however, the Eastern party branches managed to place five candidates, and one of them was on the prominent third position – Dr. Maximilian Krah from Saxony. Not being able to place Eastern German candidates in top positions for the 2014 EP list was not perceived as a problem for Christian. Christian was one of the founding party members in the East, actively focused on developing organizational structures in Thuringia and Saxony and for him, the 2014 EP elections were not a priority:

³⁴ Facebook photo in Appendix.

“Would have been a mistake to send strong personnel from the East associations to play backbenchers in the rarely noticed EP. We needed our people on the ground to develop strong links with local communities and win local and state elections.”

(Christian, TH)

On both lists we can see a visible trend of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavarian candidates to dominate top positions: 37% of the top positions in the 2014 EP list were held by Baden-Wuerttemberg members, while the number increases to 50% of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavarian candidates in the 2019 EP list. Johan, who served as a delegate at the 2018/2019 Federal Assembly expressed his dissatisfaction with the absence of East German candidates in top positions:

“The list was very skewed and did not have enough representatives from the Eastern associations which I think is problematic. Voters in the East will not vote for us because they will see the AfD as a Western party. Not close enough to the Eastern [local] communities.” **(Johan, HE)**

In terms of ideological positions, the 2014 EP list reflected the founding Euro-sceptic principles of the AfD, with only one candidate in a top position with conservative views: Beatrix von Storch (#4). Interestingly, the 2019 EP list continues the maintenance of a Eurosceptic image with only two top candidates expressing open national-conservative attitudes and close relations to the ‘Flügel’ faction: Dr. Maximilian Krah (#3) and Christine Anderson (#8).

Competitiveness Dynamics for the 2019 EP List:

Nomination rules for European Parliament candidates are very different in terms of the formal influence of district and state party branches on the candidates. Any party member or a German resident (non-party member) can apply to run for a list position with the only requirement to be officially nominated by a party delegate during the federal assembly. District or state party branches can still informally elect their preferred candidates, but such decisions have non-binding status and can only serve as a way of advertising and building support for the candidates before the federal convention.

To analyze competitiveness in the candidate contests, I look into the following elements: (1) the number of nominees, competing for a list position; and (2) the margin between the two nominees with the highest percentages. I have also divided the list positions in two categories: 1. realistic positions 1 to 12, and non-realistic positions 13 to 30, based on the electoral forecasts for the party. Vandeleene and Sandri (2019) suggest that candidates for realistic positions face more than three times higher competition than candidates competing for the bottom list positions. Party delegates and the leadership are aware that they need well-known and experienced candidates to be the face of the party (top list positions) to attract the necessary electoral votes.

For the 2019 EP list, most contests consisted of five to seven nominees both for the realistic (30.7%) and the bottom list positions (45.5%). The second and third largest percentages fall into the '8 to 10' and '11 or more' candidate categories (Table 10). If we exclude the coronation of Dr. Jörg Meuthen for the #1 position and the two top contests with only four

candidates (#2 and #8), competitiveness in terms of number of nominees was high for all list positions.

Table 10. Number of candidates for the AfD 2019 European Parliament List.

2019 EP List	Number of candidates	Percentage of elections
	1	2.8
	4	11.4
	5 to 7	40.0
	8 to 10	28.6
	11 or more	17.2
List ballots:	N	35
1-12 Realistic Positions		
	1	7.7
	4	15.4
	5 to 7	30.7
	8 to 10	23.1
	11 or more	23.1
13-30 Non-realistic Positions		
	1	0.0
	4	9.1
	5 to 7	45.5
	8 to 10	31.8
	11 or more	13.6

Notes: The table includes number of candidates from all list ballots (successful and unsuccessful).

The large number of contestants made it impossible to have clear winners in the first ballot for most positions: there were eight runoffs for the top 1-12 positions, with position #8 requiring for the convention to create a second list of candidates as there was no agreement on the first list. For the non-realistic positions of 13 to 30 there were 19 runoffs, where positions #13 and #14 required the drafting of a second list and position #16 had three consecutive candidate lists³⁵. In general, the bottom list positions were slightly more

³⁵ See Appendix for a detailed table of the candidate contests.

competitive than the top ones: the average margin of between the two nominees with highest percentage for positions 1 to 12 was 28%, while positions 13 to 30 had an average of 21.8%, putting them in the ‘close race’ category (Table 11). Nevertheless, contests for all positions were mostly tight or close races: 66.6% in both top and bottom positions. In addition, the average approval rate for all positions ranges between 55% and 61%, with only the leading position with Dr. Jörg Meuthen obtaining a 90.3% approval.

Table 11. Competitiveness in candidate contests, 2019 EP candidate list.

2019 EP List	Tight margin (<15%)	Close margin (15-25%)	Moderate margin (26-50%)	Uncompetitive (>50%)	Coronations
	9	11	6	3	1
Average approval: 57.5 Average margin: 24.2%					
1-12 Positions	4	4	1	2	1
Average approval: 61.4% Average margin: 28%					
13-30 Positions	5	7	5	1	
Average approval: 55.0% Average margin: 21.8%					

Note: The table only uses results from successful list ballots, where a candidate was able to achieve the required quorum.

Between Heated Disagreement and Exhausting Deliberation – “We are a fermented pile”³⁶:

The discussion and debates among delegates during the convention are only scratching the surface of the deliberative dynamics that are usually present months before the event itself. When I met in September 2018 with Mathias, a local party leader from Ruhr region, he shared that informal discussions between state party branches who to select for the EP list has already started. Party members who wish to run for a position but have not started to gather a delegate support base before the convention would not stand a chance:

“My district branch is very actively having people connected and advertising our own candidate list for Brussels. Our goal is to have as many people from North-Rhine Westphalia sent to Brussels. Let us assume, we have 600 delegates and NW goes with 93 delegates. We need a support of 301 for our candidates to win a spot. So, that means we have to connect our candidates with the rest of Germany.”

(Mathias, NW)

Mathias and his fellow party members from NW have started the discussion with other state branches since July 2018. It was not an easy task because they had to satisfy both factions within the party - the moderate Alternative Mitte which dominates the NW party branch and the conservative Flügel in the East German state, but also with supporters in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, and Hessen. Ursula, an activist from Duesseldorf, also shared that it was difficult to convince the other state branches to support NW candidates

³⁶ Quote from Alexander Gauland.

because they still remembered the time when Bernd Lucke and his followers left the party, taking away precious mandates with them (**Ursula NW**).

Assuming that most state branches were negotiating at least four months in advance for their favorite candidates to end up in top positions, I will now turn to the deliberative dynamics at the party assembly. Based on the number of close races discussed in the previous subsection and the constant conversations between delegates among different state blocks during the convention, it seems party members may have reached consensus beforehand only on the leading candidate Dr. Jorg Meuthen, as well as candidates for the third and fourth positions. Both Dr. Maximillian Krah (#2) and Lard Patrick Berg from Baden-Wuerttemberg (#3) got 76% approval. Interestingly, as the Saxony state leader Jörg Urban was nominating Dr. Krah, he specifically emphasized that this nomination was already democratically elected at a members' assembly. This was a direct message to the delegates that Dr. Krah represents the wishes of the grassroots in Saxony, and therefore, would be the right candidate.

Decisions on other list positions, however, were made on the spot during nominees' speeches and Q&A sessions, informal deliberation, and coffee and lunch breaks. Members of the 'Youth Alternative' (JA) group were frequently posing controversial questions to the candidates. Despite holding the respected status of a federal co-chair and faced no candidate opposition, Dr. Jorg Meuthen was asked how much longer he would stay in the European Parliament before he decided 'it is time for DEXIT'. Daniel, one of the delegates from the youth wing, explained to me that JA members are quite unhappy with the reluctance of the party leader and already EP mandate holder to show firm action against

the EU institutions and many of them voted against Meuthen's candidacy (**Daniel, BB**).

Of course, Meuthen's approval still reached 90% with 483 out of 535 delegates in favor.

In other instances, delegates from the youth wing would challenge the relationships between certain nominees and the former party leader Frauke Petry. One delegate asked Werner Maier (a nominee for #12) if he would publicly distance himself from Frauke Petry:

Werner Maier (BY): "Frauke Petry has left the party. From whom am I supposed to distance myself? [laughter]"

During one of the coffee breaks, I spoke with Lukas (ST) about the apparent animosity between his fellow members from the 'Youth Alternative' and some candidates. He confirmed that it was the mission of JA members to exclude people who sided with Frauke Petry and Markus Pretzel, but decided to stay in the party because they were "not loyal enough and can turn their backs on the party at any time". He also expressed anger with nominees who already had local or state mandates and instead of focusing on party work there, they wanted to move to the European Parliament:

"We try to avoid concentration of power in the hands of a few. If you already are a mandate holder or have a high-level party position, you actually have heaps of work. Do not run for another mandate!" (**Lukas, ST**)

In the same vein, the party past of some members from North-Rhine Westphalia attracted negative attention from the delegates. As previously mentioned by Mathias (NW), the North-Rhine Westphalian delegates were aiming to send their own candidates to the top positions. For the second position, three members from NW and one member from Baden-

Wurttemberg were nominated. According to Mathias, two of the NW nominees Martin Schiller and Kerstin Garbracht did not stand a chance as they used to be close to the former federal chair Frauke Petry and Markus Pretzell (former NW chair) whose exit caused great turmoil to the party in 2017. Guido Reil (NW) was the favored nominee, especially because he created a beneficial AfD image in the Ruhr region – a former Social Democrat and coal miner, ready to bring back prosperity to the working-class people in the Ruhr. Reil has been an important party activist, participating in the ‘Alternative Workers Union’ (AVA) and conducting frequent local social work such as the ‘Warm Bus’ initiative for the homeless.

Party Unity around the ‘Perfect’ Candidate:

Intra-party democratic mechanisms can foster increased membership participation and deliberation, but they may also intensify internal divisions. Intra-party disagreements were frequent during the convention; however, interviewees pointed out that party cohesion and unity were not compromised. Despite the internal competition among state and local branches as well as between the Alternative Mitte and Flügel factions, aiming to promote their own nominees, delegates had a shared understanding of who would be the most suitable nominees, representing an ideologically cohesive party image.

On Sunday, November 18, during the convention lunch break, I met with Anton (BY), Markus (BW) and Mathias (NW) to hear their thoughts whether they were satisfied with the candidates for the first eight positions. They were all glad that their states would be represented in at least one top position and that the candidates were from the moderate

‘Alternative Middle’. I asked them if there is a winning formula to become a candidate, aside from having networked beforehand with other state branches to vote in favor of a specific person:

Mathias (NW): “Of course, networking with other branches is good, but you never know if it will work out. Like Martin Schiller [for position #2]... he was favored by our state leadership, they tried to pull a few strings but the delegates elected the grassroots activist Guido Reil.

Markus (BW): If you are not a ‘party celebrity’ with the grassroots, you don’t have a chance to get any of the top 10 list positions. Another problem is that delegates want to hear emotional speeches, not expert issue speeches.

Mathias (NW): Normally, we should send candidates with technical experience, language skills and cultural competence. Not the case here. Only Dr. Meuthen somewhat fit these criteria.

Anton (BY): We had a good candidate for List 5 who is an expert in agriculture and offered good reforms for the EU agricultural policies. But other delegates did not support him because he isn’t about immigration or DEXIT.

Markus (BW): That’s why, the winning formula is to show anti-EU sentiment and criticize the refugee approach. [laughter]”

This conversation confirms a finding, discussed before [see section 3.1] that it is not entirely about competence and expertise, but about candidates presenting themselves as

tough opponents to Brussels and Merkel's refugee policies. For instance, when asked how to stop population growth in Africa. Bernhard Zimniok (position #5) jokingly responded: "Africans just love to have sex". Also, Lars Patrick Berg (position #4) argued that Europe should be a fortress of security, "which protects us from inhuman and misogynist stabbers and rapists", while one of his opponents, Steffen Kroeger, brought a stone piece of the Berlin Wall and claimed that the EU is trying to destroy Germany's unified identity: "Berlin and Brussels have built a new wall, an invisible wall, the wall of political correctness, permeating the whole society." And Nikolaus Fest (#6 position) summarized his arguments with "When you want to end the EU, you have to go to the EU".

After our lunch meeting was over, Mathias and Markus went back to the convention hall, but Anton stayed to share one more interesting piece about who is a 'desirable' candidate. He talked about how there are actual double standards based on party seniority. And indeed, I have observed in several instances that nominees would be asked why they joined the AfD so late (members since 2018) or why they are only supporters [Förderer]³⁷:

"The first members who joined in 2013 are perceived as the "golden ones" – very high class, smart, professionals. Everyone else who joined later, especially in 2017-2018, are perceived as "lower class members" because it took them too long to join the AfD and they remained in the opponent mainstream parties for too long."

