

Defend Democracy

Recommendations for
dealing with AfD


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Publisher:

Amadeu Antonio Stiftung
Novalisstraße 12
10115 Berlin
Phone +49 (0)30. 240 886 10
info@amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de
www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de

Editing: Ibo Muthweiler
Textei Susanne Haldrich; Britta Kollberg
Participation: Kira Ayyadi, Fabian Bechtle, Alina Darmstadt,
Stefan Dietl, Rosa Fava, Leon Kahane, Henrike Koch,
Stefan Lauer, Robert Lüdecke, Jana Michael, Judith Rahner,
Timo Reinfrank, Jan Riebe, Oliver Saal, Viola Schmidt,
Rachel Spicker sowie Tom Waurig und Susanne Kailitz,
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Preface



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“Defend democracy” – a rallying cry that demands an exclamation mark. All too often we seem to take our free and pluralistic society for granted. But for some time now it has been under threat. Ever since 2016 there has been a far-right, extremist presence in the Bundestag – and in every state parliament – that has been undermining and attacking our fundamental democratic rights. Some of our political figures initially seemed to struggle to distance themselves clearly from the provocative media strategies and debating tactics used by these far-right delegates. It was sometimes feared that the extreme right’s strategy would succeed, and that the parliamentary presence of the AfD would function as a way to put pressure on their political opponents, on civic society, and on the parliamentary system itself. Other politicians often let the extremists set the agenda, in political talk shows the AfD leadership smilingly extolled their policies, and rode a wave of controversies that they had provoked.

Now, when we can look back on years of dealing with the AfD, we note some successes, but other instances where the learning curve has been steep. In the wake of the public outrage when FDP candidate Thomas Kemmerich was elected premier of Thüringen by means of AfD votes in February 2020, every politician of all democratic parties should be adamant that it is utterly unacceptable to manoeuvre for power in any way that involves any tactical collaboration with the AfD. The Kemmerich scandal represents a turning point in how the AfD is dealt with.

Numerous representatives of our democratic institutions have thankfully now set out clear positions. One such was President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who has stated that the AfD’s mask of respectability is not to be believed. Similarly, the authorities charged with protection of the constitution have lost patience with the political mimicry that right-wing extremists use while supported by the influence and resources of the AfD, and are turning up the pressure. Official monitoring of the AfD’s “Junge Alternative” section, of the rapidly disbanded extremist “Flügel” section and of the regional Thüringen and Brandenburg associations, all classified as suspicious cases, is sending a clear warning to the party and its associates. These measures give political, governmental and civic figures a good reason to clearly dissociate themselves from the AfD. But more action is needed if we are to truly keep our democracy safe from harm. This must include acts of parliament aimed at supporting democracy, at national and regional levels.

Meanwhile, various institutions of our civic society have recently done important work in clarifying where they stand. More and more organisations – trade unions, lawyers associations, religious communities and environmental groups – have publicly restated their commitment to a democratic culture and opposition to bigotry. They are drawing up mission statements, issuing bans on joint memberships to hinder rightist attempts at infiltration

or annexation, and forming mutual aid networks to better counter hostility from the right. They have learned that it is impossible to be neutral where the constitution is at stake.

At the same time, people across society are now more aware of how their own jobs and functions are tied into our liberal democratic order, and of the many ways in which the enemies of democracy are trying to attack it, this basis of our pluralistic society. Now is the moment to ensure that our democracy is strong enough to weather any storm. This publication now includes analyses and suggested strategies for organisations concerned with economic and social policy, the environment or climate action, as well as mutual aid organisations for recent immigrants. We have also added information about the Desiderius Erasmus Stiftung, a close ally of the AfD.

I believe it is particularly important to retain the insights we have gained structurally, and with a view to the longer term, because these far-right attacks on our democracy will not go away any time soon. As the current extreme-right rabble-rousing against Germany’s anti-corona regulations all too clearly shows. So we need good clear answers to questions such as: What factors help far-right parties and movements thrive and grow? What counter-strategies are actually effective? How can we defend our constitutional democracy against attempts to undermine it, in the long term?

It will be essential to think globally, and learn from each other. Right-wing populist movements have gained a foothold in politics throughout Europe. In Germany, such movements have laid the groundwork for right-wing extremism and fatal far-right attacks – other countries should take this as a warning.

