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Full title:

The 'Alternative for Germany': the rise of right wing populism at the heart of Europe

Short title:

The 'Alternative for Germany'

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Abstract

This article charts the rise of the 'Alternative for Germany' (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or AfD) from its inception in late 2012 to its unexpectedly strong performance in the 2017 Federal election. In terms of the 'inward' aspect of Euroscepticism, the article considers the impact of the emergence of successively more hardline leaderships in 2015 and 2017, which led to a shift beyond opposition

to aspects of the European integration process to a more profound critique of German society and politics. In terms of the 'outward' aspect, it assesses the significance of these developments in the wider debates around Euroscepticism and populism. The article concludes that the AfD's Euroscepticism is now nested within an ideological profile that increasingly conforms to the template of an orthodox European right-wing populist party. It argues that the widely unanticipated level of electoral support for the AfD in the 2017 Federal elections and its status as the main opposition party in the Bundestag is a systemic shock and potential critical juncture in the development of the German party system and the contestation of European integration in the Federal Republic.

Introduction

The result of the 24th of September 2017 Federal elections presented a profound shock to the German political class. It was no surprise that Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) were returned as the largest party grouping in the Bundestag but the success of the right-wing populist 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD) – with 12.6 per cent of the vote – was unprecedented. For the first time since the early 1950s, a political party had unlocked viable political space to the right of the CDU/CSU. Not only that, it became the third largest party grouping in the Bundestag. The AfD performed strongly across Germany but did particularly well in states of the former East Germany. Figure One provides the 2017 Bundestag election results (with changes since 2013).

Figure One about here

The AfD's disruptive potential was widely recognized since its inception in late 2012 (see *inter alia* Baluch, 2018; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2017; Schmitt-Beck, 2017; Decker, 2016; Lochocki, 2016) and it has only taken four years for this potential to become reality. The 2017 Federal election results are of huge significance for the German party system as whole. The two large catch-all parties, the CDU/CSU and the Social Democratic SPD, both did badly, reflecting a longer-term trend of steady electoral decline (Lees, 2005). The CDU/CSU only polled 33 per cent of the popular vote, which was enough to claim the role of *Formateur* in any future coalition negotiations, but nevertheless represented a less than ringing endorsement of 'Merkelism'. The SPD did even worse, gaining just over 20 per cent of the vote: its worst Federal election result in the history of the Federal Republic. The established smaller parties, the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP), the Left, and the Greens, all performed respectably but it was the AfD that came third.

The immediate impact was on the process of government formation after the election. Despite the steady decline of the CDU/CSU and SPD, none of the established smaller parties had taken over what used to be the FDP's 'kingmaker' role (Pappi 1984). This left either the CDU/CSU or SPD with considerable voting power and discretion over

the process of coalition formation (Lees 2006, 2012). The size of the AfD's vote in 2017, however, added a new degree of complexity to coalition building. The AfD was an unacceptable coalition partner for both CDU/CSU and SPD but its 94 seats in what was now a 709-seat Bundestag made it even harder for one of the other smaller parties to assume the kingmaker role. This reduced the number of alternative coalition arrangements available to the CDU/CSU as *Formateur* and, following an unsuccessful attempt to form a so-called Jamaica coalition (with the FDP and Greens), Merkel argued that the only alternatives left on the table were either a return to the now familiar Grand coalition or the prospect of new elections. The eventual outcome of coalition negotiations was a Grand Coalition, which meant the AfD became the main opposition party in the Bundestag. This is a major disruptive event, not just to the day-to-day parliamentary business of the Bundestag, but also to long-held perceptions of the Federal Republic as a stable and centripetal polity (Smith, 1986).

The AfD's disruptive impact was further amplified because its performance in the 2017 Federal election surprised many commentators. Most analysts were confident that the AfD would scale the Federal Republic's 5 per cent electoral hurdle but, in the months leading up to the Federal election, the party fell short of the double-digit support in opinion polls that it had in 2016. It was recognized that the AfD's political and organizational base in the European parliament (albeit reduced by resignations from the party) and in 13 out of 16 State parliaments made it better prepared to fight the 2017 Federal election than it had been in 2013. It was also widely acknowledged that the party had now developed its programmatic profile to encompass a critique of German society that advocated the redistribution of power resources across the political system, between parties, between elites and ordinary citizens, and between insider and outsider societal groups. But, on the basis of what most commentators thought they knew about the dynamics of the German party system and the (historically risk averse) political preferences of German voters, many assumed that the more potentially transformative the AfD's political offer became, the more it would impose clear limits on the party's political appeal.

The AfD's actual electoral performance in the 2017 Federal elections shows us that, although the AfD now conforms to the template of 'classical right-wing populist parties in Europe' (Kette, 2016), its electoral appeal was not as limited as we might have thought. Indeed, I would argue that it allowed the party to present a clear political message to a distinct set of German voters and erstwhile non-voters. In other words, the AfD became the third largest party grouping in the Bundestag because and not despite of the party's increasing radicalism. In this context, the AfD's success in the 2017 Federal elections and its aftermath is not just a systemic shock; it could be a critical juncture in the development of the party system and the contestation of European Union (EU) integration in Germany.

In this article, I examine how the AFD became Germany's third political party through the analytical lens of historical institutionalism (HI) and drawing on Pirro and Taggart's (2016) notions of the 'inward' and 'outward' aspects of populist Eurosceptic politics. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, I describe my use of HI and Pirro and Taggart's schema by looking at the AfD's disruptive impact on the development of the German party system and in the context of the German political elite's traditional pro-Europeanism. In the following section, I describe the impact of the three European crises on German politics. I then go on to chart the emergence of the AfD, its initial failure to scale the Germany's five percent electoral barrier in the 2013 Federal election and its subsequent run of electoral successes in European parliament and state parliament elections, culminating in its 2017 Federal election success. Following that, I examine the internal aspect of the AfD's populist Euroscepticism and assess how two significant upheavals in the party's senior leadership both reflect and have driven forward the progressive radicalization of the party's program. I then look at the external aspect of the AfD's emergence, how the party's ideological profile has developed over time, and its significance in terms of party based Euroscepticism and populism. The paper concludes with a discussion of its findings in which I return to the notion of the 2017 Federal election being a potential critical juncture in German party politics.