(Anton, BY)

³⁷ Förderer is a non-membership category where you pay reduced membership fees, receive party information and participate at meetings as a guest with the right to speak but no voting rights.

Although Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant attitudes were a unifying factor among most candidates, Daniel (BB) and Mathias (NW) emphasized that the AfD promotes diversity in its ranks, pointing to the many nominees who were from non-German background. For instance, Leyla Bilge, a prominent women's rights activist and an "ex-Muslim, converted Christian and proud to be German", was a favored nominee for position #8 with 38% approval but unable to reach the necessary quorum. She is frequently the party face for women initiatives against Islamization such as the 2018 Women's March [Frauenmarsch].

For position #10, the Lower Saxony branch nominated Dr. Jaroslaw Poljak, an East European Jew who has been working at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. When asked how he feels as a Jew in Germany, Dr. Poljak responded, "We are all afraid today, especially walking openly with a kipa on the streets. And the AfD is the only party that can end this fear." But the highlight of the immigrant-background nominees was Achille Demagbo, an immigrant from Benin who founded the AfD district branch in Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein. He claimed that it is a privilege to stay and live in Germany that should not be taken for granted and the EU should stop its "socially romanticized development politics in Africa." His speech was followed with standing ovation throughout the convention hall. Demagbo performed very well for position #14, as he came in second with 30% of the vote on the first candidate list.

'Smoke-filled Back Rooms' and Leadership Influence in Democratized Candidate

Procedures:

The last important observation I will focus on here is leadership-delegate dynamics during the candidate selection. It was not possible to observe whether the current leadership under Jorg Meuthen was informally influencing the process before the party assembly. However, there were two specific instances where delegates were displeased with Dr. Meuthen's intervention. First, Dr. Meuthen proposed Joachim Kuhs for list position 11, one of the last realistic positions for entering the European Parliament. Kuhs is a strong support of Dr. Meuthen and also holds the party secretary position at the federal executive board. Johan (HE) commented that Dr. Meuthen was attempting to strengthen his position by surrounding himself with followers, while not allowing for the conservative members to have representative in the European Parliament. Many delegates show their frustration as well, first by pushing Joachim Kuhs to a runoff against Leyla Bilge who was favored by the Brandenburg state branch; and second by voting with a high number of 'Nays' (73 with Nays). Large amount of 'Nays' is problematic as they count toward the necessary quorum to win and can fail the runoff, as it has happened with position #13, where the first candidate list runoff received 117 'Nays'.

In a response to the rising 'Nays' for each position, Dr. Meuthen intervened again by asking delegates to consider voting with 'Abstain' than 'No' if they do not like the candidates, because abstaining votes do not influence the quorum and would not lead to repetitive runoffs and new lists. Krzysztof Walczak, an actively speaking delegate from the 'Youth Alternative', vehemently disagreed with the party leadership:

“It is legitimate to vote ‘No’ and if I do not find any of the candidates suitable, I should vote with ‘NO’ [almost screaming here]. And it is completely legitimate to do so.” **(Krzysztof Walczak, HH)**

The Assembly chair Christoph Basedow also agreed with the delegate that voting according to “your heart and conscience is a vital part of direct democracy”, and therefore, delegates should not feel pressured to avoid voting with a ‘No’. Dr. Meuthen’s proposal was rejected with a large majority and the delegates applauded the decision.

There is apparent pushback by delegates against the direct involvement of the party leadership in decision-making procedures; however, further research is necessary to establish a direct link between grassroots members’ empowerment and increased accountability and transparency of leaders’ actions on candidate selection.

Conclusion:

Abiding by the framework of the German Party Law, candidate selection is highly decentralized and inclusive. Both the local elites and members usually do not accept interference from the federal party leadership, and most state branches attempt to organize party conventions open to all members.

Appealing to the grassroots is in the center of all aspects of candidate selection. First, the success of a nominee is initially decided at a members’ meeting on the district level. If a person does not have the grassroots’ support before a state or national convention, they do not stand a chance to end up with a list position. For the candidate list for the European

Parliament (EP), which is always decided at a national convention, members from party districts informally elect their preferred nominees and conduct consultations with other branches for their support. Much of the work on candidate selection happens on the grassroots level months before the national convention.

Second, nominees who have proven themselves to be locally very active and who know what motivates their fellow partisans have higher chances of success. Some of the nominees for the EP list were big party names, holding leadership positions or state-level mandates, but others were highly engaged activists who have organized important party events such as Guido Reil and Leyla Bilge. In addition to grassroots activism, anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic rhetoric is highly valued during presentation speeches.

Third, the national leadership has very little autonomy over selection procedures. As I discuss in Chapter V, AfD leaders do not enjoy special status and privileges; rather, they are treated as representative and the grassroots can take away their approval and position if leaders attempt to reduce members' opportunities for political participation. As shown in the observation of the Federal Assembly for European Parliament Election, party delegates openly show their frustration with leadership intervention in candidate selection procedures. Also, nominees who are perceived to have been close to the former leader Frauke Petry are not positively considered by the party delegates.

Candidate selection in the AfD reflects the internal make-up of the party, maintaining power balance between the factions and allowing for grassroots members and delegates to express themselves freely. Party members do not shy away from showing their displeasure

with the previous and current leadership if they experience problems with accountability and absence of respect from the party elite. Candidate selection procedures may appear to contribute to party cohesion as long as grassroots participation is not endangered by the national party elite.

CHAPTER V

A Game of Thrones? Collective Leadership at the Alternative for Germany

“Party members would reprimand her [Frauke Petry]. And that’s also typical of our AfD, that we are very dissentious and even, as Gauland said so beautifully, "are a fermented pile."³⁸

(Sylvia, Saxony-Anhalt, local party chair)

The idea that parties tend to concentrate power in the hands of one leader or a small number of party elites can be traced back to Robert Michels’s “iron law of oligarchy”. The general pessimism of whether introducing more internal participatory opportunities corresponds to meaningful internal democracy stems from the practice of established parties that still allow party elites to retain significant control over leadership selection (Cross, 2013; Scarrow, 2014). Challenging the practices of the mainstream parties, populist leaders emphasize their proximity to the ‘people’ and present themselves as an embodiment of the citizens’ will (Mudde, 2004; Barr, 2009; De Lange and Art, 2011; Gerbaudo, 2018). However, populist promises of direct democracy do not necessarily translate into meaningful participatory opportunities for the grassroots members. A recurrent observation among party organization scholars is the personalized and highly centralized leadership in populist parties (Ivaldi and Lanzone, 2016; McDonnell and Vampa, 2016). This chapter argues that in contrast to most populist right parties, grassroots members and local party elites at the Alternative for Germany have consistently encouraged diffusion of power at

³⁸ German expression for ‘a bunch of grumpy people’

the local level and maintained collective leadership. The party factions also serve as a constraining mechanism against party elites who attempt to concentrate power in their own hands and diminish grassroots' influence in the decision-making. These features have allowed the AfD to satisfy the members' expectations for representation in the intra-party structures.³⁹

1. Understanding Leadership Selection in European Parties

The growing role of party leaders has become an uncontested trend in contemporary democracies. Robert Michels (1962 [1915]) first observed that parties tend to become centralized around their leaders. By the 1990s, many political scientists observed that these dynamics continued in the post-war era. parties have consistently engaged in oligopolistic practices, tremendously decreased the number and influence of party membership, and shifted the gravity of power distribution in the hands of the leaders (Katz and Mair, 1995; 2002; 2009; Poguntke and Webb, 2005). As a consequence to party cartelization and presidentialization, party members have started leaving the parties and the electorate has stopped identifying with the parties in the absence of political alternatives (Katz et al., 1992, Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). In a recent study, Barnfield and Bale (2020) contend that disillusionment with party leaders was a top reason for British Labor members to exit the party.

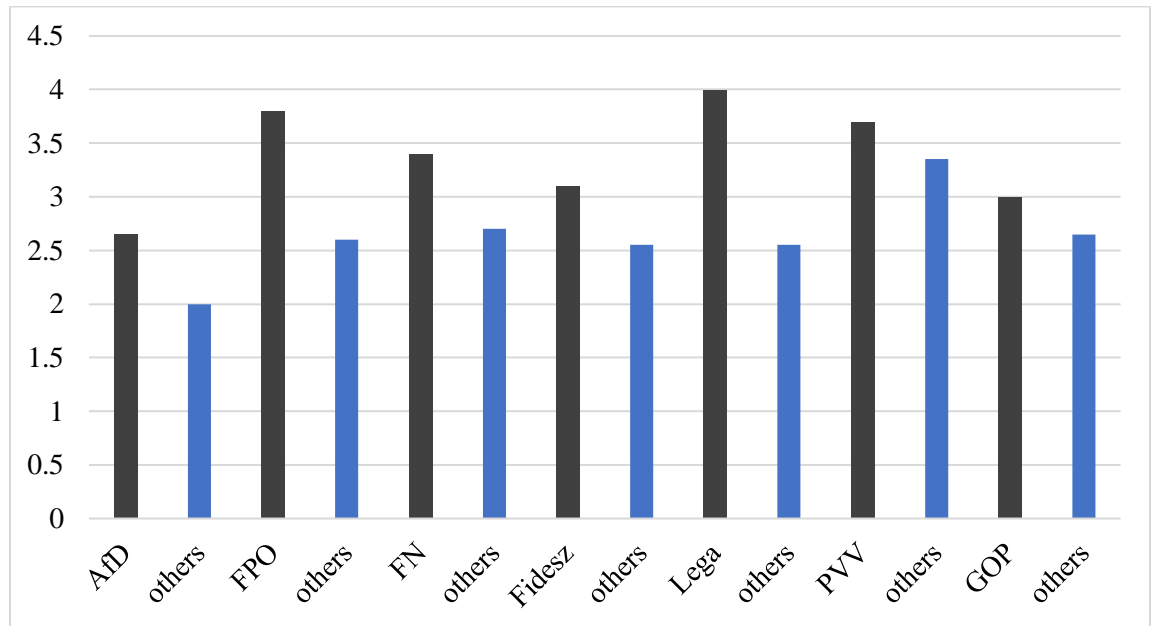
³⁹ For members' expectations of internal participation, see Chapter II.

In response to the growing political disenchantment, established parties have experimented with grassroots members' direct participation in leadership selection (Cross and Blais, 2012; Pilet and Cross, 2014; Sandri and Seddone, 2015), which has brought increasing transparency and openness. But at the same time, leadership contests saw a decline in competitiveness (Kenig, 2009). Members' inclusiveness in the intra-party decision-making processes can strengthen the party leadership, as members' choices are often "constrained and limited to the alternatives acceptable to the existing elite" (Carty, 2013, p. 19). Although research is still limited, studies have found a positive correlation between electoral success and intra-party democracy in leadership selection. Pedersen and Schumacher (2015) observe a short-term increase in support measured by opinion polls for parties with contested leadership elections, which involve all party members in the procedures.

Formal party rules may suggest that leadership contests are open and democratically competitive. Yet scholars have observed that decisions for leadership selections have been made before they reach the party membership and party elites would present a single contender for a ceremonial ratification at a convention. More than half of leadership selections in a 14-country survey were uncontested, as coronations were found to be "the norm in the established democracies of continental Europe" (Kenig et al., 2015, p. 61), which was a surprising trend in countries that are struggling with declining trust in the political parties and institutions. By the time the decision for leadership selection reaches the members, competition is rather symbolic and the seemingly 'democratic' selection procedures reinforce elite power (Mair, 1997, pp. 149-150).