We are watching the continued factional struggles in the AfD closely, but it is vital to keep in mind that “moderate elements” which have been tolerated for years in a far-right party are not in fact moderate at all. Right-wing extremist figures in the AfD are still setting the agenda within the party and about the party – although there have been a series of largely fake attempts to isolate these figures, some have been expelled from the party, and the extremist “Flügel” section has been officially disbanded. The AfD is still as dangerous as ever, especially in places

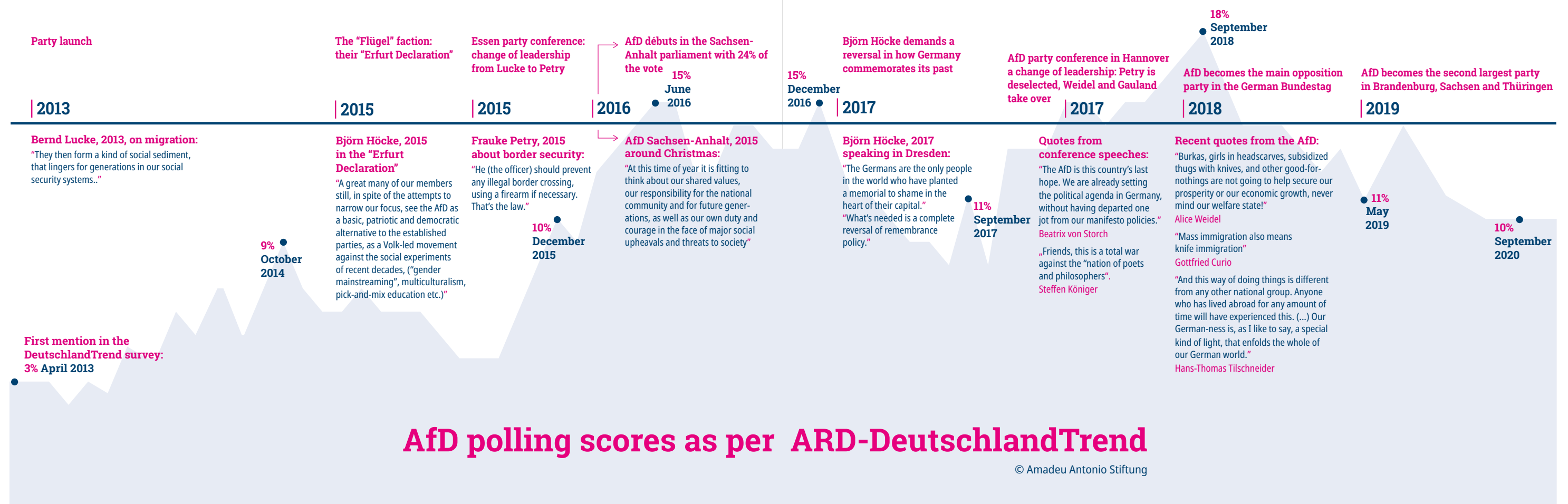
where it is established in local councils and provides resources and structure for the far-right. Throughout the country, the AfD has triggered and inspired all kinds of intolerant discourse and activity. It is normalising bigotry, and legitimising violence to promote its ideology. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the numerous controversies concerning right-wing extremism in the party, the AfD has managed to construct a community that sees the AfD as the best election option, and as appropriate parliamentary representation.

We must not tolerate this, but at the same time we should not exaggerate the size of this demographic. Only recently it has been evident that the AfD has not managed to put its stamp on the protests against the corona regulations, or to commandeer a leading role in them. The party is too self-absorbed, and has too broad an ideological focus. If your political activity is mainly driven by resentment, you will find it difficult to be seen as having something to say about broader, more far-reaching issues. And one thing above all has become obvious now that the AfD has been active in the Bundestag for four years: the party is concerned with fighting a culture war from the right, and not at all interested in the democratic political process. This self-styled “Alternative” is no alternative at all: no other party concurs with other parties’ motions as often as the AfD.

We would once more like to thank everyone involved with this publication, including our staff at the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung as well as all the activists and experts from the spheres of science, art, journalism, law and government who have made such valuable contributions.

We would appreciate any feedback, and are ready to offer support and advice whenever it may be needed.

Timo Reinfrank
Executive Director of the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung



The rise of the AfD – a story of radicalisation

As of 2013, the AfD has supposedly offered an “Alternative for Germany”. And it has been quite successful: by December 2018 the party was represented in all 16 state parliaments and in the European Parliament, and had entered the lower house of the national parliament in 2017. Initially enjoying a steady rise in popularity, with a peak poll rating of 18% in September 2018, the party has more recently lost considerable ground, sinking to 10% popularity in September 2020. One reason for this is that the AfD has not managed to present a consistent response to the challenges posed by the Corona pandemic: some sections of the party tried in vain to place themselves in the vanguard of protests against the government’s protective measures, and actively promoted that movement, others complained that the

lockdown had come too late and had not been far-reaching enough.¹ The party is currently also being damaged by its internal entrenched conflicts between its more purportedly moderate representatives and its more ethnocentric/nationalist elements. These led, for example, to the AfD losing its parliamentary group status in the three state parliaments of Bremen, Schleswig-Holstein and Niedersachsen by the end of 2020. But this does not make the AfD any less dangerous.