Historical institutionalism, party system development and change in Germany

This article draws upon the HI literature (Keohane 2017; Skocpol 1992; Hall 1989; Krasner 1988) in that it assumes that institutions develop in an evolutionary process (Pierson, 2004), marked by junctures in which 'rapid bursts of change [are] followed by long periods of stasis' (Krasner 1988: 242).

HI privileges the emergence of 'standard operating procedures' (SOPs) that serve to routinize activities and, under normal circumstances, inhibit anything more than incremental change. Such institutions, which I understand to include formal structures and less formal practices and norms, provide the settings and constraints within which political agency is practiced. Thus, this analysis of the distinct developmental path of German party politics is premised on the understanding that early moves in the formation and consolidation of the party system are crucial but there is nothing inevitable about the scope and scale of their impact. Much depends on the contingencies of time, timing, speed and sequencing.

Three decades ago, Gordon Smith talked about Germany's 'efficient secret' - a configuration of structures and norms, as well as partisan ideology - that generated what he called a 'politics of centrality' and institutional stability (Smith, 1986: 231-5). According to Smith, this was buttressed by a number of institutional features, two of which are germane to this article. These are, first, Germany's mixed member proportional electoral system and the 5 per cent electoral hurdle, which was intended to promote coalition government, limit the number of effective parties within the legislature, and – at least until the 2017 Federal election - shut out flanking parties of the right or left, and, second, the idea of the *Parteienstaat*, which gives the established political parties a stake in the maintenance of state legitimacy, and discourages the kind of populist 'anti-system' sentiment that was evident in the Weimar Republic. After 1945, German nationalism was discredited and post-war German political elites folded German national ambitions into a broader European identity that was central to the Federal Republic's *Staatsraison*.

This pro-Europeanism was further embedded by ongoing party system concentration from the 1950s until the 1970s and a significant and increasing degree of 'fit' between German

and EU institutions, particularly in terms of SOPs and norms of behaviour. Over twenty years ago, Wolfgang Wessels argued that the impact of resource dependencies and spillover effects presented a number of challenges for all EU member states, including Germany (Wessels 1997). As Rometsch observed, German policy making in EU affairs was highly sectorized and not best suited to generate a clear national position in Brussels (Rometsch 1996: 102). By contrast, the more centralised style of policy making in Whitehall allowed the United Kingdom (UK) to formulate a more coherent 'British' position (Humphreys, 1996) and was regarded by many as being more effective. On the debit side, however, Wilks (1996) and others have also noted that the structure, SOPs and norms of the British state created dissonance between the UK and EU levels. Key factors included the centralised nature of the British state, the primacy of parliamentary (i.e. internal, domestic) sovereignty, and the lack of codified constitutional rights. Scholars identified a degree of procedural and normative misfit between many UK politicians' and policy makers' core identities and perceptions of their roles and the highly rules-based and often supranational nature of EU politics. This led Bulmer and Burch to speculate that the ongoing modernisation of the British state and its further adaptation to 'continental practices' alien to the Westminster tradition might lead to push back from domestic political actors and a new 'critical juncture' in the UK's relationship with Europe (Bulmer and Burch, 1998: 625-6)[1].

Germany's culture of co-operative Federalism, by contrast, emphasises codified legal rights and responsibilities and cultivates a consensual political culture in which the EU level is not a fundamental challenge to domestic sovereignty. Thus, the fundamental 'unease' that many British politicians feel about EU integration (Ibid: 626) is generally absent amongst most politicians in the Federal Republic. The apparently more pacific relationship between the domestic and the European that we see in German politics is

[1] The British Conservative Party's intraparty struggle over EU membership, the decision of the UK Government to hold a referendum to settle the matter, and the current domestic discord around the subsequent Brexit process are all part of that critical juncture.

further facilitated by a relatively compliant mainstream media that broadly shares German elites' European orientation and ambitions. Moreover, in material terms, the Federal Republic's manufacturing and banking sector has historically benefited from the opening up of European markets. Germany is one of the world's leading export nations and maintains a significant trade surplus with the rest of Europe. Again, this is in contrast to the UK, which runs a structural trade deficit with the EU, particularly with Germany, and where the manufacturing and, in particular, the export sector of the economy is much smaller (with patterns of support for European integration on economic grounds being more complex as a result).

Taken in the round then, Germany possesses a combination of long-term structural, procedural and normative constraints that have made party-based Euroscepticism the 'dark matter' (Lees, 2002) of German politics, in that it was effectively invisible at the level of party politics despite unease about aspects of European integration amongst the German electorate. Since the emergence of the AfD, that dark matter of Euroscepticism is now visible and, in the context of a strong elite consensus around the European project, it possesses an anti-system dimension that subverts the analytical differentiation between Euroscepticism and populism. Returning to Pirro and Taggart's (2016) 'supply side' schema, any analysis of the 'inward' aspect of German Euroscepticism must consider the extent to which recent European crises have shifted the ideological contours of the AfD's Euroscepticism. But in terms of the 'outward' aspect, we must also ask what has been the impact of the emergence of a populist Eurosceptic party like the AfD in Europe's most influential member state on our understanding of party based Euroscepticism and populism?

Three European crises and the emergence of the AfD

The AfD was founded by German conservatives who were unhappy with the centrist direction of travel of the CDU under Angela Merkel's leadership (Franzman, 2016) but it found its political impetus by mobilizing popular unease about the European project and

specifically the nature and composition of the Eurozone and Germany's role as its political anchor and paymaster. The emergence of the AfD is evidence of a certain weakening of the centripetal forces identified by Smith, some of which has taken place under the impact of the three crises (economic and financial, migrant, and the impact of Brexit) that have rocked the nations of Europe in recent years.

The cumulative impact of the three European crises on German politics has been significant although, of the three, Brexit has had very limited impact to date and the topic of British withdrawal from the EU certainly was not a high-profile theme in the 2017 Bundestag election campaign.