Leadership selection mechanisms, also, vary across party families. Christian democratic and radical right parties tend to have more centralized procedures, where party elites usually select the leaders, while in green and libertarian parties party members directly decide on the leadership (Krouwel, 2012). Especially interesting is the case of populist parties, whose central ideological principle is to offer citizens an alternative to the established parties and encourage a directly democratic political participation. Populism, however, carries contradictory elements, as it employs anti-establishment rhetoric and urges for citizens' involvement, while entrenching personalized forms of leadership (Viviani, 2017). Populist leaders tend to present themselves as able and willing to work for the citizens' interests – "I can do it for you." (Barr, 2009, p. 37), and populist supporters "want politicians who know the people, and who make their wishes come true" (Mudde, 2004, p. 558). In a recent study on the authoritarian tendencies of populist right voters, Donovan (2020) finds that strong unchecked leaders are highly valued among supporters of the Italian Lega, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Dutch Party for Freedom, and the French National Front with a score between 4 and 3.4 out 5 points. In contrast, AfD respondents were less likely to prefer centralized leadership that "bends the rules" (2.65/5) (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Mean rating of preferences for strong leaders ‘who bend the rules’. Radical right party voters compared to other voters (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree).
⁴⁰



Since plebiscitary linkages are highly vertical, it is not a surprise to see strong personalized and centralized leadership structures in populist parties. The French National Front, an emblematic radical right party in its endurance and electoral success, has only initially experimented with collective leadership between Jean-Marie Le Pen and representatives of the *Ordre Nouveau* movement; then, a few years after the party creation, Le Pen solidified his position of a strong single leader (Hainsworth, 1992; Ivaldi and Lanzone, 2016). In the Belgian National Front, its founder Daniel Feret consistently prevented the establishment of a strong extra-parliamentary organization and expelled activists who have questioned his leadership authority (Art, 2011). The Italian Lega is also characterized by charismatic

⁴⁰ Note: From “Right populist parties and support for strong leaders”, T. Donovan, 2020, Party Politics (Source: CSES Module 5; DPES, 2017; FES, 2017).

leadership and personalized internal organization, in which grassroots activists are only an instrument for electoral mobilization and have limited opportunities to challenge the leadership and influence decision-making (McDonnell and Vampa, 2016; Sandri et al., 2019). In the same vein, the highly successful Five Star Movement has adopted leadership selection rules in 2017, almost a decade after its creation, but the procedures lack transparency and are frequently modified by the leadership (Deseriis and Vittori, 2019). Gherghina and Soare (2021, p. 59) also observe that personalized leadership and hierarchical structures can be disadvantageous, as a “one-man show is not a good recipe for sustainable electoral performance” in Central and Eastern European populist parties (Bulgaria Without Censorship and the Romanian People’s Party as examples).

Nevertheless, not all populist visions of direct democracies are equal. Some populist parties may follow a model of hierarchical and powerful leaders, while others may entail more diffuse participation in leadership selection and larger grassroots influence in constraining the party elites. Whether this is also the case in the Alternative for Germany is a question this chapter seeks to explore. Bottom-up party organizations constrain the development of internal hierarchies and reduce the capabilities of leaders to monopolize decision-making power (Bolleyer, 2013). The research presented in this chapter suggests that AfD grassroots members and factions hold the real power, while leaders only act as representatives that can be replaced any time. Contrary to the observations of scholars on other right-wing populist parties, the AfD party organization exhibits propensity toward horizontal distribution of power and absence of concentrated leadership in the hands of a single undisputed leader. Federal party leaders only rely on certain popularity among the

membership base, which can be quickly shaken if local and state party elites decide to point their thumbs down (Kleinert, 2018). Grassroots members have consistently resisted changes toward a stronger and more centralized leadership, perceiving such an organizational move as weakening internal democracy and reducing their distinctiveness from the established parties. Being portrayed as a party immobilized by internal fights between factions is an image most parties seeking electoral success and government participation would avoid. Factionalism may negatively impact party legitimacy and cohesion (Boucek, 2009). However, in the case of the AfD, factions are an essential element in the organization to maintain internal democracy and keep in line party elites that strive to centralize power in their own hands. In Chapter II, I suggest that these leadership dynamic features are effective in satisfying members' expectations of internal participatory practices, not available in many established parties.

2. Party Leadership Selection: German Law and Practice

Leadership election methods vary in their inclusiveness from the party executive being the least inclusive selectorate to the whole electorate as the most inclusive selection body. Smaller and exclusive selectorates such as party executive members or members of the party parliamentary group can be beneficial for the incumbent party leader who can influence the decision-making process with promises of office or policy rewards. In addition, party leaders may be able to shape the elitist selectorate by appointing loyalists, thus presenting a greater obstacle to leadership challengers. Formally, this exclusive

election method has not been employed in European democracies since the mid-1970s (Cross and Blais, 2011). Today, the most commonly used leadership selectorate across continental Europe is the party convention that consist of either party members or elected delegates. Nevertheless, informally, party elites still shape the leadership selection before it is finalized at the convention.

German Party Law stipulates that party conventions must elect the party leader and the executive boards, without specifying the voting rules and the term limit. However, Detterbeck and Rohlfing (2013, p. 77) observe a tendency for party elites in the established parties to reach consensus on a single candidate, before being presented to the convention for a formal ‘coronation’: “selection of party leaders in Germany has been and still is an elite affair...determined behind closed doors.” Bound by the strict rules of the German Party Law, the Alternative for Germany follows the party convention selectorate model, but frequently employs very inclusive procedures such as membership ballots with advisory status on party leadership and leadership of the parliamentary group. In terms of leadership deselection, only the AfD, the Greens, the Left and the Social Democrats have explicit rules. AfD members, in particular, have the right to vote out of office individual party leaders or the whole executive board.

It is worth noting the specific language used in designating leadership in German parties. All established parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, the Greens, and the Left) call the party leaders ‘Vorsitzende’ or ‘Chairperson’, while the AfD refers to their leaders as ‘Sprecher’ or ‘speaker/spokesperson’. This distinction is an important example of a discursive way in which the party seeks to institutionalize the relationship between the rank-and-file

members and the elected leadership, as the ‘speaker’ being dependent on and representative of the interests of the party activists.

Similarly to the Greens and the Left Party, the AfD has adopted a model of a multi-member leadership; after 2015, dual leadership has become a norm on the federal level. On the state level, five party branches have also maintained dual leadership until 2019: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Hessen, North-Rhine Westphalia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Thuringia. In its foundation years (2013-2015), the AfD has focused on including all members in federal party conventions, but since 2018, the party has moved toward the selectorate norm of delegate conventions.

When selecting delegates for federal conventions, the AfD is characterized by bottom-up integration of choices made by the members. Grassroots members on the local level nominate one or two delegate candidates. Usually, the candidates already hold the position of a local party chair or deputy chair, with the exception of the East German states and North-Rhine Westphalia, where a majority of the delegates would belong to the ‘Youth Alternative’ of the party with no formal leadership role. The selection of delegates is finalized at the state-held members’ assemblies. Delegates are appointed for a two-year term. Federal party leaders and members of federal executive board have the right to vote at conventions only if they have been elected by the members to serve as delegates. State party conventions, however, are still largely organized as members’ assemblies. Only the

states of Hessen, North-Rhine Westphalia, and Saarland follow the delegate model, where delegates are decided by members at local party meetings⁴¹.

During my fieldwork, I took part in four local party meetings in Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, North-Rhine Westphalia and Brandenburg, specifically held to nominate delegates for the federal and state (NW, HE) party conventions. When voting at conventions, delegates are bound by the expressed desires of their local rank-and-file members. It is common for local party branches to request the deselection of their delegates before their term is over, if they were dissatisfied with their performance (**Manfred, HE**). Meetings for delegate nomination are characterized with extensive deliberation among grassroots members, who decide upon the most favored candidates for leadership roles and discuss strategies for networking with delegates from other districts.

An important aspect of the early stages of leadership selection is the organization of phone conferences with other local party branches. Party chairs from the four local chapters I visited confirmed they would establish contact with the delegates or chairs from other district branches to coordinate voting for state/federal leadership. During the 2019 State Party Convention in Heidenheim, William (BW) viewed the success of the moderate liberal faction in leadership selection as a product of extensive coordination between members of district branches several months before the convention. In a similar vein, Marcus credited the influence of the moderate members to the pre-convention phone conferences:

⁴¹ See Appendix for the distribution of members' assemblies and delegate conventions by state.

“There was heavy infighting between the groups. The Flügel wanted to take over....and they have many supporters here [in Baden-Wuerttemberg], but they were disorganized. If one of our candidates of the moderate liberal group speaks, they start booing and ask stupid questions that have nothing to do with the executive board election....But we were prepared, we coordinated beforehand with other delegates to vote as a block...” (Markus, BW)

AfD activists partaking in the local party meetings expressed pride in the level of membership inclusiveness in party conventions. The most frequently shared story during the interviews was how the party organized two of the largest federal conventions in Germany since the end of the Second World War – 2015 Bremen Party Convention with 2,000 members and 2015 Essen Party Convention with 3,000 members. These large assemblies, however, were often described as “insane organizational and logistical challenges” (Sven, SN) and “impossible to deliberate” (Olaf, NW). Because of the high demand for participation, Sylvia (ST) jokingly pointed out that the party should start saving money for renting stadiums.

Despite the organizational issues and high costs of members’ assemblies, most interviewees were against delegate conventions and insisted that at least on the state level, conventions should include the whole membership. The delegate vote system was perceived as highly problematic and weakening the interests of the grassroots because the party leadership could easily manipulate delegates through instruments of office patronage and party exclusion proceedings:

“A carrot and a stick strategy by the party leadership will not work on hundreds of thousands of members. Members should be empowered to make decisions from bottom to top according to our commitment to grassroots democracy.” (Oliver, TH)

3. Competitiveness of leadership contests⁴²

Being a very new party, the AfD has only undergone through a limited number of leadership elections from 2013 to 2021. The party has held seven elections on the federal level and seventy-five on the state level⁴³. On the federal level, both incumbents and new challengers enjoy equal level of success. However, there is more leadership turnover on the state level: a new leader would prevail in 66.6% of the leadership races (Table 12). These results should not be surprising as they follow a pattern examined by other scholars that leaders chosen by more inclusive selectorates (party conventions and members’ assemblies) are more exposed to the risk of removal (Ennsner-Jedenastik and Müller, 2015; Schumacher and Giger, 2017).

⁴² A detailed table provided in the Appendix. Data obtained from the AfD website and news articles (see Appendix).

⁴³ Excluding from the analysis the initial leadership elections during the foundation of each party branch.

Table 12. AfD leadership turnover on federal (N=7) and state level (N=75) (2013-2021).

Federal Level	Delegate Convention	Members Convention
New leader	2	1
Incumbent remains	2	1
State Level		
New leader	5	45
Incumbent remains	3	22
East		
New leader	0	17
Incumbent remains	1	16
West		
New leader	5	28
Incumbent remains	2	6

Only examining leadership turnover does not reflect upon the competitiveness of the races. Regardless of the extent of selectorate inclusiveness, in many cases leadership elections may result in coronations if only a single contender emerges. Detterbeck and Rohlfing (2013) show that more than 88% of leadership elections in Germany between 1965 and 2012 were uncontested (Table 13). Only recently, the leading established parties CDU and SPD have re-introduced open leadership competition: in December 2018, the CDU party delegates could choose between three candidates for the chairperson position; in 2019, for the first time since 1993, the SPD expanded the leadership selectorate to all party members (Jun and Jakobs, 2021).

Table 13. Competitiveness of leadership contests in Germany (1965-2012).⁴⁴

Number of candidates	Percentage of elections
1	88.43
2	5.09
3	3.24
4 or more	3.24
N	215

On the other hand, leadership contests in the AfD contrast with a more diverse empirical picture: a majority of the federal leadership elections were highly competitive with 3 or more candidates, while coronations constituted only 28% (Table 14).

Table 14. Candidates in leadership contests, AfD (2013-2021).

Federal Level	Number of candidates	Percentage of elections
	1	28.5
	2	14.2
	3	28.5
	4 or more	28.5
	N	7
State Level		
	1	37
	2	50
	3	9
	4 or more	4
	N	54

A particularly interesting case was the selection for the second federal chair in the 2017 party convention, where the party held two consecutive rounds between Georg Pazderski (47.3%) and Doris von Sayn-Wittgenstein (49.4%) without a clear simple majority. The stalemate was broken when Alexander Gauland volunteered as a compromise candidate and ran unopposed in a new election, gaining almost 68% of the vote⁴⁵. On the state level,

⁴⁴ Note: From “Party Leader Selection in Germany”, K. Detterbeck and I. Rohlfing, 2013, Routledge.

⁴⁵ More details on page 18.

contests between two candidates (50%) are most frequent, while coronations constitute a large minority (37%). Interestingly, there is a clear East-West divide in the leadership selection patterns, as East German states tend to have a significantly higher number of coronations (12 out of 26 elections) than the West and Southern state branches (8 out of 28 elections).

The absolute number of candidates may represent ‘openness’ of the leadership selection but does not provide much information about its competitiveness. For instance, during the foundational party convention in 2013, sixteen candidates were competing for each of the three federal chair positions. However, all the winning candidates secured more than 80% of the votes, which paints a very different picture of the contest: Bernd Lucke (96.4%), Konrad Adam (79.6%), and Frauke Petry (80.8%). Thus, to evaluate competitiveness more accurately, we should look into the margin of victory and the members’ approval. Table 15 shows the average approval in both federal and state elections, as well as the vote margins between the top two candidates in the first ballot. It is important to note that the findings on state leadership selection have limitations: data on approval was available in 55 out of 75 cases (73%) and on margin of victory in 44 cases (58.6%).

