AfD – the alternative for whom?

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When in 2013 a group of professors of economics founded Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland – AfD) it seemed that the name of the new grouping was exaggerated. Taking into account its slogans and its leaders, the AfD could at that time be an alternative for disenchanted voters of the CDU/CSU and the FDP alone. The party's 'founding fathers', among whom there was a large group of former CDU members, did not conceal the fact that their ambitions were not particularly far-reaching. Their basic goal was to influence the CDU so that it would return to its former conservative values.

Over less than four years of the AfD's existence, practically every aspect of the party has changed but its name. These aspects included: the leadership, the image, the political platform and the political power base. Professors of economics, who claim that Germany's Eurozone membership is the country's main problem, have been replaced with young activists focused on identity issues. The party gained an anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic profile and began to represent traditional non-voters, instead of disenchanted voters from other parties. This evolution turned out to be successful – the AfD representatives sit in the parliaments of most federal states and the party is likely to attain representation in the Bundestag after the 2017 elections. For the German political scene, this will be a shock comparable to the electoral success of the Greens' in 1983.

The consequences of this revolution on the political scene have already been evident at the federal state level. The AfD's presence in state parliaments forces other parties to establish alliances against it, which consequently prevents each of these parties from delivering on their electoral promises. Meanwhile, the AfD is shaping the public debate by referring to issues which other parties until recently considered as taboo. This forces the remaining parties to take a stance on these issues and adopt specific legislative solutions.

A history of success

On 14 April 2013, the founding congress of the new party, Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland – AfD), was held in Berlin. The new movement's initiators were professors of economics critical of the Eurozone, journalists and businesspeople centred around Prof. Bernd Lucke and Konrad Adam, a former columnist of the conservative opinion-forming daily *FAZ*. The new party's manifesto was written on two pages and contained demands regarding Germany's exit from the Eurozone and a return to its national currency – the German mark, the dissolution of the currency union, increased participation of banks in the bearing the costs of the financial crisis, more direct democracy and a plan to prevent the responsibilities of individual states from being transferred to the EU level[1].

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[1] AfD Wahlprogramm 2013, 2 January 2017, http://www.alternative-rlp.de/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2013_Wahlprogramm.pdf

Regardless of its manifesto, the party headed by Bernd Lucke began to build its image as a conservative movement distancing itself from the political establishment. The party's representatives declared their will to bring a new quality to the German political scene by proposing a substantial debate on the possible dissolution of the Eurozone. The new party solicited for the votes of those individuals who were disenchanted with the changes in those parties having a conservative (CDU and CSU) or liberal (FDP) profile. It also intended to take advantage of the mounting resistance within society towards the costs of saving Greece. This is confirmed by voting statistics showing the flow of voters from other parties to the AfD in the election to the Bundestag held on 22 September 2013, in which the new party won 4.7% of the votes and the required threshold was 5%. The AfD voters included mainly former supporters of the FDP, the Left Party and Christian Democratic parties. High approval ratings of the AfD among the Left Party's supporters indicate that the vote for the AfD was intended as a protest against the policy pursued by the government. The European Parliament election held on 25 May 2014 turned out to be another success for the AfD. Alternative for Germany won 7% of the votes and brought seven deputies to the European Parliament. The stunningresult by this Eurosceptic party is not merely a product of its political platform[2] but also of its focus in the pre-election campaign on a new issue, i.e. immigrants abusing social benefits. The topic turned out to be popular – the Bavarian CSU tried to capitalise on it in its campaign and so did Angela Merkel herself a few days before the election. The European Parliament election has shown that a vote for AfD is not a wasted vote, yet at the same time a dispute within the party was revealed. It involved the conservative-liberal group centred around Bernd Lucke and the conservative-national group, the so-called Patriotic Platform, represented by Frauke Petry, one of the three co-chairs of the party. She demanded a greater presence of patriotic and identity-oriented elements in the AfD's narrative. Until mid-2015, Lucke had managed to manoeuvre between the two wings.

The European Parliament election has shown that a vote for AfD is not a wasted vote and this has been the beginning of a string of AfD electoral successes in federal state parliaments.