The impact of the financial crisis on Germany was sharp but relatively short-lived. 2009 was the worst year of the crisis for European economic growth, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In that year, the German economy contracted by 5.6 per cent of GDP (more than the 5.5 per cent contraction in Italy, 4.2 per cent in the UK, 2.9 per cent in France and 3.6 per cent in Spain). European economies recovered to some extent after 2009 but Germany's bounce back was striking. Driven by powerful export growth as a result of the weak Euro, the German economy grew strongly (with growth rates of 3.9 and 3.7 per cent in 2010 and 2011) compared with the weaker Eurozone economies (OECD.stat, 2017). Germany also escaped the sustained rises in unemployment associated with the crisis. German unemployment peaked at 7.7 per cent in 2009 and subsequently dropped back to 4.6 per cent by 2015 (compared with unemployment rates of 10 per cent in France, 12 per cent in Italy, and the socially disastrous increase in unemployment experienced by Spain over the period: rising to a high of 24.4 per cent in 2014) (OECD.stat, 2017).

State-led responses to the banking crisis, the subsequent downturn in their wider economies, and the rise in unemployment had an inevitable impact on public finances in European countries. However, the experience of the major European economies differed significantly. Italy's debt as a percentage of annual GDP rose to 132.3 per cent of GDP by 2014, Spain's to 99.3 per cent, the UK's to 88.2 per cent, and France's to 95.6 per cent. Interestingly, Germany's debt to GDP was at a relatively high starting point of 63.6 per cent

of GDP in 2007 and peaked three years later at 81 per cent of GDP. By 2014, it was just a little over 10 percentage points higher than it was in 2007 at 74.9 per cent of GDP (OECD.stat, 2017). In addition, Germany was running a budget surplus of 0.2 per cent of GDP when the crisis started in 2007. This surplus was not as big as Spain's (equivalent to 2 per cent of GDP) but represented a much tighter fiscal position than that of Italy (running a deficit equivalent to 1.5 per cent of GDP), France (deficit equivalent to 2.5 per cent of GDP) or the UK (deficit equivalent to 3 per cent of GDP). Over the next three to four years, national finances across Europe deteriorated markedly as governments tried to offset the worst effects of the crisis but Germany's deficit peaked at just 4.2 per cent of GDP in 2009, compared with 7.2 per cent in France, 5.3 per cent in Italy, 10.8 per cent in the UK and 11 per cent in Spain. By 2014, Germany was back in surplus, whilst all the other major European economies remained in deficit (OECD.stat, 2017).

Some of the reductions in European states' budget deficits were the result of the modest economic upturns they had all experienced in the years after 2010. But much of it was achieved through politically contested cuts and the steady erosion of the European social model. Europe had entered the age of 'austerity', described by Blyth as 'a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts and deficits' (Blyth 2013: 2). The pain generated by these adjustments and the subsequent political upheaval led to the emergence of significant political challengers in some European polities but Germany's relatively soft landing after 2009 meant system stability appeared to have been maintained.

Nevertheless, the economic and financial crisis in Europe – and Germany's central role in leading responses to it – provided the mobilizing narrative for the AfD. Like the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in its original incarnation as the Anti-Federalist League a quarter of a century earlier, the AfD originated in a distinctly intellectual milieu. In late 2012 Alexander Gauland, Konrad Adam, and Berndt Lucke set up the Electoral Alternative 2013 (*Wahlalternative 2013*), from which the AfD emerged the following year. Gauland was a

former Department Head of the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Adam was a former Editor of the influential *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper, and Lucke was a tenured Professor of Macroeconomics at the University of Hamburg. They were well informed and well networked and their joint manifesto was endorsed by an impressive array of economists, journalists, business leaders and political activists, many of whom were former members of the CDU. By the spring of 2013 what was now the AfD held its first party congress in Berlin, in which the leadership board was formally elected and a party program - including a clear commitment to work for the abolition of the Euro – was approved. In May 2013, the AfD launched *Land* parties in all 16 German states to fight the Federal election in September of that year.

The networkedness of the AfD ensured that the new party attracted much attention as the 2013 Federal election approached. This period saw a collective turn towards a more Eurosceptic position by most of the main political parties, with the AfD enthusiastically channeling the new mood amongst voters. As Weldon and Schmitt put it 'a quarter of a century after reunification and seventy years after World War II, the battle over Europe seems to have arrived in German politics' (Weldon and Schmitt, 2014: 65).

The CDU/CSU was the clear winner of the 2013 Federal election, polling 41.5 per cent of the vote (up 7.7 percent on 2009) and just falling short of an absolute majority in parliament. The AfD very narrowly failed to enter the Bundestag with 4.7 per cent of the vote. On the same day, the AfD also fell short in the Hesse state parliament elections with 4 percent of the vote (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2013).

The next opportunity for the AfD to gain an electoral foothold was the May 2014 European Parliament elections. The AfD won 7.1 percent of the national vote, coming in fifth behind the CDU (30.02 percent), SPD (27.27 percent), the Greens (10.7 percent), and the Left Party (7.39 percent). The following month the AfD's seven newly elected MEPs were accepted into the European Conservatives and Reformists parliamentary group, albeit on a split vote. The European Parliament elections provided the impetus for further respectable electoral performances in state parliament elections across Germany. This run

of success coincided with the critical stage of the second of the three European crises, the migrant crisis.

Germany's responded generously to the migrant crisis: with tens of thousands of migrants arriving in the summer of 2015 and around a million in total being welcomed over the following year. Merkel's personal association with Germany's open door policy played well with centrist and centre-left voters but was far less popular with many of her own supporters. The AfD subsequently took advantage of the disconnect between the normally politically astute Merkel and her core electorate by shifting their own political message way from a technical critique of the Euro-crisis to a more aggressive attack on immigration. This shift in tactics paid off in state elections and eventually forced Merkel to change her approach and admit that her government had 'made mistakes' in handling the crisis.

Table One about here

Table One provides us with the percentage vote shares won by the AfD in Bundestag and state elections, sorted by individual state, over the period 2013 to the 2017 Federal election. Four points can be made about the data. First, the AfD's performance in the 2017 Federal election was a clear improvement on 2013 in all German states. Second, the AfD improved on its performance in the 2013 Federal election in all subsequent state elections as well. Third, the AfD now has a presence in all but three state parliaments. The exceptions are Hessen, as already discussed, as well as Bavaria and Lower Saxony (in both of which the next elections are not due until 2018). Fourth, there is a clear divide between the western and eastern states, with electorates in the latter more receptive to the AfD's message at Federal and state elections.