Table 15. Competitiveness in leadership contests, AfD (2013-2021).

Federal	Tight margin (<15%)	Close margin (15%-25%)	Moderate margin (26%-50%)	Uncompetitive (>50%)	Coronations
	2	1	2		2
Average approval: 64.2%					
Average margin: 22.8%					
State	6	8	5	5	20
Average approval: 67%					
Average margin: 31.2%					
East		1	4	3	12
Average approval: 75.5%					
Average margin: 41.9%					
West	6	7	1	2	8
Average approval: 58.7%					
Average margin: 20.5%					

On average, winning candidates enjoyed an approval in the high 60s - 64.2% in federal and 67% in state elections. The degree of approval, even in coronations with no challengers, is an important indication of the possibility of being deselected or dismissed in the next election. When we look into the geographical distribution, the approval vote for East German winning candidates tends to be higher with average of 75.5% versus 58.7% in West and Southern states. This observation also coincides with a trend of East German party leaders to be more likely re-elected in office for two or more terms: in half of the East German elections, the incumbent remained in power, while this was the case only in 19.5% of the West German elections (Table 12).

In addition, we should analyze whether the elected leader won by a small margin, which could indicate that the contests were actually competitive. The average margin was 22.8% in federal selections, with 42.8% of the cases being tight or close races and 28.5% – moderate races (Table 16). On the state level, there is again a clear distinction between East and West branches, where East contests would be mostly coronations (60%), moderate races (20%) or uncompetitive (15%). The leadership elections in the West branches would be more representative of the federal level, where tight and close races would dominate (57.7%), and the average margin of victory is 20.5%.

Inclusive leadership selections with close results between the candidates as indicated on the federal level and in West state branches, can reflect an internally democratic organization (Kenig, 2009). However, such competitive and contested races are also more likely to be divisive and further enhance internal factionalism – an issue already defining the organization of the AfD.

4. Challenges to Collective Leadership

When assessing the organizational trajectory of the Alternative for Germany, the party appeared to experience similar internal processes to other right-wing populist parties in terms of leadership personalization. However, a major difference of the organizational structure of the AfD is the strong opposition of party activists against attempts of power centralization in the hands of a single leader. The profound anti-establishment sentiments among party members have left an imprint on the leadership style, as party elites do not

enjoy the normally expected high respect and admiration from the grassroots. Rather, party members constantly keep the leadership in check and criticize their actions when necessary.

The organizational structure of the AfD is a reflection of the members' demands for direct democracy, who were disillusioned with the professionalized party oligarchy and leadership coronations in the mainstream parties⁴⁶. During its first federal party convention in April 2013, AfD members selected three party speakers: Bernd Lucke, Frauke Petry, and Konrad Adam. The original party statute stipulated that the federal executive body should consist of at least two speakers, and the party convention has the right to select the executive board with a simple majority or deselect them with a three-quarter majority (AfD Federal Statute, 2013). Most of the interviewees emphasized the importance of collective leadership as a symbolic break with established party politics and a necessary element for providing members' representation:

“We always have some individuals who want all the power and the issue is to be careful not to become what we originally fought against.” (Uwe, BY)

In the following subsections, I examine the power centralization attempts of the former party leaders – Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry. One of the observations I make is that it is possible to identify a pattern of misaligned preferences between the members' expectations of collective leadership and the organizational reforms for building hierarchical and centralized party structures.

⁴⁶ See Chapter II for members' perceptions on intra-party democracy.

4.1 Organizational Reforms under Bernd Lucke

The initial schisms between the party base and the leadership began at the Erfurt Party Convention in March 2014, when Bernd Lucke attempted to steer the party away from the collective leadership model and institutionalize centralization of power in the hands of a single leader. Supplanting the multi-member leadership with a single chairperson would have made the AfD resemble more closely the traditional party leadership structure. Similar leadership restructuring moves have been frequently observed in other populist right parties such as the French National Front (Hainsworth, 1992; Ivaldi and Lanzone, 2016). The proposed changes were also aimed to significantly reduce internal democracy by providing the party executive board with the right to deselect its board members by a simple majority, without involving the grassroots members. Such a reform could have introduced a sanction mechanism for the leader to keep undesirable board members in line or remove them completely thus, reducing the free exchange of dissenting opinions.

Removing horizontal hierarchy between the federal party and state party branches was another highly criticized point in Lucke's proposed reforms: the federal executive board would have the power of dissolving state boards or entire party branches, rather than keeping such decisions within the party convention (Amann and Bartsch, 2014). Some party members perceived this proposal as a reasonable tool for the leadership to manage internal fights before important elections or to maintain a degree of decorum within a party, struggling with open display of extremist language or symbols. However, they expressed fear of "leadership paternalism" (Mathias, NW), abuse of power to discipline their internal

opponents (**Tobias, ST**), and effective removal of grassroots autonomy and participation – “the backbone of the AfD” (**Uwe, BY**).

A last major change in the members-leadership dynamic was Lucke’s proposal for the leadership to directly choose participants in the federal expert committees for party program development, and thus influencing the direction of policy formation and disempowering the whole membership in the process. Sven, one of the founding members of Saxony party branch, recalled another controversial act by Bernd Lucke to circumvent the grassroots in policymaking. In August 2014, the AfD MPs at the European Parliament supported the imposition of sanctions against Russia, although during the March 2014 Party Convention, party members have decided against such sanctions (Lachmann, 2014). This move was seen by the grassroots as the leadership challenging the core of participatory democracy:

“Noncompliance with party convention resolutions should be penalized. A party leadership that does not respect decisions taken democratically is trampling on intra-party democracy!” (**Sven, SN**)

The proposed statute reforms have taken the party convention by surprise, and members have voted with almost 80% in favor to postpone the discussion to a later convention. The organizational reform was effectively pushing for hierarchical centralization, transforming the party leadership into the highest party decision-making organ and relegating party members to a symbolic role of influence. During the interviews, some of the moderate liberal members who founded the party in 2013, expressed discontent with Lucke’s

tendency to exhibit authoritarian leadership style and make decisions independently without consulting his supporters (**William, BW; Uwe, BY; Wilhelm, BY; Olaf, NRW; Wolfgang, NW**). For Sven, Lucke was behaving as “an owner or a majority holder of a family business” instead of a “spokesperson of a democratic party” (**Sven, SN**).

By the end of 2014, Bernd Lucke’s proposed reforms met with pushback from the two federal co-speakers Adam Konrad and Frauke Petry, as well as the Brandenburg state party leader Alexander Gauland and North-Rhine Westphalia state party leader Marcus Pretzell. During the 2015 Bremen Party Convention, the grassroots passed a new party statute with a narrow two-third majority (61.3%)⁴⁷. It was a compromise reform of Lucke’s initial proposal to centralize the power in his own hands: from February to December 2015, both Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry would serve as equal party speakers, and after December 2015, the first speaker becomes the sole party leader while the second speaker takes the position of a deputy-speaker (Bender and Lohse, 2015).

Since the Erfurt and Bremen Party Conventions, the growing internal power struggles and noticeable radicalization in parts of the membership have led to the creation of the two dominant factions – the Eurosceptic economic liberal ‘Alternative Mitte’ and the conservative-nationalistic ‘Flügel’. The newly amended party statute from January 2015 has infuriated the grassroots from the East German party branches, in particular the state of Thuringia. During the Thuringian state party convention in March 2015, a large majority of party members adopted an ‘Erfurt Resolution’, which was drafted by the radical right

⁴⁷ In contrast to 2013 and 2014, for the first time, Bernd Lucke’s proposal had not received close to a 100% approval from the members.

ideologist Götz Kubitschek (Wagner, 2017). In addition to its wide approval in the East German party branches, the Resolution also gained the support of local branches in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hessen, Lower Saxony, North-Rhine Westphalia and the youth-wing chapters of Baden-Württemberg and Hessen (AfD Thuringia Internal Document).

The conflict between Bernd Lucke and the ‘Flügel’ was fueled by fundamental ideological differences between the Eurosceptic liberal and the national conservative activists: the Erfurt Resolution emphasized the party leadership’s “tendency to unduly and unnecessarily limit the political range of the AfD” (Erfurt Resolution, 2015). However, it is equally important to recognize that the internal strife was caused by an organizational mismatch between Lucke’s structural reforms to turn the AfD into an acceptable governing partner and the grassroots members’ prioritization of anti-establishment direct democracy-seeking goals. Party activists who supported both the initial Erfurt Resolution and a later ‘Stuttgart Appeal’ (Stuttgarter Aufruf)⁴⁸ described the AfD as a “protest movement” or a “citizens’ movement” guided by “popular sovereignty” (Alfred, BB; Tobias, ST). They were disappointed with the possibility of losing the grassroots-oriented organization and resembling the mainstream parties.

In response to the Erfurt Resolution and the ‘Flügel’ faction, in May 2015 Bernd Lucke and like-minded activists founded the ‘Wake-Up Call’ association (Weckruf, 2015). At

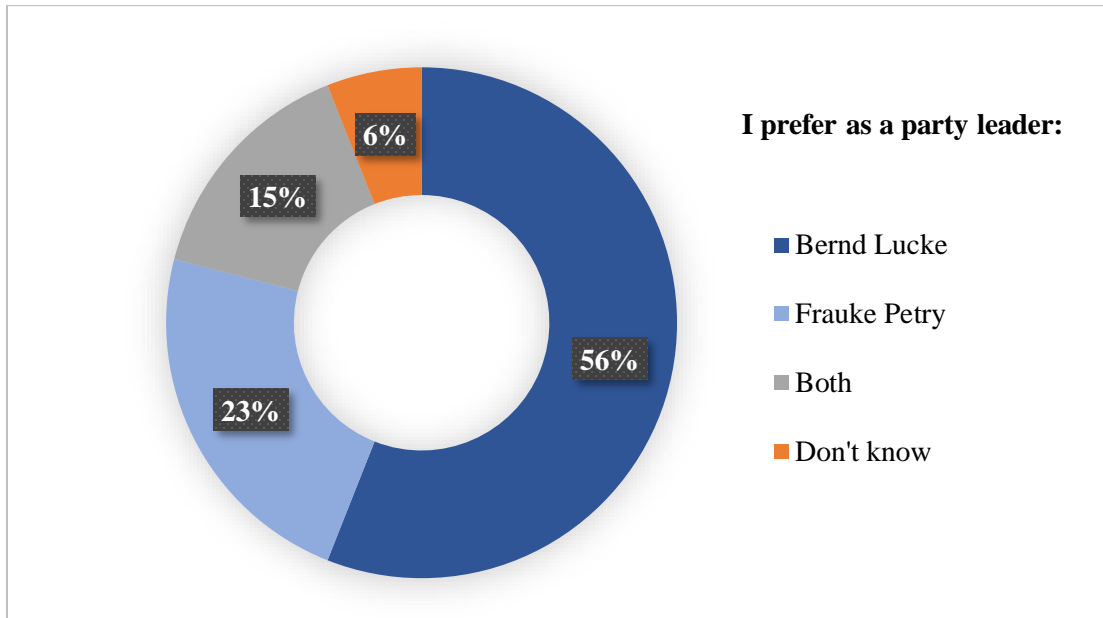
⁴⁸ The 2018 Stuttgart Appeal was mostly supported by the southern branches of Baden Württemberg, Bavaria, and Hessen. In it, party members criticized the growing number of regulatory and exclusion proceedings, introduced by the federal leadership against members and functionaries. <https://www.stuttgarter-aufruf.de/>

that point, the Wake-Up Call was perceived as an informal infrastructure for a party split and subsequent creation of a new party around Lucke. It is important to acknowledge that some moderate members chose to form their own faction – the ‘Alternative Mitte’ – instead of joining Lucke’s association. There was a relative consensus among interviewed party members that the Wake-Up Call was an unnecessary escalation of the internal power struggle. For Ursula, a member of the Alternative Mitte, the Wake-Up Call was a “clumsy instrument of division” and not everyone who supported Lucke decided to join the group **(Ursula, NW)**.

The Essen Convention in July 2015 was the first members’ assembly selecting single leadership after Lucke’s reforms. With more than 3000 members attending, the convention was deemed the largest in the history of Germany after the WWII **(Wilhelm, BY)**. Bernd Lucke and the Wake-Up Call association were defeated. Frauke Petry won the first speaker position with 59.7%, while Lucke only received 38%. To maintain balance between the moderates and nationalist conservatives, party members elected as a second speaker Jörg Meuthen, who remained neutral during the conflict between Lucke and the Flügel’.