The mounting internal dissonance undermined the party's credibility but not to an extent which would disable it from installing its representatives in subsequent federal state parliaments. Back in 2014, the Alternative for Germany had brought its representatives to the state parliaments in Saxony, Thuringia and Brandenburg, and at the beginning of 2015 its representatives were elected to the first western federal states – Hamburg and Bremen. These elections showed that the party was becoming increasingly able to mobilise traditional non-voters, which was due to the expansion of their manifesto to include issues such as pro-family policy, education, energy issues, immigration and – in Saxony – cross-border crime.

The string of electoral successes in specific federal states consolidated the party for a short time but it did not eliminate the divisions. These returned, for example, during a vote in the European Parliament on the sanctions against Russia. Bernd Lucke, who voted for the sanctions, had to face open criticism from his deputies and demands for his resignation voiced by more radical groups of ordinary party members. The actions by Bernd Lucke aimed at disciplining the national-conservative activists and, at the same time, at resolving the conflict

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[2] Programm der Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) für die Wahl zum Europäischen Parlament am 25. Mai 2014, 2 January 2017, https://www.alternativefuer. de/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/03/Europapro- gramm-der-AfD.pdf

(by launching the procedure of removing one activist from the party and reducing the number of party co-chairs to two) proved ineffective. Meanwhile, the good election result attracted new individuals wishing to become party members. In mid-2015, the party already had 22 000 members, while Lucke and his supporters could count on the loyalty of some 3 000 of them[3]. Ahead of the party's federal congress in Essen (on 4-5 July 2015), the heads of AfD structures in Saxony, Brandenburg and Thuringia, and also North Rhine-Westphalia, grouped in an association operating within the party, referred to as the Patriotic Platform, demanded that the AfD adopt a more critical stance towards immigrants and refugees. They expressed their support for the anti-Islamic Pegida movement, demanded that sanctions against Russia be lifted and began to openly claim that the USA is co-responsible for the war in Ukraine and in Syria. During the party congress, certain changes to the leadership structure were made. Frauke Petry, the head of AfD in Saxony, and Jörg Meuthen, the AfD leader in Baden-Wurttemberg, who was associated with Bernd Lucke's group, became the party's co-chairs. Lucke himself left the party claiming that he did not intend to lend his name to the party's new, more populist orientation. Numerous ordinary party members and local AfD leaders, mainly from western Germany, followed suit. In total, around 20% of party members left the AfD at that time. The loss was quickly compensated by an inflow of new activists; after Bernd Lucke's departure the AfD considerably improved its election results in subsequent federal state elections.

The unstable leadership

The relatively weak position of the party's leaders is typical of Alternative for Germany. This is caused by three factors:

[3] Jetzt sollen die Mitglieder entscheiden, 2 January 2017, http://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/inhalt.kein-ende-der-afd-querelen-jetzt-sollen-die-mitglieder-entscheiden.169f0a4b-e31f-4dcb-9d8c-95a911d3b635.html

Formal. Intending to build an image of a pluralist, democratic and ideologically diverse movement, the party's founders decided that it will be headed by three leaders of equal status. Despite this, Bernd Lucke, being the 'face' of the party, tried to rule it independently on his own. The AfD's successes in eastern federal states contributed to party members becoming increasingly unwilling to accept Bernd Lucke's leadership. It was being challenged in particular by Frauke Petry – his rival, one of the party's co-chairs and the head of the party organisation in Saxony. One of the reasons why Petry was able to effectively challenge Lucke's leadership was that her formal status within the party structure was equal to that of Lucke. Although the number of co-chairs was reduced from three to two, when the new duumvirate was formed the rivalry flared up anew. Despite Lucke's departure, the AfD continues to be riddled with conflict within its leadership. At present, Frauke Petry's main rival (in terms of the position held) is the AfD's co-chair Jörg Meuthen. Two-person party leadership is no exception in German politics. The Greens and the Left Party are also headed by two co-chairs. However, this model is equally being challenged in these parties (also by the co-chairs themselves).

The weak position of the party leaders is typical of Alternative for Germany.

Ideological. Like any other party in the early stages of its existence, the AfD attracted individuals whose views are frequently divergent. From the very beginning the party had two main wings: the liberal-conservative one and the national-conservative one. The background of the struggle for power between Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry lay in their approach to the Dresden-based Pegida movement (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West). Lucke considered Pegida a xenophobic,

islamophobic, non-bourgeois movement and distanced himself from it, while activists from eastern federal states, who supported Petry, were of the opinion that support should be offered to participants in the protests organised by Pegida.