Figure Two about here

Initial analysis of the AfD vote in the 2017 Federal elections demonstrates the degree to which the AfD outperformed expectations. Figure Two demonstrates that the AfD drew support from voters of all of the other major political parties, particularly the two big catch-

all parties, with nearly a quarter of AfD voters previously voting CDU/CSU and 10 per cent voting SPD. Significantly, the AfD also drew substantial support from previously disengaged voters, with 35 per cent of the AfD's vote coming from non-voters in the 2013 Federal election (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2017). Table Two also demonstrates that there was a distinct gender skew in the AfD's support, with more male than female voters supporting the AfD in both eastern and western German states.

Table two about here

Figure Three about here

Figure Three demonstrates that the AfD's particular appeal to middle aged voters, with 15 per cent of voters between the ages of 30 and 44 and 14 per cent of 45- to 59-year-old voters voting AfD. In both eastern and western states, the AfD's populist appeal was obviously greatest with working age voters who had lived most of their lives in a unified Germany (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2017).

Figure Four about here

Figure Four breaks down the AfD vote according to Vehrkamp and Wegschaider's five-fold typology of social milieus and indicates that the party's electoral support was concentrated within three distinct social groups: the 'Precariat' (in part time or temporary employment, or unemployed), the 'respectable' middle class (in full time employment, often in the private sector, with high levels of home ownership), and 'traditionalists' (likely to value Germany's cultural legacy, to resent rapid social change, and to have concerns about Islam and levels of immigration). The Precariat were the most likely to support the AfD in the 2017 Federal election but the strong presence of the respectable middle class and traditionalists in the electoral mix indicates that AfD's political message resonated strongly with voters who felt cultural discomfort with modern Germany as well as with voters who felt real economic distress.

In many ways, the appeal of the AfD to middle aged and middle-class voters represents continuity rather than change. As Grimm observed in 2015, what was then the AfD's 'conservative national-liberal ideology', with its emphasis on a 'stable currency, social security, and immigration', provided 'a persuasive and credible option to voters from all economic strata' (Grimm 2015: 271). But Grimm was using data from the 2014 European parliament elections: in other words, before the 2015 migrant crisis and its aftermath. Hoerner and Hobolt argue that the AfD in its current stage of development is both a product and driver of the increased polarisation that has taken place in German politics since 2015 (Hoerner and Hobolt 2017). In the 2017 Federal elections, the AfD mobilised previously disengaged voters (ibid: 2-3) through a narrative of 'culture war' or difference (Vehrkamp and Wegschaider, 2017) that was particularly resonant in the eastern German states (Roth and Wolf, 2017).

The supply side dynamics of the AfD's Euroscepticism

'The Greeks are suffering. The Germans are paying. The banks are clearing up'

(AfD Federal election poster, 2013)

This campaign slogan from the early days of the AfD's development defies simple classification. It draws upon notions of 'the Germans' that potentially goes beyond appeals to German frugality to embrace a *Völkische* tone but this is offset by the empathetic manner in which 'the Greeks' are described. This was not the simple othering narrative that populists often call upon to create 'the people' of the imaginary 'Heartland' (Taggart, 2000, 2003). Where the notion of the 'the people' is more present is in a more demotic sense of the people or European peoples versus the elites, and especially the elites that make up the European political class. Thus, a simple slogan carries a powerful subtext about the asymmetrical power resources possessed by the people vis-à-vis political and economic elites (Mudde, 2004). At this point in the AfD's development, the appeal to populist instincts was 'chameleon-like' (Taggart, 2000 Op Cit) in that it was adapted to specific national conditions. In Germany, the Left Party has quite successfully articulated a form of left wing

populism but the right wing variant had traditionally failed to thrive. It was no surprise for many political scientists, therefore, that in the early years of its existence the AfD resembled more a 'functional equivalent for a right-wing populist party in Germany' (Berbuir et al, 2014: 8) than fully conforming to the orthodox template of such a party. As Decker observed, at that point in the AfD's development, the party's 'strong emphasis on the free market differentiated the AfD from the hard core of European right wing populism' (Decker 2016: 11)[2]. This is no longer the case.

Up until 2015, the AfD's core message was the kind of contingent and limited contestation of the European project that Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) classified as 'soft' Euroscepticism. Indeed, one paradox of the AfD's ideological and rhetorical profile is that at that stage of the party's development it was the so-called moderates within the party – the economists whose main interest was critiquing the Euro – rather than the conservative and nationalist wing who originally harnessed the language of populism as part of their tactical agenda (Franzman, 2016). However, from 2015 the AfD's Eurosceptic narrative became increasingly nested within a more populist and critical approach to the entire German political settlement and the institutions, procedures, and practices that underpin it. At the same time, the ordo-liberal and pro-free market elements of the party's program began to be over-written by a more orthodox right wing populist agenda.

The drivers of programmatic change were the two major upheavals in the AfD's senior leadership in 2015 and 2017. The first, in July 2015, saw the original leading spokesperson, the economically liberal Berndt Lucke, replaced by Frauke Petry from the AfD's national-conservative wing. Petry initially drove the AfD in an explicitly populist direction and took a strong position in opposition to Angela Merkel's open door policy to Syrian refugees in late 2015 and 2016. As already noted, this resonated with voters and the AfD was rewarded with some strong performances in state parliament elections.

[2] 'Die starke Betonung der Marktfreiheit unterscheidet die AfD vom harten Kern des europäischen Rechtspopulismus'.

However, the mood amongst the electorate subsequently shifted back towards the mainstream parties and the AfD fell back in the polls. In May 2017, after trying to persuade her party conference to moderate its position in response to this decline in its fortunes, Petry announced she was stepping down and would not lead the party's 2017 Federal election campaign, although she remained co-Chairperson of the party. The party then appointed Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland as its leading spokespeople. Weidel described herself as a 'classic liberal' (Chazan, 2017), whilst Gauland, who was also Chair of the Brandenburg State party, had a more radical profile that saw him embroiled in a row over racist comments he was alleged to have made about German national football hero (and 2014 World Cup Winner) Jérôme Boateng. The post-2017 leadership team faced a difficult task, with more extreme nationalist voices in the ascendancy and demanding a voice in the drafting of the party's program for the 2017 Federal election. There were also concerns that the party had become a potential home to outright neo-Nazis. As one activist put it: 'the AfD is now like hanging a light bulb in the middle of the jungle, you attract all sorts of creatures' (Deutsche Welle, 2017).