A day before the convention, Forsa Institute published survey results with AfD supporters, showing an interesting trend: 56% favored Bernd Lucke as a party speaker (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Preference for an AfD party speaker.⁴⁹



However, 72% of the respondents agreed that refugees and migrants are the biggest issue in Germany and only 48% chose the 'Euro and Greece' as problematic, thus showing misaligned preferences for a more right-wing populist program instead of a Eurosceptic conservative platform (Figure 15). A majority of them also saw the leadership conflict as damaging to the party image (54%) (Figure 16).

⁴⁹ Source: Forsa Institute, July 2015

Figure 15. The biggest concerns in Germany, according to AfD supporters (blue) and the whole population (orange).⁵⁰

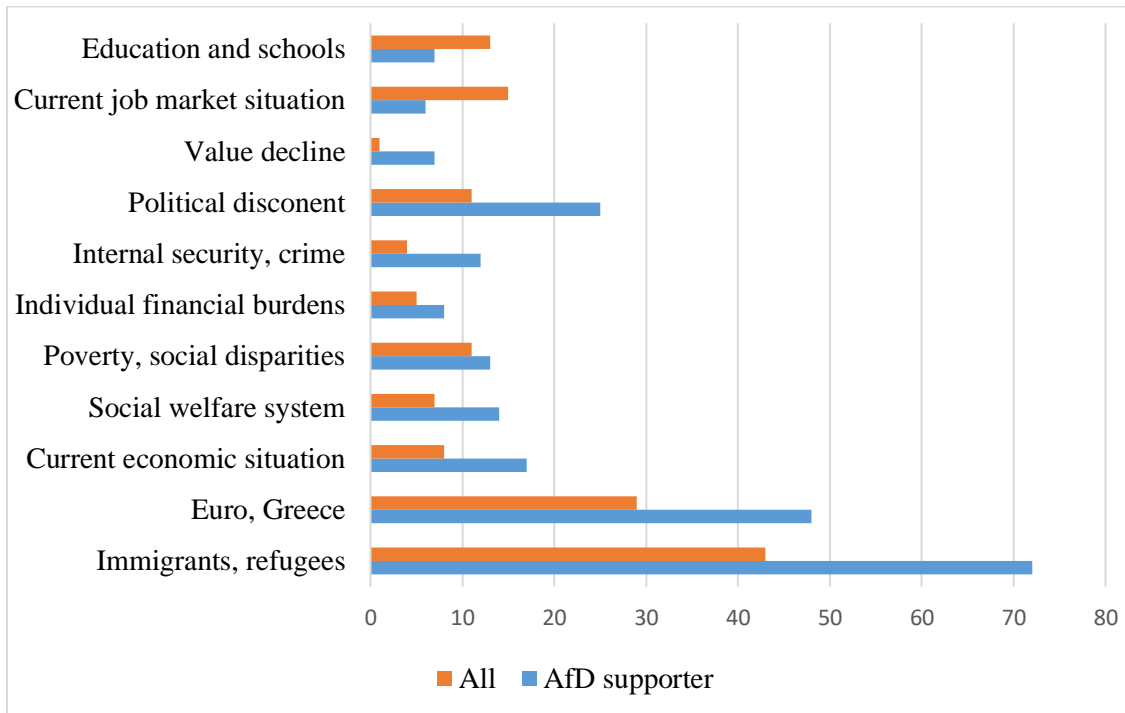
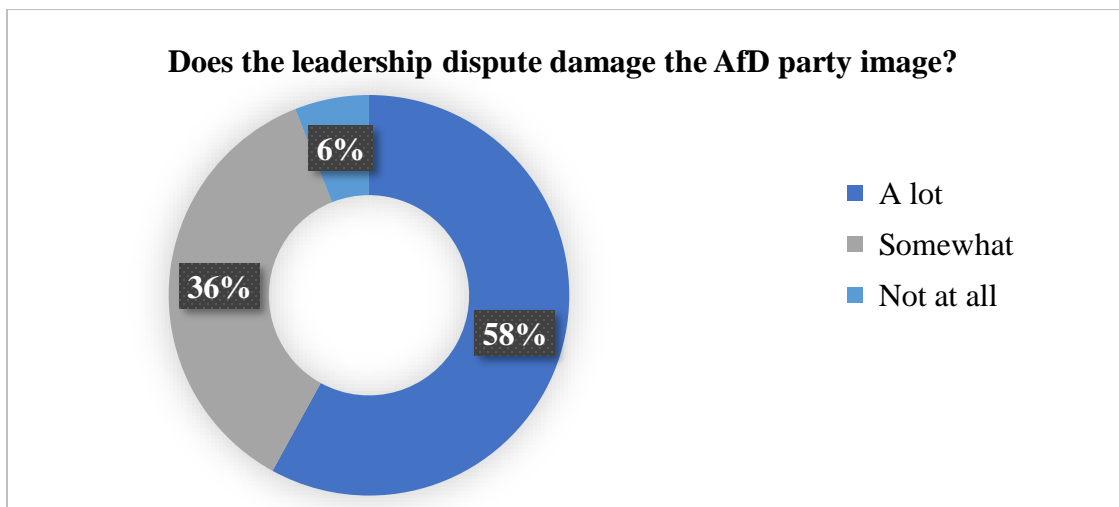


Figure 16. Evaluation of the intra-party conflict⁵¹.



⁵⁰ Source: Forsa Institute, July 2015.

⁵¹ Source: Forsa Institute, July 2015.

Interestingly, factionalism may have a positive impact on intra-party democracy by “facilitating debate and communication between leaders and followers” and regulating internal power-sharing (Boucek 2009, p. 479). The ‘Flügel’ and ‘Alternative Mitte’ factions were an expected response against one leader or one ideological current to dominate the party. Alexander Dilger (2015), a former state speaker from North-Rhine Westphalia, noted that Bernd Lucke’s inability to act as a “team player” and to build consensus on common goals among the party members was a fundamental organizational failure. Lucke did not meet the needs of the grassroots to sustain internal democratic participation and to seek balance between the factions. Alfred, a member of the ‘Flügel’ faction, described how he was envisioning an acceptable AfD leadership:

“Party chairs cannot believe in all ideological trends inside the party. However, it is their task to mediate between the factions and foster a positive environment for discussions. Instead, Lucke chose to favor and push for only one direction.”

(Alfred, BB)

Nevertheless, some AfD members were grateful of Bernd Lucke’s efforts build a party that “brings issues to the public” **(Harry, BW)** and challenges the mainstream parties: “his brief uprising made party history and gave an alternative to left-wing politics” **(Oliver, TH)**.

4.2 Following Lucke's mistakes: Frauke Petry's attempt for leadership centralization

Petry was one of the first vehement opponents of Bernd Lucke's statute reforms. She welcomed the opportunity of arising conflict between moderate liberal and nationalist conservative members to gather significant support and become the new party spokesperson in July 2015. However, similarly to Bernd Lucke, she showed consistent tendency to seek solo leadership and centralization of power.

In May 2015, during an informal meeting, state party speakers proposed collective leadership that may have at least temporarily satisfied the demands of the grassroots. The proposal was about a neutral federal executive board, where neither Lucke nor Petry would run for a position. Frauke Petry saw the proposal as "misaligned with members' interests", while Lucke supported the idea as long as none of the people involved in the leadership dispute take part in the board election: the Brandenburg speaker Alexander Gauland, the North Rhine-Westphalia speaker Marcus Pretzell, as well as Lucke's supporters Hans-Olaf Henkel, Bernd Kölmel and Ulrike Trebesius (FAZ, 2015).

An important aspect of Frauke Petry's rise in the party was that initially she seemed to show willingness to maintain collective leadership – a perception that has faded away by 2017. In practice, Petry frequently tried to bypass the party structures and attempted to create her own power center, together Marcus Pretzell, her husband and leader of the largest state branch (NW). Initial attempts of the grassroots members to constrain Petry's leadership centralization were present during the Saxony state party convention in February 2016. The district party branches of Bautzen and Dresden submitted a proposal for a three-

member collective leadership as a first step for the AfD to go back to its roots of a citizens' movement. Some party members expressed dissatisfaction with the continuous trend of accumulation of office positions in the hands of Petry and demanded that party leaders not hold a state parliament mandate simultaneously (**Hermann, SN; Sven, SN**).

In June 2016, members of the federal executive board and speakers of the state branches held a closed meeting at the Braunlage resort in the Harz mountains, discussing party rules of communication. Two resolutions were passed. First, public comments about party members would be allowed only after the concerned person has been notified in advance, and the federal party would issue a single statement about any internal conflicts. Second, a "principle of regional non-interference" would forbid party members to comment on internal conflicts if they do not belong to the state party branch in question (FAZ, 2016).

Both resolutions were a response to a rising power struggle between the federal party leaders Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen, and specifically an internal dispute regarding anti-Semitic rhetoric in the Baden-Wuerttemberg parliamentary group. As a leader of the state parliamentary group, Meuthen demanded the exclusion of the MP Wolfgang Gideon because of anti-Semitic positions in two of his books⁵². Such exclusion proceedings require the support of two-thirds of the parliamentary group, which was not accomplished (Kelnberger and Schneider, 2016). As a result, the parliamentary group was split in half with Jörg Meuthen and like-minded MP forming their own parliamentary group against

⁵² Wolfgang Gideon has argued that the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", anti-Semitic texts referring to Jewish global domination, were genuine; compared Holocaust deniers with persecuted dissidents in China; and described Talmud Judaism as the "internal enemy of the Christian West" (Bensmann 2016).

Wolfgang Gideon. Frauke Petry, however, openly announced she recognized the legitimacy of the original parliamentary group. This case was not a question of political differences between the federal party leaders, but rather a power struggle, as Petry intervened in local party matters before consulting with members of the federal executive board and the Baden-Württemberg state board. When asked about this particular clash of leadership, Sebastian described Petry's behavior as "disturbing micromanagement" (**Sebastian, BW**). The Brandenburg party leader and federal deputy spokesperson, Alexander Gauland has also criticized Petry's intervention as going against the wishes of the grassroots in Baden-Württemberg and other state branches (Zeit, 2016).

The grassroots' continuous disapproval of Frauke Petry reached its peak during the Cologne Federal Convention in April 2017, when delegates had to deliberate on two major decisions for the upcoming federal elections: (1) the leading candidate ('Spitzenkandidat') for the Chancellor position; and (2) the direction of the electoral program. In early February 2017, the AfD organized a membership survey on whether a leading candidate or a top-team should represent the party. Most members favored a collaborative team (54%) over a single individual (46%), in contrast to Frauke Petry's skepticism of a 'top-team' proposition (Schneider, 2017).

In terms of membership representation, AfD referendums usually follow a similar pattern to other populist parties that advocate grassroots participation. In the case of selecting a Spitzenkandidat, 9,000 out of 25,000 AfD members (36%) have participated in the survey (Euroactiv, 2017). In Podemos, for instance, between 32% and 23% of party members have taken part in online party consultations from 2016 to 2018; for the Five Star Movement,

members' turnout is also comparable – 43% to 26%. (Vittori, 2020). Membership surveys are frequently employed by the AfD, especially in the decision-making process on party manifestos (See Chapter III), and although these results are non-binding, they are used at the conventions as evidence showing the preference of the grassroots.

During the Cologne Convention, supporters of Frauke Petry attempted to delay the vote on 'Spitzenkandidat' to another convention. The Federal executive board member Albert Glaser and the Bochum district party leader Christian Loose proposed motions to remove the election of a leading candidate from the agenda. However, delegates decided to go with the members' preferences and voted on a Spitzen-team of Alexander Gauland and Dr. Alice Weidel (68%), representing the interests of both the national conservative and moderate liberal factions (am Orde, 2017). The decision at the Cologne Convention created separation between the leadership positions for the 'party in public office' and the 'party central office', which was perceived as highly advantageous in terms of reducing the possibility of leadership consolidation under Frauke Petry.

The second major decision during the Cologne Convention was the debate on the 'Realpolitik Strategy' resolution, proposed by Petry, and the adoption of the electoral program. Petry urged the party to choose a pragmatic "real-political path of a citizens' party" and avoid a national conservative and "fundamentally oppositional" direction that would damage the party's potential as a coalition partner. Nevertheless, the delegates refused to discuss the 'Realpolitik Strategy' while the federal co-speaker Jörg Meuthen stressed the importance of party unity instead of exclusion of the national conservative 'Flügel' faction. During his convention speech, Meuthen rejected a coalition government

with the mainstream parties and argued that the AfD was “a fundamentally oppositional party that did not lack Realpolitik but wisely and necessarily would wait until our positions become a majority” (Meuthen, 2017).