Personnel. The present temporary alliances indicate that the ongoing conflicts are increasingly focused on the ambitions of local leaders rather than on ideological issues. In summer 2016, Petry supported the rebellion by a portion of AfD deputies to the state parliament in Baden-Wurttemberg against Jörg Meuthen, meaning to weaken his position or even force him to resign from the function he held in the party. Ultimately, Meuthen emerged as the victor in this battle, owing to the support he received from Alexander Gauland, the head of the AfD in Brandenburg, regardless of the differences in these two politicians' ideological affiliations. The goal adopted by Gauland and the national-conservative (André Poggenburg – Saxony-Anhalt, Björn Höcke – Thuringia) and moderate activists (Armin-Paul Hampel – Lower Saxony) associated with him is to prevent Frauke Petry from being nominated by the AfD as a candidate for chancellor.

The excessive internal diversity

The unending leadership crisis within the AfD is an element of a broader phenomenon involving a constant reshuffle of executive posts at lower levels of the party structure. At the state, regional and local levels this reshuffle has slightly different causes than at the federal level. Paradoxically, the main reason behind the personnel reshuffle has been the successful creation of party structures at a record pace. Shortly after its establishment in 2013, the AfD had 10 000 members, according to its own figures. At the end of 2013, the number reached 17 000 and in mid-2015 22 000. At present, the number of party members is estimated at 18 000 – 22 000. Due to the fact that it was not possible to verify the candidates in detail, executive posts were

frequently taken by individuals with no organisational skills or who in their earlier lives had episodes of other, sometimes compromising, political activity. Matthias Wohlfarth was appointed the first leader of the state-level AfD structures in Thuringia. He was a member of an evangelical sect and used his party position to pursue his missionary work. In Hesse, the party leader Peter Münch concealed his former activity in the Republicans party (Die Republikaner) which has been categorised by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as an extremist party.

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Comprehensive vetting of party members to check their former activity is inevitable for the AfD. Regular announcements regarding removal from the party of individuals involved, for example, in actions by neo-Nazi groups or other related groups suggest that this may pose a serious problem for the party in the future. It may trigger scandals such as those surrounding the Left Party activists, who concealed their former cooperation with the East German security service – the Stasi. The emphasis the AfD places in its programme on direct democracy translates into the model of decision making within the party itself. The AfD party conventions (at various levels) tend to take the form of assemblies of party members instead of party delegates. Considering that so far the Alternative has not developed any networks of inter-relations or formed permanent factions based on long-term goals and interests, discipline is not the appropriate word to describe the actions of the party members (in contrast to the CDU for example). This is why the results of such meetings are sometimes surprising, similarly to the short-lived protest party – the Pirate Party.

The party's manifesto as the list of the nation's problems

The AfD is frequently compared with the Pirate Party for other reasons. It is often claimed to be a 'single issue party', i.e. it is focused predominantly on the anti-immigrant narrative. This has not been the case since at least May 2016, which was when a 95-page-long party manifesto was adopted, containing the party's stance on all the major areas of politics[4]. When compared with the initial (slogan-based) party manifestos, it mainly reveals a shift from conservative-liberal views towards more radical ones. This is due to the fact that a portion of party members with moderate views left it and that in the second half of 2015, in connection with the migration crisis, the political climate changed and matters other than the Eurozone crisis appeared on the agenda.

Although the former manifesto contained statements objecting to immigration to Germany that is motivated by the desire to take advantage of the German welfare system, including from EU countries, at the same time it recognized the right to seek asylum as one of the fundamental rights. In its present manifesto, the AfD proposes that the right to seek asylum be removed from the chapter of the constitution regarding fundamental rights, in order to eliminate the instances of this right being abused. Moreover, Alternative for Germany wants the applications for international protection to be submitted in the applicant's country of origin only. To achieve this, it proposes the creation of special centres, such as in north Africa, for example, under the auspices of the UN, the EU or Germany itself. Individuals who submitted their applications for international protection in Germany would be sent to these centres to await their decision there.