It had taken a little more than four years for the AfD's ideological profile to reach the point that it could be accused of acting as a beacon for the creatures of the far right. Under Petry the AfD doubled down on what I would describe as two policy 'levers' that had already been developed under the Lucke leadership. The first was a 'narrative lever', through which potentially disruptive propositions were smuggled into the mainstream political discourse. The second was a 'procedural lever' through which the constraining political institutions that have kept populism in check were rejected in favor of political alternatives that were more conducive to the dissemination and entrenchment of the AfD's anti-elite message. Taken together, the two levers constituted a praxis of political insurgency that was fundamentally alien to politics as it has been conducted in the Federal Republic.

The first, narrative, lever was originally exercised through the AfD's assertion that the Eurozone was the creation of an out-of-touch and metropolitan elite whose interests and

those of whom they serve are very different from those of the people. At this point in its development the AfD was not an anti-European party *per se* but rather favoured 'a return to subsidiarity', 'more democracy, more public involvement', and 'less bureaucracy, less costs for member states' (AfD, 2014: 8-10). Such messages were more Gaullist than Farageist and were in many ways consistent with a traditional strand of conservative CDU thought that had been neglected and alienated by Merkelism.

The AfD's manifesto for the 2014 European Parliament election stressed ordo-liberal prescriptions for solving the Euro crisis (AfD, 2014 Op Cit: 3-7) and re-enforced the now familiar German narrative of the need to avoid moral hazard and (re)establish credible commitments across the Eurozone. In the same document there were also appeals to a 'social EU' in which labour market and social policies should be 'made at the local level' and there should be 'no free trade agreement to Europe's disadvantage' (ibid: 12-16). The retention of ordo-liberal and social market elements meant that, behind the populist anti-Euro rhetoric, the AfD's approach to core policy areas such as economic policy contained a great deal of continuity with the past. This is consistent with Patzelt's assertion that the AfD at that time 'filled a gaping hole on the German political right caused by Merkel shifting her ruling conservative Christian Democrats to the left' (Paterson, 2014).

Under Lucke, the AfD's ideological ambivalence extended to other policy domains, such as social policy, immigration and the environment. In the 2014 European election, the AfD manifesto argued 'for equal rights for the sexes, recognizing their different identities, social roles and life situations' (AfD, 2014 Op Cit: 17); a statement that needs little decoding to position the party very much on the conservative side of the issue. The manifesto went on to argue for a supposedly 'humane' immigration policy in which 'the immigration of non-EU workers is to depend exclusively on German needs' though a Canadian-style points system (Ibid: 15). The party's stance on environmental policy was also made clear, including a wholesale rejection of the German Renewable Energy Act (EEG) and a repatriation of EU environmental competences to the national level (Ibid: 19-20).

By contrast, the AfD's tone on immigration was more aggressive from the start. AfD posters in the 2013 Bundestag election contained a good deal of 'dog whistle' politics, using slogans like 'Courage for Truth' (similar to the UK Conservatives' 'Are you thinking what we're thinking?' in the 2005 UK General Election), whilst an earlier poster had argued for 'classical education over multicultural re-education'. As Berbuir and colleagues point out, AfD communications strategy on social media in particular often tapped into the stock 'vocabulary of right-wing politics, such as denial of multi-culturalism, the condemnation of non-heteronormative lifestyles such as same-sex unions or 'political correctness' (Berbuir at al, 2014 Op Cit: 12). The subsequent leadership of Petry ramped this narrative up and sharpened its edges, especially during the critical phase of the migrant crisis. Petry advocated the closing of the EU's borders, more intrusive identity checks at the German border, and the construction of camps in the Middle East and Mediterranean to prevent refugees arriving in Germany in the first place. Under her leadership, the AfD stressed the primacy of German *Leitkultur*, or cultural primacy, rejected the idea of Islam as a desirable part of German society, and advocated the banning of minarets. The party's original Euroscepticism was increasingly nested in the wider discourse of right wing populism.

I have already touched upon how difficult it is to sustain the analytical distinction between Euroscepticism and populism in the distinct context of German politics. As the AfD's ideological profile has developed, the blurring of this analytical distinction has become more marked over time. In particular, the two major changes in the leadership of the party has coincided with the open courting of the anti-Islam Pegida movement (Deutsche Welle, 2017) and the Farage-esque technique of explicitly linking the European issue to fears over immigration and a more general xenophobia within sections of the German electorate. Along with the nomination of the bellicose Alexander Gauland as the AfD's lead candidate for the 2017 Federal Election, the party's decision to use the Texas-based Harris Media agency (which had previously worked with UKIP in Britain and the Trump campaign in the USA) in its campaign (Spiegel, 2017) was a powerful symbol of how far the party had moved onto a more orthodox right-wing populist terrain.