In the same vein, for Manfred, a delegate at the convention, Petry quickly forgot her promise to the members when she fought against Bernd Lucke for the AfD to be a home of a wide spectrum of political opinions and a party to “vote out people like Merkel [CDU] and Schulz [SPD], instead of extending their term of office with coalitions” (**Manfred, HE**). Sylvia (**Saxony-Anhalt**) also compared Petry’s leadership ambitions with “demagogic confusion” and questioned the ‘Realpolitik Strategy’ as “an attempt to create a disciplinary weapon against her internal opponents”.

From the beginning, the organizational idea behind the AfD was a party controlled by the grassroots. Bernd Lucke’s attempted reforms of power centralization surprised many party members, thus, giving birth to the ‘Alternative Mitte’ and ‘Flügel’ groups. After Lucke’s party exit, the two factions started institutionalizing themselves as important actors, preserving grassroots democracy and balancing different ideological interests. By 2016, both factions had already developed their internal organizations and support base so that they could show effective resistance against Frauke Petry’s leadership centralization efforts.

4.3 Keeping Federal Collective Leadership as a Norm

After gaining mandates in the 2017 Federal Parliament, Frauke Petry and her supporters left the AfD and created a new party, the Blue Party. Similarly to Bernd Lucke, Petry aimed

at accumulating power and refused to build consensus between different party factions. The fates of Lucke and Petry cemented a trend of federal collective leadership with continuous monitoring from the moderate liberal and national conservative factions. For Christof, the removal of Lucke and Petry from the federal party executive was an expected outcome in a party that was created in opposition to the traditional hierarchical structures of mainstream politics:

“If someone from the top starts to move in that direction again, to depict themselves as the only alternative, then they are actually close to deselection. Because we [the members] also have a strong instinct that politics should not be so focused on one person alone.” **(Christof, BY)**

Following Petry’s departure from the party, in December 2017 the AfD held a party convention deciding on a new federal board. Jörg Meuthen remained as the first party speaker with 72% support. It was not surprising that the party delegates re-elected Meuthen because he has frequently served as a moderator between the factions and sought pragmatic solutions for the AfD to stay united. The power struggle between the factions was highly visible in the selection for the second party chair. The federal executive board proposed the Berlin party leader, Georg Pazderski, as a candidate, representing the moderate liberal group. However, at the convention, a surprise competitor emerged in the face of the Schleswig-Holstein party speaker, Doris von Sayn-Wittgenstein, supported by the ‘Flügel’ group.

For two consecutive rounds, neither candidate was able to reach a simple majority support: Pazderski with 47.3% and von Sayn-Wittgenstein with 49.4% (Salmen 2017). The grassroots perceived Pazderski as “Petry 2.0”, because he used to support Petry, favored the exclusion of the ‘Flügel’ leader Bjorn Hoecke, and advocated participation in a coalition government (**Klaudia, BE**). A dual leadership with Meuthen and Pazderski would also shift the power to the moderate liberals and would not reflect the internal political diversity. After a short break, the co-chair of the federal parliamentary group, Alexander Gauland was the only person to resolve the selection stand-off and emerged as a compromise candidate with 68% vote. Famous with his English dog-necktie⁵³, Gauland is the most experienced politician with a long career as a CDU civil servant in Hessen. Although he frequently sides with the national conservative members, he often acts a moderator between the factions and maintains party unity.

The AfD has continued following the dual leadership model in the most recent federal executive board election in November 2019. The delegates at the Braunschweig Convention have selected Jörg Meuthen for a third consecutive term. This time, for a party co-speaker, the convention elected a new face: Tino Chrupalla – a Bundestag member and a local party leader from Goerlitz, Saxony. Although Chrupalla does not officially identify with the national conservative faction, he has attended some ‘Flügel’ meetings and has not openly criticized Bjorn Hoecke and his supporters. During the convention, the Saxony

⁵³ See Appendix.

party chair Jörg Urban described the co-chair leadership selection as the perfect formula to strengthen the East-West relations and unite the party factions:

“As far as I am concerned about the West German and East German party branches, we can learn a lot from each other. The two chairs are well perceived and will harmonize the differences at the grassroots. It is a good balance between an academic [Meuthen] and a craftsman [Chrupalla] to achieve a bigger constituency of supporters.” (AfD TV, Dec. 5, 2019)

Conclusion

After significant infighting and removal of Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry from their positions, the party has managed to achieve a measure of stability through collective federal leadership. Unlike other populist right parties, the AfD tends to favor horizontal distribution of power and discourage concentrated leadership in the hands of a single undisputed leader. After two major party splits (in 2015 and 2017), both party elites and grassroots members have encouraged power-sharing to mitigate internal competition among factions and to dissuade members from exiting the AfD.

The party factions ‘Alternative Middle’ and ‘Flügel’ have also played an important role in constraining party elites who attempt to concentrate power in their own hands and diminish grassroots’ influence in the decision-making. Federal party leaders only rely on certain popularity among the membership base, which can be quickly shaken if local and state party elites decide to point their thumbs down (Kleinert, 2018). As Uwe puts it, “the

decision-making should remain in the hands of the grassroots and party leaders are not *primus inter pares* [first among equals]. They are replaceable” (Uwe, **BY**). Unlike legislative seats, the top party leadership position is least divisible and leadership selection can cause significant internal struggle between competing factions. Maintaining dual party leadership can serve as a mechanism to avoid internal Pyrrhic victories and encourage trust between the divided groups.

However, collective leadership has its weaknesses, as it may worsen problems with integrating different factions into the common party line. If elected with the help of a specific dominant faction, federal speakers would not see themselves accountable to the whole party membership. In addition, if the co-leaders represent diverging internal interest, it is highly likely for the party to experience paralysis in reaching consensus on core party policies, as Poguntke (1987) has observed in the early organization life of the German Green Party.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusions: Intra-Party Democracy in Populist Right Party Organizations

1. Meaningful Internal Participation and Deliberation

The main contribution of this thesis is that it explores the extent to which a populist right party such as the AfD deviates from the prevalently centralized and hierarchical structures in other success radical right parties and grants decision-making power to ordinary party members when it comes to party policy formation, candidate selection, and leadership election. In addition, this research highlights the organizational challenges the AfD is facing as it implements and maintains participatory decision-making processes.

In clear contrast with the organizational development of many radical right parties, the Alternative for Germany relies on intra-party democracy and shies away from centralized charismatic leadership with a committed personal following. Party members place great value on horizontal interactions based on open discussion and unrestrained expression of dissenting opinions, which has reinforced the institutionalization of deliberative mechanisms on all party levels and the presence of organized ideological factions. Party members' support for intra-party democracy has contributed to the creation of a discursive organizational culture, prioritizing mechanisms of 'voice' than 'exit' or 'loyalty' in vital decisions on electoral candidates, policies, and leadership (Hirschman 1970).

Policy development in the AfD is characterized with diverse internal democratic procedures and increased grassroots involvement. There are intense interactions among

rank-and-file members, local activists and state/federal delegates as policy decisions move through different stages of direct and indirect participation. As local activists volunteer to shape drafts of policy statements in expert committees, ordinary members participate in deliberation conferences and ballots. At the final stage in party conventions, both delegates and activists from expert committees engage in lengthy discussions on policy positions. The findings on the AfD policy formation do not confirm the hypothesis based on Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' that powerful leaders can easily manipulate decision-making processes, which rely on direct participation of members. Final decisions on electoral programs may not satisfy the specific ideological leanings of all party members. However, the findings do show members' satisfaction with the presence of mechanisms, enabling democratic deliberation and participation.

Second, candidate selection procedures in the AfD are defined by both intense grassroots activism on the local level and lengthy deliberation during party conventions. Pre-convention campaigning and the establishment of informal alliances between different district party chapters were as essential as the controversial discursive interactions between convention delegates and nominees before reaching a final candidate position vote. Democratized selection procedures usually intensify intra-party competition (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). Nevertheless, delegates did not perceive intra-party democracy as threatening to party unity and as conducive to internal disagreements that could damage the party public image. Despite the apparent competition among local party branches and between the party factions for top candidate list positions, delegates had a shared

understanding of the most suitable nominees, reflecting an ideologically cohesive party image of anti-immigrant rhetoric and Euroscepticism.

Third, unlike other populist right parties, the AfD tends to favor horizontal distribution of power and to encourage collective leadership. Such structures restrict the possibility and the number of tools available to a single party leader to dominate internal decisions. Participatory decision-making processes in the AfD do not effectively enable party leaders to remain in power, to enjoy majority support for their alternative policy proposals, or to set up loyal electoral candidates. The presence of well-organized factions ('Alternative Mitte' and 'Flügel') also allows for mediated discussions and serves as independent controls on the party leadership. A recent development in the AfD – the formal dissolution of the Flügel faction in March 2021 – and its implications on the party leadership's ability to manoeuvre with fewer constraints require further research. This organizational change, however, may be rather cosmetic, enacted in a response to the decision of Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution to put the AfD under surveillance as a suspected right-wing extremist group.

In general, the party's direct participatory mechanisms and deliberative dynamics are highly valued among members. However, some interviewees have pointed to increasing issues, related to maintaining the organization of lengthy discussions with the participation of hundreds of members. The AfD has yet to address its problems pertaining to limited professional party staff, as well as financially unfeasible and time-consuming members' conventions.

2. Implications and Directions for Future Research

This thesis hopes to have contributed to the quest for more democratic participatory and deliberative mechanisms that can help parties remain primary political channels and “the central linkage between citizens and government” (Katz 2013, p. 50). Intra-party democratic instruments that go beyond offering voting rights (membership ballots) and rather advance deliberation and informed discussions in internal decisions can provide party members with a sense of meaningful inclusion in collective political decision-making. The perceived absence of such participatory experience has motivated many interviewees to seek out a suitable political home in the AfD organization.

This research also opens space for debate about the changing dynamics of political representation and accountability. While established parties have started experimenting with internal democracy as a way to return to the ‘golden age’ of mass party politics, new populist parties such as the AfD, M5S, and Podemos aim to use direct participation as an alternative to the mainstream. Populist parties emphasize on individual participation as a way of regaining control over democratic institutions and of seeking accountability from politicians, who should not simply serve as representatives of a specific constituency. It is an important question of further research to analyze whether efforts of citizens’ empowerment in decision-making are meaningful and sustainable in the long run or whether ‘the party in public office’ might opt to circumvent ‘the party on the ground’.

The further study of the organizational structure and functioning of the AfD would also contribute to vast literature on contentious politics, in particular to the interactions between

social movements and political parties. I have observed during my field research that AfD has exhibited characteristics of a movement party with both grassroots democratic coordination among supporters and strong political mobilization simultaneously in institutional and extra-institutional arenas (citizens' roundtables, demonstrations, festivals). Also, different local party branches have established close connections with domestic and transnational radical right movements (PEGIDA, Identitarian Movement). Such movements may provide resources and structures for the AfD to solidify its local support but may also shape internal party policies and influence candidate selection. Thus, it is important to enhance our knowledge on the implications of programmatic alignment between right-wing movements and parties, especially when populist right parties attempt to moderate their stances to avoid social and legal stigmatization while social movements tend to be radicalized and violent as they do not face electoral constraints.