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[4] Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland, 2 January 2017, https://www.alternativefuer.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/03/Leitantrag-Grundsatzprogramm-AfD.pdf

The AfD's manifesto presented ahead of the 2014 European Parliament election contained references to Western culture as the basis for German identity. However, it did not contain the word "Islam". The manifesto announced on 1 May 2016 contains demands regarding a ban on foreign funding of mosques, a ban on women wearing full-face veils, a ban on female public servants, teachers and schoolgirls wearing head scarves, a ban on constructing minarets, on the call of the muezzin and on ritual slaughter of animals. Muslim organisations should not be granted public juridical person status (which would enable them to apply for funding from taxes paid by Muslims). According to the AfD, Islam is not a facet of German culture and the rising number of Muslims is one of the biggest challenges the German state faces. Specific factions within the party agree on this issue, they only differ in their assessments of the threats posed by Islam (or Muslims) – whether these are political, cultural or demographic threats.

It is claimed that the AfD is a 'single issue party', but its manifesto contains the party's stance on all the major areas of politics.

The manifesto contains large passages on a pro-family policy, promoting the traditional family model intended to counteract the unfavourable demographic trends. This is accompanied by criticism of the equal rights policy, gender issues, gender parity and "wrongly understood" feminism. The party also opposes abortion being financed from public funds.

The party's manifesto devotes considerable attention to the crisis in the EU and in the Eurozone, which inspired the creation of the AfD. The party proposes that the EU should return competences to individual states and claims that EU institutions (such as the EU Council, the European Commission and the European Par-

liament) have too much ability to influence the policy of specific states despite the lack of sufficient democratic legitimacy. Should this demand not be met, the AfD proposes that Germany leave the EU or that the EU be dissolved and a new economic cooperation structure be created. According to the AfD, Germany should leave the Eurozone and should the Bundestag fail to vote in favour of this exit, the party will propose a referendum regarding this issue (which would require changes to Germany's constitution since it does not provide for a referendum being organised at the federal level). The AfD claims that only sovereign states, and not supranational organisations, are able to meet their citizen' expectations regarding their rights, freedoms and sense of security. The party has interpreted the results of the British EU exit referendum as confirmation of its narrative. Plans were announced to organise a similar referendum over 'Dexit' in Germany. Euroscepticism is a common ground for agreement between the AfD, the National Front headed by Marine Le Pen and the United Kingdom Independence Party. The two MEPs elected from AfD lists, who did not leave the party, are Beatrix von Storch and Marcus Pretzell. The former is a member of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (in which the main political parties are the British UKIP and the Italian Five Star Movement) and the latter belongs to the Europe of Nations and Freedom group (in which the National Front is the largest component).

In the section of its manifesto devoted to foreign and security policy the AfD proposes reconstructing a strong and independent position for Germany in the international arena. This is to be achieved, for example, by obtaining permanent membership of the UN Security Council, checking each time whether Germany's involvement in specific NATO activities is in line with Germany's interests and strengthening the Bundeswehr. Unlike the Left Party, the AfD agrees that Germany's membership of NATO is in Germany's interest. However, only on the condition that NATO constitutes a defence al-

liance. The AfD opposes the establishment of a European army and sees it as another step towards transforming the EU into a superstate. The manifesto emphasises the importance of relations with Russia ("security in Europe is impossible without Russia") and suggests that it would be necessary for Germany to become more independent of the USA. This is seen as a precondition for Germany to be able to represent its own interests in the international arena instead of Washington's interests.

The AfD emphasises the importance of relations with Russia and the need for Germany to be more independent of the USA.

In connection with Donald Trump's electoral victory, the party is hoping for a change in the "balance of involvement" in trans-Atlantic relations (by which it means that the USA's hegemonic ambitions should be replaced with cooperation between equal partners) and for putting an end to the conflicts in Ukraine and in Syria (with Russia's involvement in peace-making processes)[5]. Previous statements by AfD politicians suggest that they see the USA, not Russia, as the biggest threat to global peace. Hence the regular appeals for lifting the sanctions against Russia, recognising it as a partner in the fight against terrorism, expressing understanding for the Kremlin's point of view and criticism of the 'deterrence strategy' which NATO uses towards Russia[6]. The AfD emphasises that it was the USA's policy that destabilised the Middle East, which in turn triggered the influx of immigrants to Germany. The AfD strongly objects to Turkey's membership of the EU. Neither Poland