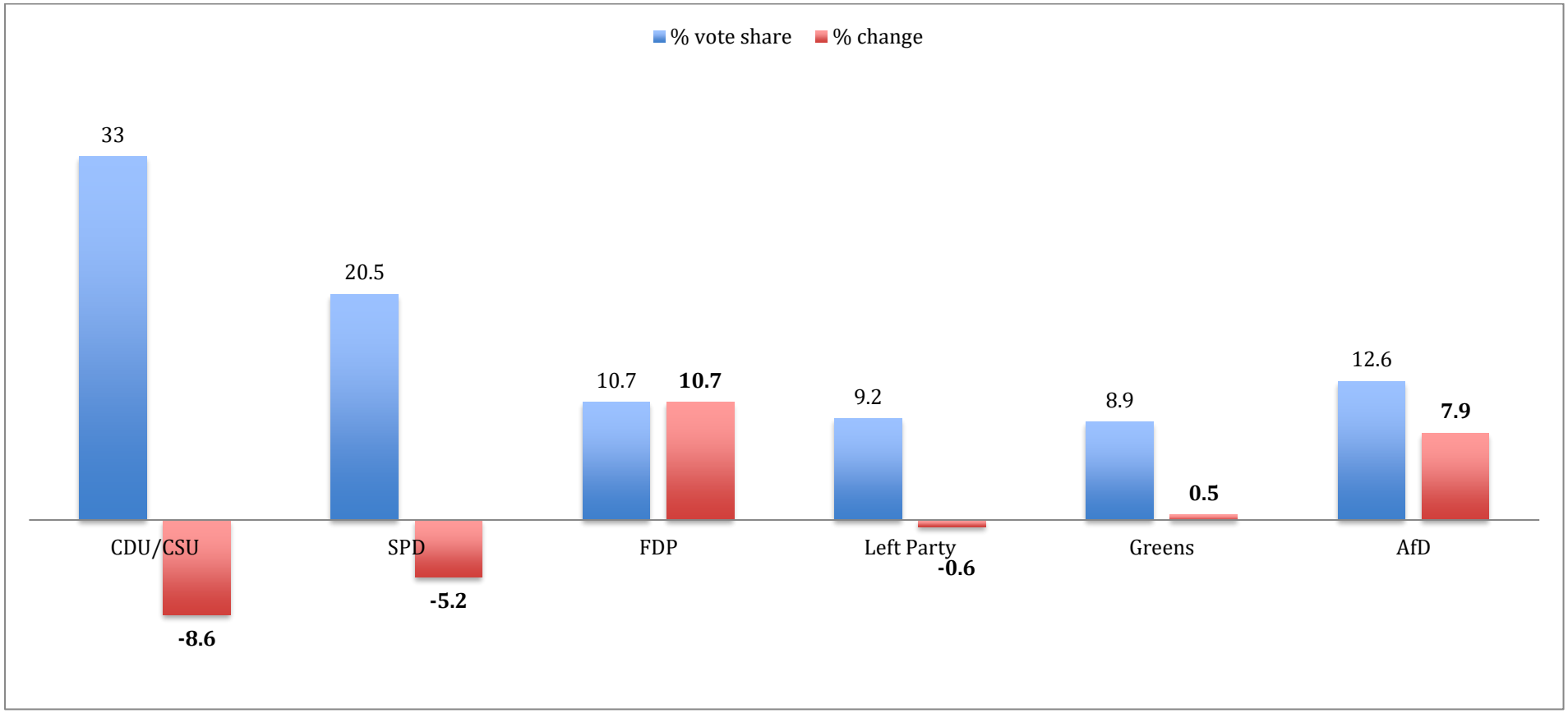
More substantive evidence of this shift was evident in the AfD's electoral program for the 2017 Federal election. Only one out of 11 sections, amounting to three out of the document's 76 pages, was dedicated to the Eurozone. The other ten chapters, including chapters on Islam and its claimed incompatibility with democracy and on the demographic impact of asylum seekers, mention Europe integration but only as a theme nested within a broader populist critique of German society and politics (AfD, 2017a). The AfD's so-called 'short program' for the 2017 Federal elections has a slightly different emphasis – for instance the opening heading of the first chapter declares 'No to a United States of Europe' – but taken in the round the theme of Europe had become fully nested in a wider right wing populist discourse in all but one of the document's 14 chapters and all but two of its 42 pages (AfD, 2017b).

Discussion and Conclusions

This article argues that the AfD increasingly conforms to the orthodox template of a right-wing populist party (Kette, 2016) and that they presented a clear political message to a distinct set of German voters and erstwhile non-voters in the 2017 Federal election. On the basis of what we know this electoral strategy was successful and the AfD is now Germany's third biggest party. The result of the 2017 Federal election was not only a systemic shock that disrupted the process of government formation but also compels us to re-think long-held assumptions about the electoral limits of right wing populism in Germany. In this context, the AfD's success in the 2017 Federal elections is arguably a critical historical juncture in the development of the party system and the contestation of EU integration in the Federal Republic. There is some evidence that AfD voters are less attached to the party than voters who support the other political parties (Hoerner and Hobolt 2017: 5) but this may change if the party is able to consolidate its position in the party system and voting for it becomes more routinized over time. If this were to be the case, then we will be able to argue with certainty that a critical juncture has taken place.

In HI terms, the AfD has managed to break away from the SOPs of the past. The direction of travel of the AfD's programmatic development has been one of progressive radicalization associated with two instances of leadership change within the party. In terms of the 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of this development, it is clear that the Euro crisis provided the initial mobilizing impetus for the AfD's development but it was the migrant crisis of 2015 that drove its radicalization. This further blurred the analytical divide between Euroscepticism and populism in the German context. Because of this, it is hard to draw wider conclusions about its implications for wider debates on party-based Euroscepticism, other than to note the AfD's potential for disruption at the EU level as the main opposition party in the largest and most powerful EU member state. What we can say with some confidence, however, is that the speed of the AfD's organizational and programmatic development has been striking. Right wing populism has reached the heart of Europe and the Eurosceptic dimension of the AfD's profile is one of a number of profoundly disruptive political propositions the party now presents for the Federal Republic's political settlement.

Figure One. The 2017 German Federal election: % vote share and % change since 2013 Federal election