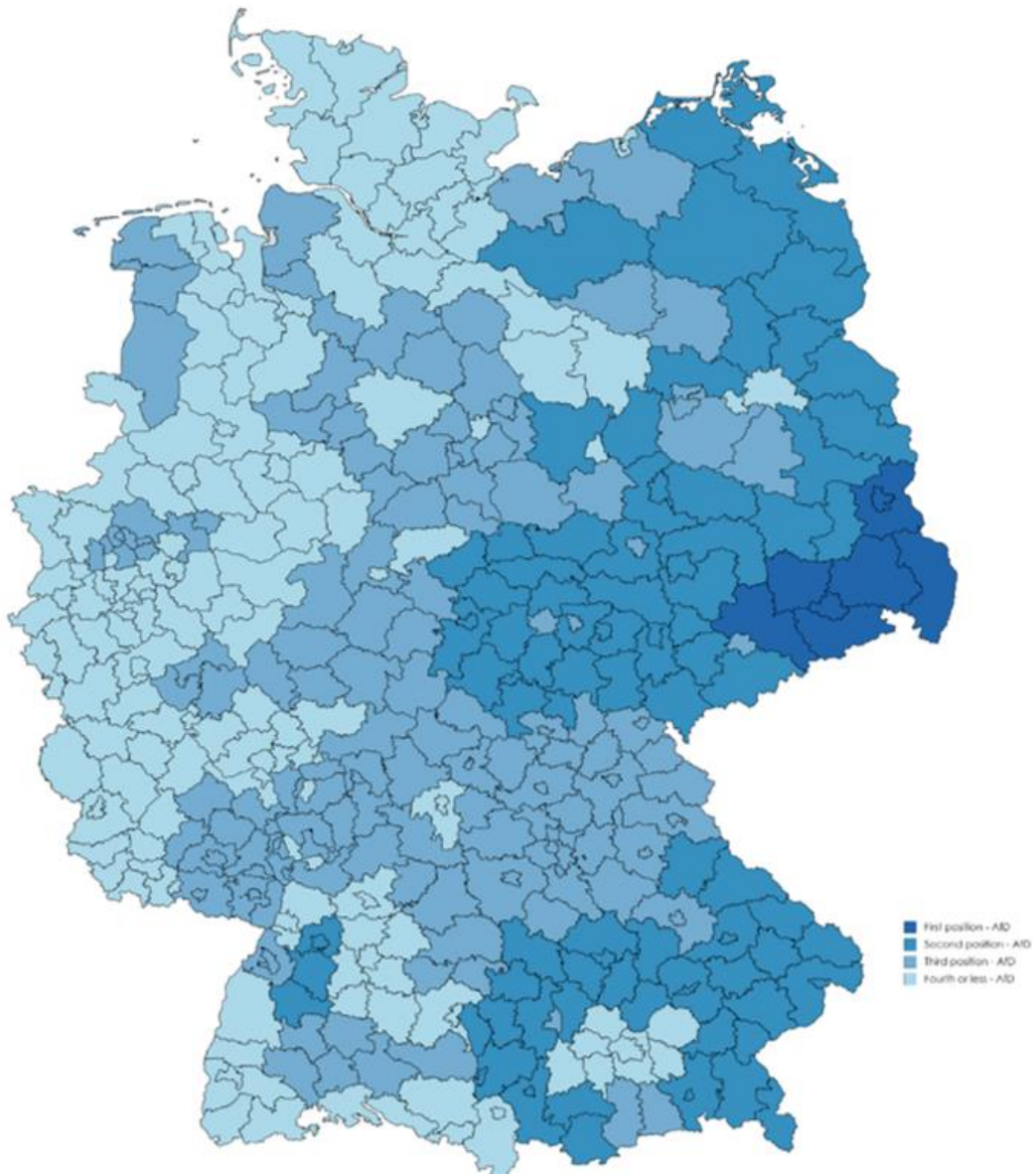
Appendix:

Vote percentage for the AfD in the Bundestag and state elections, by individual states, 2013-2019.

	State	2013 Federal election (second vote) in %	2017 Federal election (second vote) in %	State elections (%)
East	Brandenburg	6.0	20.2	2014 (12.2) 2019 (23.5)
	Mecklenburg- Vorpommern	5.6	18.6	2016 (20.8)
	Saxony	6.8	27.7	2014 (9.7) 2019 (27.5)
	Saxony-Anhalt	4.2	19.6	2016 (24.3)
	Thuringia	6.2	22.7	2014 (10.6) 2019 (23.4)
West	Baden- Wuerttemberg	5.2	12.2	2016 (15.1)
	Bavaria	4.3	12.4	2018 (10.2)
	Berlin	4.9	12.0	2016 (14.2)
	Bremen	3.7	10.0	2015 (5.5) 2019 (6.1)
	Hamburg	4.2	7.8	2015 (6.1) 2020 (5.3)
	Hessen	5.6	11.6	2013 (4.1) 2018 (13.1)
	North Rhine- Westphalia	3.9	9.4	2017 (7.4)
	Lower Saxony	3.7	9.1	2017 (6.2)
	Rhineland- Palatinate	4.8	11.2	2016 (12.6)
	Saarland	5.2	10.1	2017 (6.2)
	Schleswig- Holstein	4.6	12.6	2017 (5.9)
All		4.7	12.6	

Source: Walhrecht (2019), adapted by the author.

District support for the AfD in the 2017 Bundestag election.



<i>Full List of AfD Interviewees:</i>								
<i>Name age, gender</i>	<i>Joined</i>	<i>Party position</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Former party</i>	<i>Party faction</i>	<i>Interview date</i>
Doris 20-35, female	2017	Member	NA	Student	BW, urban	FDP	AM	November 2018
Jurgen 36-64, male	2013	Member	University	Private	BW, rural	None	AM	November 2018
Thomas 36-64, male	2015	Member	University	Self- employed	BW, rural	CDU		November 2018
Anika 36-64, female	2015	High (district)	University	Civil service	BW, rural	CDU	F	December 2018
Hannah 36-64, female	2015	Member	University	Civil service	BW, rural	CDU		December 2018
Markus 36-64, male	2016	High (district)	University	Self- employed	BW, urban	CDU		February 2019
Helena 36-64, female	2016	Member	University	Unemploy ed	BW, urban	CDU		February 2019
William 65+, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	BW, rural	None	AM	March 2019
Sebastian 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Private	BW, rural	None	AM	March 2019; August 2019
Harry 65+, male	2017	Member	University	Retired	BW, rural	None	F	April 2019
Helga 65+, female	2017	Member	High School	Retired	BW, rural	None		April 2019
Anton 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Private	BY, rural	None	AM	October, November 2018
Christof 36-64, male	2013	Member	University	Private	BY, rural	None	AM	October 2018
Corinna 36-64, female	2015	High (district)	University	Self- employed	BY, rural	CSU		October 2018
John 20-35, male	2016	Member	University	Self- employed	BY, urban	None	AM	October 2018

Mikaela 36-64, female	2017	Member	University	Private	BY, urban	CSU	AM	October 2018; January 2019
Simon 20-35, male	2014	Member	High School	NA	BY, urban	CSU	F	October 2018
Uwe 65+, male	2013	Member; former High (district)	University	Self- employed	BY, urban	None	AM	October 2018
Wilhelm 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Private	BY, urban	CSU		November 2018; January 2019
Jorg, 36-64, male	2015	High (district)	University	Private	BY, urban	CSU		November 2018
Ernst 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	BY, rural	CSU	F	December 2018
Franz 36-64, male	2016	High (district)	University	Private	BY, rural	CSU	AM	December 2018
Karl 65+, male	2017	Member	High School	Retired	BY, rural	REP		December 2018
Armin 36-64, male	2017	Member	University	Private	BY, rural	REP		December 2018
Klaudia 36-64, female	2013	Member	University	Self- employed	BE, urban	None	AM	November 2018
Rudi 36-64, male	2016	High (district)	High School	Private	BE, urban	CDU	AM	January 2019
Alfred 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Private	BB, rural	FDP, REP, CDU	F	September 2018
Michael 36-64, male	2014	Member	High School	Blue Collar	BB, rural	None		September 2018
Daniel, 20-35, male	2014	High (district)	University	Civil servant	BB, urban	SPD	F	November 2018; January 2019
Alexande r	2014	Member	High School	Private	BB, urban	None	AM	January 2019

36-64, male								
Hans 36-64, male	2016	Member	High School	Blue- collar	BB, rural	Free Voters	F	January 2019
Thilo 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	BB, urban	CDU, Freiheit		February 2019
Jens 36-64, male	2015	Member	High School	Blue Collar	BB, rural	None	F	February 2019
Ingo 36-64, male	2013	Member	University	Private	BB, rural	SPD	AM	February 2019
Jacob 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	HH, urban	None		November 2018
Magnus 20-35, male	2015	Member	NA	Student	HE, urban	None	AM	October 2018
Robert 20-35, male	2015	Member	University	Private	HE, urban	CDU	AM	October 2018
Monika 20-35, female	2016	Member	NA	Student	HE, urban	None		November 2018
Ina 65+, female	2015	High (district)	University	Self- employed	HE, rural	CDU		April 2019
Johan 20-35, male	2014	High (district)	High School	Civil service	HE, rural	CDU	F	April 2019
Manfred 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Private	HE, rural	CDU		April 2019
Helge, 20-35, male	2015	Member	University	Private	NI, urban	None		February 2019
Julia 36-64, female	2015	High (district)	University	Self- employed	NI rural	None	AM	February 2019
Andre 36-64, male	2014	High (state)	University	Self- employed	NW, urban	FDP	AM	September 2018
Klaus 65+, male	2016	High(dist rict)	University	Civil service	NW, rural	None	AM	September 2018
Lothar 20-35, male	2016	Member	NA	Student	NW, urban	CDU		September 2018

Mathias 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	NW, urban	CDU	AM	September 2018; November 2018
Olaf 36-64, male	2013	High (state)	University	Private	NW, urban	Freiheit, FDP	AM	September 2018
Ursula 36-64, female	2013	Member	University	Self- employed	NW, rural	None	AM	September 2018
Ulrich 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	NW, urban	None	AM	September 2018
Wolfgang 36-64, male	2013	Member	University	Private	NW, urban	CDU	AM	September 2018
Stefen 20-35, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	RP, urban	Freiheit		March 2019
Heiko 36-64, male	2015	Member	University	Civil Service	RP, urban	CDU		April 2019
Horst 65+, male	2013	High (district)	University	Private	RP, rural	SPD	AM	April 2019
Peter 36-64, male	2015	Member	High School	Civil Service	SL, rural	None		November 2018
Rena 36-64, female	2013	High (district)	High School	Blue- collar	SN, rural	None	AM	July 2019
Sven 36-64, male	2013	Member	University	Civil service	SN, rural	FDP		July 2019
Frank 36-64, male	2017	High (district)	University	Self- employed	SN, rural	None		August 2019
Gerhard 65+, male	2017	Member	High School	Self- employed	SN, urban	CDU		August 2019
Hermann 36-64, male	2014	Member	High School	Blue- Collar	SN, urban	Linke		August 2019
Natalie 36-64, female	2016	Member	University	Private	SN, urban	CDU		August 2019
Norbert 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	High School	Blue- collar	SN, rural	None		August 2019

Torsten 36-64, male	2016	High (state)	University	Self- employed	SN, urban	CDU		August 2019
Florian 20-35, male	2017	Member	NA	Student	ST, rural	CDU	F	March 2019
Joana 36-64, female	2015	Member	University	Private	ST, rural	Linke	F	March 2019
Sylvia 36-64, female	2014	High (district)	University	Private	ST, rural	None	F	March 2019
Lukas 20-35, male	2015	Member	University	Self- employed	ST, rural	CDU		April 2019
Tobias 36-64, male	2013	High (state)	University	Civil service	ST, rural	FDP, CDU	F	April 2019
Dominic 36-64, male	2015	High (district)	University	Self- employed	TH, urban	None	F	March 2019
Mario, 20-35, male	2015	Member	University	Private	TH, rural	FDP		March 2019
Oliver 36-64, male	2013	High (district)	University	Self- employed	TH, rural	None	AM	March 2019
Astrid 35-64, female	2013	Member	University	Private	TH, rural	CDU		July 2019
Christian 20-35, male	2013	High(district)	University	Private	TH, rural	None	F	July 2019
Martin 36-64, male	2013	High (state)	University	Self- employed	TH, rural	None		July 2019

Note: AM – Alternative Mitte, moderate faction; F – Fluegel, nationalist conservative faction

List of Party Documents Considered in the Analysis:

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AfD. Proposal Book for the European Elections Assembly. https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2018/12/Antragsbuch_Riesa_2019_datensicher.pdf

AfD. 2019 European Elections Program. https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf

AfD Baden-Württemberg Party Statute. https://afd-bw.de/afd-bw/formulare/landessatzung_heidenheim.pdf

AfD Baden-Württemberg LFA Rules of Procedure. https://afd-bw.de/afd-bw/formulare/go_lfa.pdf

AfD Bavaria LFA Rules of Procedure. <https://www.afdbayern.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2015/11/GO-LFA-vom-13.11.2015.pdf>

AfD Bavaria Party Statute. <https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/170/2019/07/02211202/Landessatzung-BY-Stand-24.02.2019.pdf>

AfD Berlin Party Statute and LFA Rules of Procedure. <http://afd.berlin/partei/landessatzung/>

AfD Brandenburg Party Statute. <https://afd-brandenburg.de/landesverband/satzung-des-lv-brandenburg/>

AfD Bremen Party Statute. https://afd-bremen.de/images/Uploads/Dokumente/landessatzung-bremen_26-02-17_endgueltige-fassung.pdf

AfD Hamburg Party Statute and LFA Rules of Procedure. <https://afd-hamburg.de/satzung-und-ordnungen/>

AfD Hessen Party Statute. https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/179/2019/04/23114846/1_AfD-Hessen_Satzung-2019-02-16_KM.pdf

AfD Lower Saxony Party Statute. <https://afd-niedersachsen.de/landessatzung/>

AfD Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Party Statute.

<https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/119/2016/11/08160931/MV-Satzung-2019.01.26.pdf>

AfD Rheinland-Palatinate Party Statute.

<https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/110/2020/01/01182309/2019-11-17-Landessatzung-AfD-RLP.pdf>

AfD Saarland Party Statute.