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[5] Petry: Trump hat die Karten zur politischen Zeitenwende in der Hand, 3 January 2017, https://www.alternative-fuer.de/petry-trump-hat-die-karten-zur-politischen-zeitenwende-in-der-hand/

[6] Pazderski: Dialog mit Russland statt Abschreckung, 3 January 2017, https://www.alternativefuer.de/pazder-ski-dialog-mit-russland-statt-abschreckung/

nor other Central European countries are mentioned in the AfD's manifesto. However, AfD politicians frequently refer to the behaviour of the Visegrad Group states in the migration crisis as a model and see the criticism offered by Brussels as an example of EU institutions' hypocrisy[7].

In similarity with earlier versions, the present manifesto contains numerous demands typical of parties with a liberal economic profile. These include curbing bureaucracy, withdrawal of the state from subsidising specific sectors of the economy, simplification of the tax system and the social insurance system. For example, the party supports the maintaining of minimum wage and increased support from the state for large families. The AfD all but rejects trade liberalisation agreements such as TTIP.

The main features of the AfD's manifesto are its temporary nature and concise phrasing. When defining challenges, it resembles a journalistic commentary on those events which occupied the minds of the German public from 2013–2016 (both important ones such as the migration crisis and less prominent ones such as the presence of toxic substances in toys). The problems considered are accompanied by proposed specific solutions which indicate what the party supports (and not merely what it objects to). These actions are proof of the effort intended to facilitate the formation of a secure base of voters, so that the party does not have to rely on protest votes.

Although, as far as its platform is concerned, the Alternative is not a party focused on one issue, it does tactically focus on individual topics. It is typical of this party to concentrate on concerns which ignite the most fervent emotions among its voters (in 2013 – the Eurozone crisis, in 2014 – illegal immigration, in 2015 – the threat posed by Islam, in 2015/2016 – the migration crisis),

in order to deliberately break a taboo, to use controversial rhetoric and to take a stance in opposition to that of the government.

The stable voter base

The AfD is frequently referred to as a protest party. The argument that voters do not vote specifically for the AfD but against other parties is indeed borne out, at least in some statistics. One piece of evidence for the lack of a permanent voter base may be the party's different approval ratings recorded in specific surveys, depending on whether the public debate was at a given moment dominated by one particular subject inspired by some crisis. The AfD recorded high approval ratings in the period when the Eurozone crisis aggravated, when the perceived threat posed by radical Islamists increased, when the migrant crisis broke out and immediately after actual or attempted terror attacks.

As far as its platform is concerned, the AfD is no longer a 'single issue party'. However, it can tactically focus on individual topics.

Research regarding the motivation to vote for the AfD in individual federal state elections has shown that a portion of voters supported the Alternative to express their dissatisfaction with other parties. In the 2016 elections to the state parliament in Baden-Wurttemberg, 70% of the voters who supported the AfD indicated their disenchantment with other parties as the reason behind their choice; the corresponding proportion in Saxony-Anhalt was 64%.

Alongside this, research conducted under the socio-economic panel (SOEP, an annual research study carried out since 1984 on a group of around 30 000 respondents), measuring, among other issues, long-term loyalty towards specific parties, shows that the AfD has man-

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[7] Der Traum der AfD von der Visegrad-Connection, 3 January 2017, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article157777404/Der-Traum-der-AfD-von-der-Visegrad-Connection.html

aged to build a stable electorate of 5–6% (i.e. comparable to the average approval ratings of the FDP over many years and much higher than the level of support for neo-Nazi parties such as the NPD or the DVU). However, support for the AfD as recorded in SOEP is significantly lower than in regular short-term polls measuring the level of support for specific political parties. This confirms the argument that a portion of AfD voters are volatile voters who vote against other parties. It also shows that the AfD has become the alternative for those voters who do not have a party that they could vote for. This is a starting point which the AfD could use to build a permanent presence on the German political scene. This potential is also evident in how effective the Alternative is when it tries to mobilise traditional non-voters. For comparison: in the 2014 elections in Brandenburg the AfD won 12 000 votes by former non-voters, in the 2016 elections in Saxony-Anhalt – 101 000. Both federal states have a similar population.