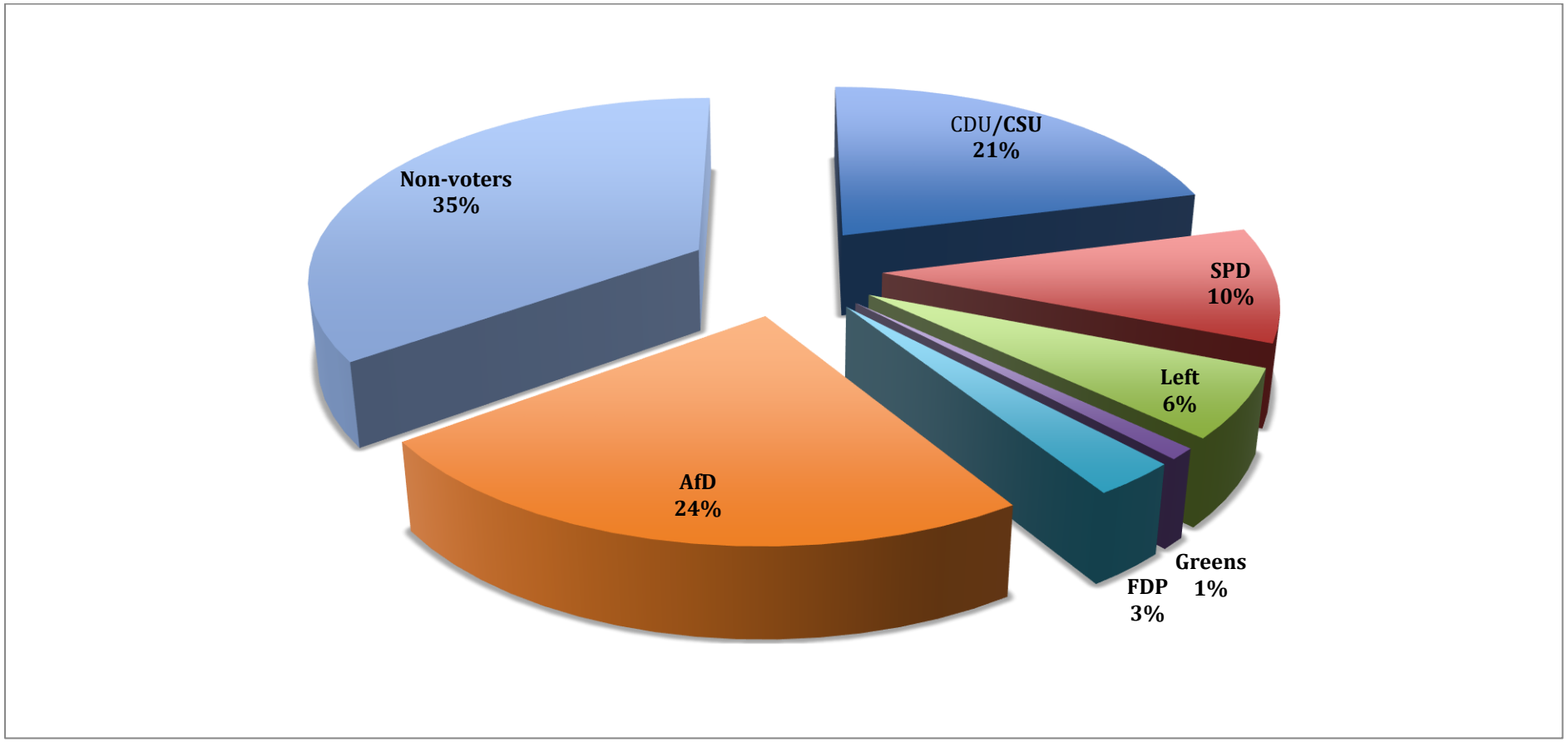
Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2017

Table One. Percentage vote shares for the AfD in the Bundestag and State elections, by individual states, 2013 – 2017

	State	2013 Federal election (second vote) in %	2017 Federal election (second vote) in %	% Change	State elections in %
East	Brandenburg	6.0	20.2	14.2	2014 12.2
	Saxony	6.8	27.0	20.2	2014 9.7
	Saxony-Anhalt	4.2	19.6	15.4	2016 24.3
	Thuringia	6.2	22.7	16.5	2014 10.6
	Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	5.6	18.6	13.0	2016 20.8
West	Baden-Württemberg	5.2	12.2	7.0	2016 15.1
	Bavaria	4.3	12.4	8.1	Due in 2018
	Berlin	4.9	12.0	7.1	2016 14.2
	Bremen	3.7	10.0	6.3	2015 5.5
	Hamburg	4.2	7.8	3.6	2015 6.1
	Hessen	5.6	11.6	6.0	2013 4.1
	North Rhine Westphalia	3.9	9.4	5.5.	2017 7.4
	Lower Saxony	3.7	9.1	5.4	Due in 2018
	Rhineland Palatinate	4.8	11.2	6.4	2016 12.6
	Saarland	5.2	10.1	4.9	2017 6.2
	Schleswig-Holstein	4.6	8.2	3.6	2017 5.9
All		4.7	12.6	7.9	---

Source: Bundeswahlleiter, 2017; adapted by the author.

Figure Two. The 2017 Federal election: breakdown of support for the AfD by voting status in 2013 Federal election



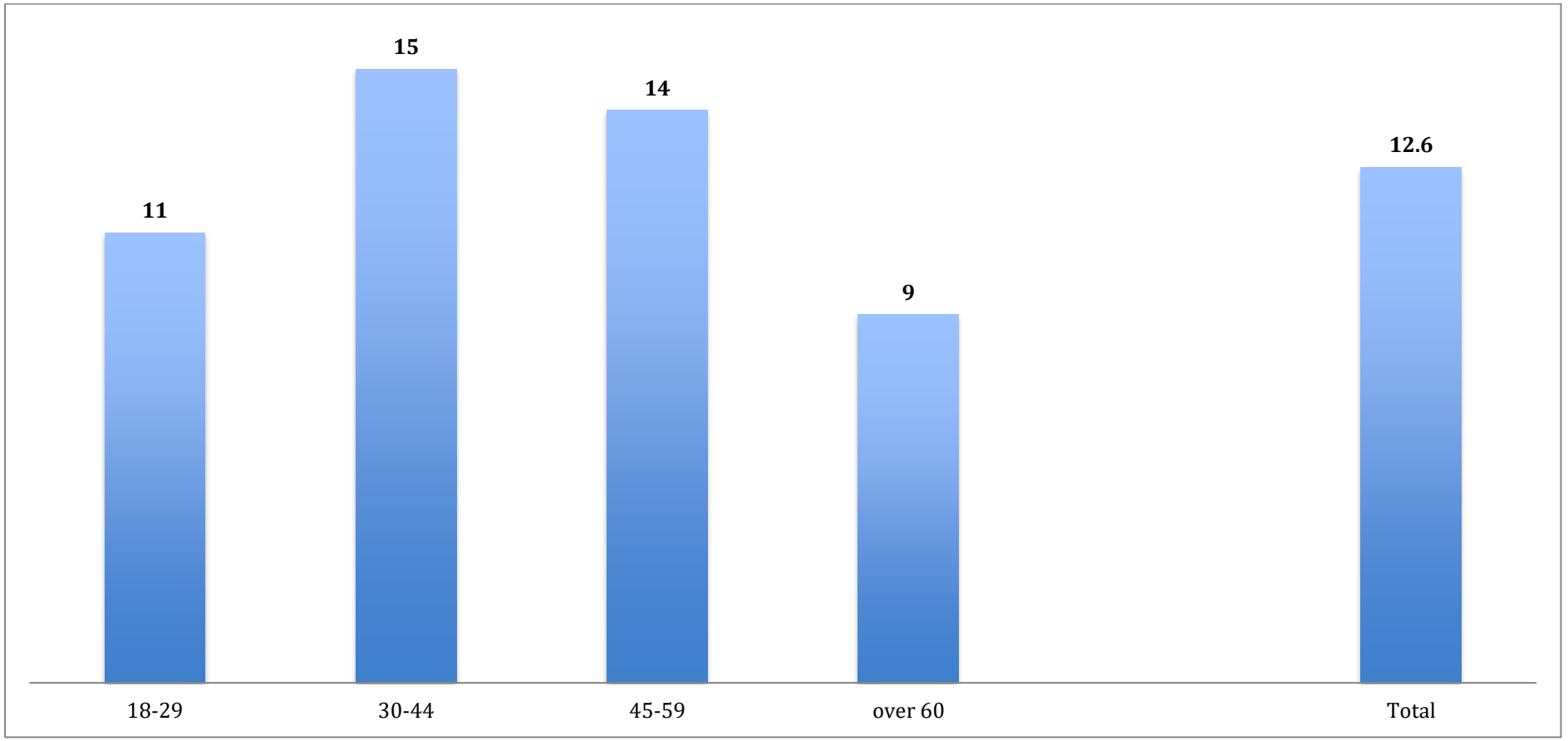
Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2017