<https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/87/2019/02/04155119/Landessatzung-12.08.1803.02.19.pdf>

AfD Saxony Party Statute. <https://www.afdsachsen.de/landesverband/satzung.html>

AfD Saxony-Anhalt Party Statute.

<https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/88/2018/08/14084541/Landessatzung-AfD-LV-Sachsen-Anhalt-Stand-09.06.2018.pdf>

AfD Schleswig-Holstein Party Statute and LFA Rules of Procedure. <https://afd-sh.de/index.php/component/phocadownload/category/2-satzung-ordnung>

AfD Thuringia Party Statute.

https://cdn.afd.tools/sites/178/2018/09/20163416/20180203_Landessatzung-Partei.pdf

AfD Candidate List for the 2014 and 2019 European Parliament Elections.

2014 EP Candidate List	State	2019 EP Candidate List	State
1. Prof. Dr. Bernd Lucke	NI	1. Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen	BW
2. Prof. Dr. Hans-Olaf Henkel	BE	2. Guido Reil	NW

3. Bernd Kölmel	BW
4. Beatrix von Storch	BE
5. Prof. Dr. Joachim Starbatty	BW
6. Ulrike Trebesius	SH
7. Marcus Pretzell	NW
8. Dr. Marc Jongen	BW
9. Paul Hampel	NI
10. Prof. Dr. Jörg Meuthen	BW
11. Dirk Driesang	BY
12. Dr. Hugh Bronson	BE
13. Dr. Christiane Gleissner	HE
14. Jochen Seeghitz	BY
15. Eberhard von dem Bussche	HE
16. Alfred Heitmann	NW
17. Alexander Beresowski	BW
18. Prof. Dr. Jens Zeller	BW
19. Christina Baum	BW
20. Prof. Dr. Jörn Kruse	HH
21. Kerstin Burkhardt	BY
22. Petr Bystron	BY
23. Peter Würdig	NI
24. Prof. Dr. Michael Wüst	BY
25. Prof. Dr. Claudia Koch-Brandt	HE
26. Thomas de Jesus Fernandes	MV
27. Bernhard Vogel	NI
28. Dr. Oliver Zielke	NW

3. Dr. Maximilian Krah	SN
4. Lars Patrick Berg	BW
5. Bernhard Zimniok	BY
6. Dr. Nicolaus Fest	BE
7. Markus Buchheit	BY
8. Christine Anderson	HE
9. Dr. Sylvia Limmer	BY
10. Prof. Dr. Gunnar Beck	NW
11. Joachim Kuhs	BW
12. Erich Heidkamp	HE
13. Dr. Verena Wester	NW
14. Thorsten Weiß	BE
15. Dr. Hagen Brauer	MV
16. Martin Schiller	NW
17. Dr. Michael Adam	BE
18. Uta Opelt	NW
19. Dr. Hans-Thomas Tillschneider	ST
20. Mike Moncsek	SN
21. Dr. Rainer Rothfuß	BY
22. Julian Flak	SH
23. Dr. Christoph Birghan	BY
24. Christian Waldheim	SH
25. Dietmar-Dominik Henning	BW
26. Dr. Ralf Böhnke	NW
27. Jonas Dünzel	SN
28. Hakola Dippel	HE
29. Detlef Ehlebracht	HH
30. Rebecca Weißbrodt	BW

AfD Candidates for the Gera Local Elections, May 2019. Only two women ran for a position in the local government. AfD was the first party in the city, leading with 28.8% and winning 12 seats.

UNSERE KANDIDATEN FÜR DEN STADTRAT GERA		
		
Dr. Harald Frank geb. 1957, Chemiker	Bettina Etzrodt geb. 1953, Ärztin	Dieter Laudonbach geb. 1957, Diplom-Ökonom
		
Stephan Brandtner, MdB geb. 1966, Rechtsanwalt	Jens Kästner geb. 1965, Podologe	Dr. Wolfgang Lauerwald geb. 1955, Dichter / Arzt i.R.
		
Kerstin Müller geb. 1985, Ärztin	Dr. Reinhard Etzrodt geb. 1951, Arzt i.R.	Normann Zießig geb. 1985, Techniker
		
Reiko Pflug geb. 1974, Koch		Bert Botschek geb. 1968, Polizeibeamter
		
Frank Morgenroth geb. 1973, Jurist / Lehrer	Dr. Elke Voigtsberger geb. 1951, Arzt	Sebastian Überschar geb. 1983, Kundenberater
		
Nico Klecker geb. 1978, Lagerist	Andreas Fröhlich geb. 1978, Heizungsbauer	

Alternative Women Association, AfD North Saxony. Source: Facebook, AfD Kreisverband Nordsachsen



Member vs Delegate Assembly by State (2019).

State	Type of Assembly	Membership Size
Baden-Württemberg	Members	3,700
Bavaria	Members	5,300
Berlin	Members	1505
Brandenburg	Members	1300
Bremen	Members	170
Hamburg	Members	650
Hessen	Delegates	2,800
Lower Saxony	Members	2,700
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Members	700
North Rhine-Westphalia	Delegates	5,200
Rhineland-Palatinate	Members	2,200
Saarland	Delegates	370
Saxony	Members	1,600
Saxony-Anhalt	Members	1,366
Schleswig-Holstein	Members	1,113
Thuringia	Members	1,225

Source: Statutes from each state party branch. Membership size, reported by the AfD.

Detailed data on leadership selection at the AfD. 2013-2021.

Federal Leader	Political orientation	Terms	Tenure	Vote share	Margin (%)	Candidates	Convention
Bernd Lucke	Moderate	1	2013 – 2015	96.4		16	Members
Konrad Adam	Moderate	1	2013 – 2015	79.6		16	Members
Frauke Petry	Conservative	2	2013 – 2015	80.8		16	Members
			2015 - 2017	59.7	22	5	Members
Dr. Joerg Meuthen	Moderate	3	2015 - 2017	62.0	33	5	Members
			2017-2019	72.0	--	1	Delegates
			2019-present	69.1	44	3	Delegates
Alexander Gauland	Conservative	1	2017 – 2019	67.8	--	2/2/1 ⁵⁴	Delegates
Tino Chrupalla ⁵⁵	Conservative	1	2019 – present	54.5	13	3	Delegates
BW Leader							Members
Jens Zeller	Moderate	1	2013-2015				
Bernd Kölmel	Moderate	2	2013-2015				
			1.2015-7.2015	61.5	25	2	
Dr. Joerg Meuthen	Moderate	1	7. 2015-2016	93	--	1	
Dr. Lothar Maier	Moderate	1	2015-2017	95	--	1	
Dr. Bernd Grimmer	Conservative	1	2015-2017	71	--	1	
Ralf Özkara ⁵⁶	Moderate	1	2017-2018	51.7	5%	3	
Marc Jongen	Moderate	1	2017-2019			3	
Bernd Gögel	Moderate	1	2019-2020	53	8%	2	
Dirk Spaniel	Conservative	1	2019-2020	52	4%	2	
Dr. Alice Weidel	Moderate	1	2020-present	54	12	3	
BY Leader							Members

⁵⁴ First two rounds with Georg Pazderski (47.3) vs Doris von Sayn-Wittgenstein (49.4) – no simple majority; third round with Gauland running unopposed.

⁵⁵ Runoff election: Chrupalla – 44%; Dana Guth – 22%; Gottfried Curio – 33%

⁵⁶ Runoff: Ozkara vs Weidel

Andre Wächter	Moderate	1	2013-2015	55	10%		
Petr Bystron		1	2015-2017				
Martin Sichert ⁵⁷	Conservative	1	2017-2019	51.6	11.5%	3	
Corinna Miazga ⁵⁸	Moderate	1	2019-present	58.5	17%	5	
HE Leader							
Albrecht Glaser	Moderate	1	5.2013-11.2013				Members
Gunther Nickel		1	1.2014-11.2014				Members
Konrad Adam ⁵⁹	Moderate	1	2014-2015			2	Members
Susanne Gruber		1	2014-2015				Members
Peter Münch	Conservative	2	2014-2015				Members
			2015-2017	55	--	1	Members
Albrecht Glaser	Moderate	1	2015-2017	61	--	1	Members
Rolf Kahnt	Moderate	1	2015-2017	55	--	1	Members
Robert Lambrou	Moderate	2	2017-2019	56	26%	2	Delegates
			2019-present	58.7		3	Delegates
Klaus Herrmann ⁶⁰	Moderate	2	2017-2019	55	25%	2	Delegates
			2019-present	50.1		2	Delegates
RP Leader							
Uwe Zimmermann	Moderate	1	2013-2015	60			
Uwe Junge	Conservative	2	2015-2017	89.6	--	1	
			2017-2019	74.6	58%	2	
Michael Frisch		1	2019-present	74.6	63%	2	
NI Leader							
Armin-Paul Hampel		2	2013-2016				Members

⁵⁷ Runoff Sichert vs Werner Maier

⁵⁸ Runoff Miazga vs Katrin Ebner-Steiner

⁵⁹ Runoff third ballot Adam vs Albert Glaser

⁶⁰ Runoff

			2016-2018				
Dana Guth ⁶¹	Moderate	1	2018-2020	54	15%	2	
Jens Kestner ⁶²	Conservative	1	2020-present	52	6%	5	
HH Leader							Members
Jörn Kruse		1	2013-2015				
Bernd Baumann		1	2015-2017	58	16%	2	
Dirk Nockemann		2	2017-2020	58	16%	2	
			2020-present	88	--	1	
HB Leader							Members
Christian Schäfer		1	2013-2015				
Frank Magnitz	Conservative	1	2015-2019				
Peter Beck		1	2019-2021				
NW Leader							
Alexander Dilger	Moderate	1	4.2013-12.2013				Members
Jörg Burger		1	2013-2014				Members
Marcus Pretzell		2	2014-2015				Members
			2015-2017				Members
Martin Renner	Moderate	1	2015-2017				Members
Thomas Röckemann	Conservative	1	2017-2019	53			Delegates
Helmut Seifen	Moderate	1	2017-2019	57			Delegates
Rüdiger Lucassen	Moderate	1	2019-2021	59	20%	2	Delegates
BB Leader							Members
Roland Scheel		1	4.2013-12.2013				
Alexander Gauland	Conservative	1	2014-2017	88.7	--	1	
Andreas Kalbitz	Conservative	2	2017-2019	73	53%	2	
			2019-present	77	55%	2	

⁶¹ Runoff Guth vs Hampel

⁶² Runoff Kestner vs Dana Guth

MV Leader							Members
Leif-Erik Holm	Moderate	1	2013-2014				
Andreas Kuessner		1	2013-2014				
Steffen Wandschneider		1	2013-2014				
Holger Arppe		1	2.2014-11.2014				
Matthias Manthei		2	2.2014-11.2014				
			2014-2016	91		2	
Bernhard Wildt		1	2016-2017	62	29%	2	
Leif-Erik Holm	Moderate	4	2014-2016	50.5		2	
			2016-2017	94	--	1	
			2017-2019	62	38%	2	
			2019-present	66	37%	2	
Dennis Augustin	Conservative	1	2017-2019	57		2	
Hagen Brauer	Moderate	1	2019-present	54		2	
BE Leader							Members
Günter Brinker	Moderate		2013-2016				
Beatrix von Storch	Conservative	1	2016-2017	70.4	--	1	
Georg Pazderski	Moderate	2	2016-2017	58	18%	2	
			2017-2020	79	--	1	
SN Leader							
Frauke Petry	Conservative	2	2013-2016	80.2			Members
			2016-2017	84.5		2	Members
Jörg Urban R	Conservative	2	2018 - 2020	91	--	1	Members
			2020 - present	87.5	--	1	Delegates
ST Leader							Members
Michael Heendorf		1	4.2013-12.2013				

Arndt Klapproth		1	12.2013-3.2014				
André Poggenburg	Conservative	2	2014-2016				
			2016-2018	61	32%	2	
Martin Reichardt		2	2018 - 2020	82	--	1	
			2021 - present	91	--	1	
TH Leader							Members
Arndt Breustedt		1	4.2013-8.2013				
Matthias Wohlfarth		2	4.2013-8.2013				
			2013-2014				
Michaela Merz		1	2013-2014				
Björn Höcke	Conservative	4	2014-2016	60			
			2016-2018	93	--	1	
			2018-2020	81	--	1	
			2020-present	83	73%	2	
Stefan Möller	Conservative	4	2014-2016				
			2016-2020	84	--	1	
			2018-2020	71		2	
			2020-present	86	--	1	

Gauland's famous dog-necktie. Source: Stern. <https://www.stern.de/lifestyle/mode/alexander-gauland---warum-der-afd-mann-eine-hundekrawatte-traegt-7637338.html>



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