The roots of its success

The following factors and strategic decisions have contributed to the AfD's successes to date:
• The process of 'social-democratisation' of the CDU, which has been progressing since 2005 (the consent for minimum wage, dual citizenship, gender parity, resignation from obligatory military service) and the emergence of a political vacuum on the right of the political spectrum adjacent to the Christian Democrats.
• The initial boycott by the CDU, which enabled the AfD to wage its campaign with relative ease, as nobody pointed to the contradictions in the AfD's promises or its internal conflicts.
• Initiating debates on certain issues which broke taboos or were on the brink of German political correctness, combined with the party's image having escaped any associations with the neo-Nazi part of the political spectrum.
• Being transformed from a 'single issue party' to a party with a comprehensive vision of

changes, formulated in the manifesto it would like to follow in Germany.
• The turn to the right. Initially, it seemed that the change of leadership and Frauke Petry's empowerment meant the end of the AfD and that the party would not be able to retain its former voters. This was confirmed in polls: in July 2015, the AfD's approval ratings fell from the fixed 5–6% recorded over several months to 3%. Data regarding the flow of voters suggests that initially the AfD attracted the voters of all the remaining parties, mainly the CDU, the Left Party and the FDP. As its political platform evolved, the share of other parties' voters in the AfD's electorate began to dwindle and the party is increasingly effective in mobilising traditional non-voters. The turn to the right, which *de facto* happened in July 2015 and was sealed with the publication of the party's electoral manifesto less than a year later, turned out to be a sound move from the point of view of the party's political strategy.

The AfD has managed to build a stable electorate of 5–6%, i.e. comparable to the average approval ratings of the FDP over many years and much higher than the level of support for neo-Nazi parties such as the NPD or the DVU.

• The knowledge of local reality, problems and needs in those federal states in which the party has representation in the local parliaments. In the context of election campaign practice this meant that the federal-level AfD politicians took efforts to promote the AfD's image as a moderate party in supraregional media, essentially leaving more radical activists free to act at a local level. The party's result in the 2016 elections in Berlin was particularly significant. The double-digit support recorded in Berlin (14.2%) shows that the party is also able to win votes in liberal big cities with a traditionally left-leaning electorate.

The party of the 'average citizen'

So far, the AfD has not been considered a potential coalition partner. However, the party is exerting a tangible influence on German politics – its presence on the political scene forces other parties to make coalition alliances 'of convenience' and, as a consequence, to abandon some of their electoral promises. In this situation, the AfD is winning further supporters.

After less than four years since it was established, the AfD has representation in the parliaments of ten of the 16 German federal states and in the European Parliament. The AfD failed to cross the electoral threshold in just two of the elections in which it has run to date – in Hesse and in the 2013 Bundestag election.

The polls (measuring both long- and short-term support for specific parties) indicate that AfD representatives will get elected to the Bundestag in the 2017 election. Considering how AfD politicians have behaved so far, the party is unlikely to be a relentless opposition. In line with Alexander Gauland's idea, the Alternative wants to be a party of the 'average citizen', and therefore it will not automatically reject proposals for cooperation from other parties (including the Left Party), on the condition that this cooperation could be presented as efforts to improve the life of the average citizen. This rhetoric will confirm the party's desired image as an anti-establishment party acting against the logic of party interests, and at the same time – as a moderate party which mainstream voters could trust.

APPENDIX

AfD's presence in federal state parliaments

Federal state and election date	Election result
Saxony – 31 August 2014	9.7%
Brandenburg – 14 September 2014	12.2%
Thuringia – 14 September 2014	10.6%
Hamburg – 15 February 2015	6.1%
Bremen – 10 May 2015	5.5%
Saxony-Anhalt – 13 March 2016	24.2%
Rhineland-Palatinate – 13 March 2016	12.6%
Baden-Wurttemberg – 13 March 2016	15.1%
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – 4 September 2016	20.8%
Berlin – 18 September 2016	14.2%

The AfD's major figures

Frauke Petry (b. 1975 in Dresden) – co-chair of the party, head of the AfD faction in the local parliament in Saxony and of the party organisation there. She studied chemistry in Reading (UK) and in Göttingen. In 2004, she was awarded the degree of Doctor of Chemistry. In 2007– –2013, she ran her own company manufacturing polyurethane for sealing tyres, which she herself invented. She has won several awards in business innovation contests. In 2013, she

had to declare bankruptcy. Her company was acquired by a consortium of investors and continues to operate. Petry has been associated with the AfD from the beginning of the party's existence. In April 2013, at the AfD's founding congress she was appointed one of the three co-chairs of the party (next to Bernd Lucke and Konrad Adam). In July 2015, following an internal dispute between the national-conservative and the conservative-liberal wings, Petry, one of the main representatives of the former wing, was elected the party's chairperson. Jörg Meuthen was elected co-chair.