Table Two. The 2017 Federal election: % electoral support for the AfD by gender

	East	West
Male	26	13
Female	17	8

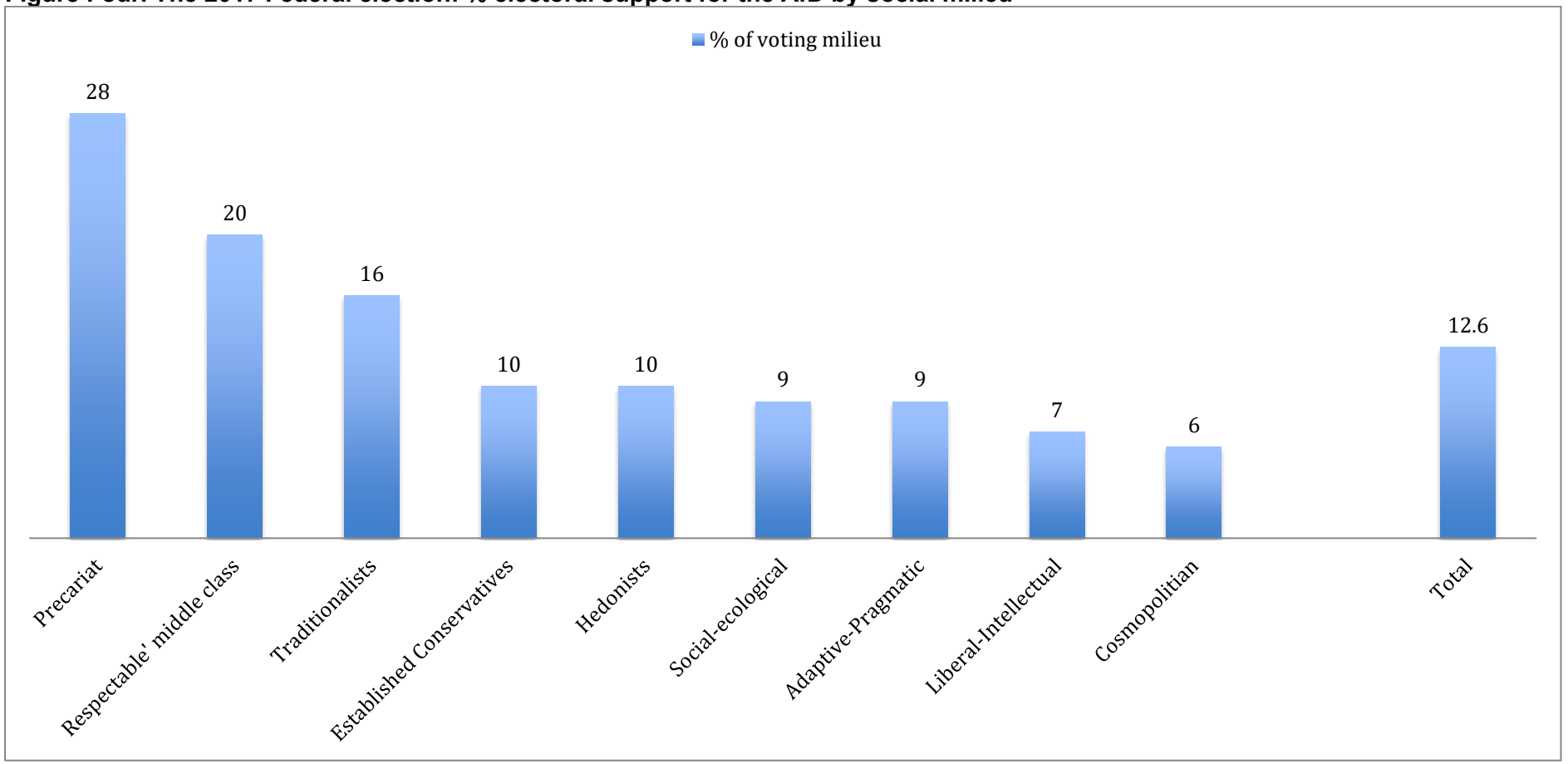
Source: Bundeswahlleiter, 2017

Figure Three. The 2017 Federal election: % electoral support for the AfD by age cohort



Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2017

Figure Four. The 2017 Federal election: % electoral support for the AfD by social milieu



Source: Vehrkamp and Wegschaider, 2017

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