Jörg Meuthen (b. 1966 in Essen) – co-chair of the party, head of the AfD faction in the local parliament in Baden-Wurttemberg and of the party organisation there. After 1989 he worked as economics lecturer at various universities. He belongs to the conservative-liberal wing of the party and, as he himself claims, intends to counterbalance the more radical members of the party.

Alexander Gauland (b. 1941 in Chemnitz) – deputy chair of the party, head of the AfD faction in the local parliament in Brandenburg and of the party organisation there. He studied political science and law in Marburg, where he earned his doctoral degree. Between 1973 and 2013 he was a member of the CDU. His professional career has included jobs in the Frankfurt city hall, in the federal Ministry for the Environment, and in 1987–1991 he was head of the office of the minister-president of Hesse. After Germany's reunification, between 1991 and 2005, he held several posts in the *Maerkische Allgemeine Zeitung* daily. Gauland was one of the founders of the AfD. He belongs to the national-conservative wing of the party. However, he mainly represents the party's intellectual background. He is the party's ideologist.

Beatrix von Storch (Beatrix Amelie Ehrengard Eilika, Duchess of Oldenburg, b. 1971 in Lübeck) – deputy chair of the party, member of the European Parliament, head of the party organisation in Berlin. She studied law in Heidelberg and Lausanne. Until 2011 she worked as a lawyer in Berlin. Since the mid-1990s she has established several associations with different goals including the compensation for and return of plots of land to former owners affected by the agricultural and industrial reform in the Soviet occupation zone (Göttinger Kreis and Allianz für den Rechtsstaat), promotion of citizens' political activity (Zivile Koalition), involvement for transparency in public life (Abgeordneten-Check.de). Former member of the FDP. A member of the Alternative for Germany from the beginning of the party's existence. Beatrix von Storch's main task in the AfD involves lobbying.

Albrecht Glaser (b. 1942 in Worms) – deputy chair of the party. Between 1970 and 2012 he was a member of the CDU and held various posts in local administration in Hesse. The AfD's candidate for president in the 2017 election.

Marcus Pretzell (b. 1973 in Rinteln) – MEP and leader of the AfD in North Rhine-Westphalia. Following his studies in Heidelberg he worked as a lawyer in the construction and development sector. He does not belong to the national-conservative wing of the party, although he is a supporter of the "identitarian" movement. In his private life, he is married to the party's leader Frauke Petry.

Armin-Paul Hampel (b. 1957 in Bielefeld) – member of the party's governing body and head of AfD in Lower Saxony. A prominent TV journalist. He used to work as parliamentary reporter and foreign correspondent. Used to be the head of the TV station ARD's bureau in Delhi. He is associated with the more moderate wing of the AfD.

Georg Pazderski (b. 1951 in Pirmasens) – member of the party's governing body and chairman of the AfD faction in the chamber of deputies in Berlin, co-chair of the party in Berlin. A retired Bundeswehr colonel.

André Poggenburg (b. 1975 in Weissenfels) – member of the party's governing body, head of the AfD faction in the local parliament in Saxony-Anhalt and of the party organisation there. One of the initiators of the AfD's turn to the right, as a result of which Bernd Lucke, the party's founder, and his supporters left the party.

Björn Höcke (b. 1972 in Luenen) – co-chair of the AfD in Thuringia and head of the AfD faction in Thuringia's local parliament. A teacher by profession. Despite not holding any prominent position in the party hierarchy at the federal level, he is one of the AfD's main figures because he attracts extreme right voters to the party. He enjoys considerable support from party activists in eastern Germany. He is frequently criticised for his views, including by fellow party members. The party's former leadership had previously launched a procedure to expel him from the party. It was cancelled when Frauke Petry became the AfD's leader.