Its party conferences, the activities of AfD parliamentarians in the federal states, and statements made by party leaders demonstrate that the AfD is anything but what it claims to be: an alternative. The history of the party is a history of radicalisation. The ethnocentric, nationalist, racist and sometimes anti-Semitic ideas that have gained currency in Germany’s mainstream political discourse since the AfD gained seats in the Bundestag, if not before, have been a fundamental part of the party’s ideology since its inception. The AfD is the parliamentary arm of what is referred to as the “new” right-wing,

and so is part of a highly diverse political grouping that also encompasses, for example, the far-right “Identitarian movement” and the far-right network “Ein Prozent” as well as protest groups such as “PEGIDA” and “Zukunft Heimat”. These groups, including the AfD, pursue the strategy of permanently shifting the boundaries of what it is permissible to assert in German society. This is leading not only to the normalisation of much more inhuman language in the various parliaments, in newspaper commentary and in the political discourse as a whole, but also to a situation in which the situation of people of colour, the LGBTQIA+ community and the Jewish population in Germany is concretely threatened.

Extremist professors

The AfD was founded in February 2013 in Oberursel, Hessen, by economics professor Bernd Lucke and 17 other men. It was initially known in the media as the “professors’ party”. At the time, Lucke was a popular guest on talk shows where he generally decried the

federal government’s handling of the Euro and the financial crisis in Greece. He would also describe the established political parties as “used up”, and claim that there was a threat posed by migrants, who he said made up “the dregs of society”. Although migration was not a central issue for the AfD at the time, it did seem to touch a nerve amongst potential party adherents. A study carried out by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research shows that right from the party’s beginnings, AfD voters held more extreme views than the rest of the population.² As early as December 2013, a good 70 percent of AfD voters were against Germany taking in people with refugee status. The party’s racism and hatred of other groups of people are not recent developments: they are part of the party’s ideological core.

Only three of the 18 founding fathers are still members of the party today. Issues around the Euro and the consequences of the financial crisis quickly faded from interest. Elements of the party recognised that although their own voters were against the Euro and the EU, greater

numbers of Germans could be reached through racism and the maligning of minorities. By its first anniversary, this self-declared “alternative” party, often defined by the media as a “Eurosceptics’ protest party” had become a holding pen for a miscellany of right-wing and far-right tendencies.

At around this time, Holger Arppe, then spokesman for the AfD in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, was prosecuted for incitement of racial hatred, on the basis that he had for years advocated violence against Muslims in the comments of the Islamophobic blog “PI-News”.³ In the Duisburg city council, AfD delegates had lent support to an NPD candidate⁴, and Jan-Ulrich Weiß from the Brandenburg AfD was charged with incitement to racial hatred after posting an anti-Semitic caricature on Facebook.⁵ In an interview with BILD, Lucke described these as a “relatively large number of isolated cases”, and attempted to paint the nationalist-conservative wing or “Fluegel” of the party, then gathering around Frauke Petry, as a marginal element. However, Petry had been nominated party spokeswomen at the AfD’s 2015 conference in Essen. Lucke announced his departure from the party on the evening of this interview.

Stirring up the headlines

In 2015, almost 890,000 people came to Germany seeking respite from war, inequality and persecution. The AfD exploited the associated challenges to their own ends. The Greece- and Euro-related crises became yesterday’s news, and the party pounced on a new key issue that would gain them followers in right-wing circles: refugees. Following the departure of Lucke in summer 2015, the AfD’s poll rating fell to under three percent but the party’s increasingly extremist positioning attracted support from the right-wing fringe. By autumn, the AfD had already climbed back up to seven percent in the polls, by means of racist rabble-rousing. Events in Cologne on the night of New Year’s Eve 2015 provided a tipping point. That evening several women were sexually assaulted at Domplatte in the city centre. The attackers were conjectured to be recent immigrants. The resultant criminal proceedings are still dragging on, and there is still no clear picture of what actually happened or who was involved. Right-wing populists and extremists exploited this occurrence to disseminate and profit from a myth that male refugees had a “tendency to commit sexual violence” and thus represented a danger to “German”

women. And the attacks were also used as the occasion for a general attack on what were called the “established parties”, focussing however on the CDU, its leading figures, and Chancellor Angela Merkel. Frauke Petry wrote on Facebook: “Is Germany “cosmopolitan and diverse” enough for you, Frau Merkel, now there has been this spate of felonies and sexual assaults?” Björn Höcke issued a similar accusation: “Merkel is responsible for these attacks by gangs of immigrants on women in Cologne and other German cities.”⁶

A prime example of the AfD’s strategy of showcasing indignation with regard to refugees, and of how this involved the violation of usual moral constraints, was delivered by Marcus Pretzell, then an AfD Euro-MP and party chair for Nordrhein-Westfalen, Frauke Petry, and the then Euro-MP Beatrix von Storch in January 2016. Pretzell declared, first at a party event and then to a DPA journalist, that “the defence of Germany’s borders, by the use of weapons as a last resort” would be “a wholly uncontroversial measure”.⁷ Petry backed this statement, and, when asked in an interview with the regional newspaper Mannheimer Morgen how a border guard should react to an “illegal” crossing, responded: “He should prevent any illegal border crossing, using a firearm if necessary. That’s the law.”⁸ Following this, when asked on her Facebook page if women and children should also be shot in this manner, Beatrix von Storch answered simply: “Yes”. Frauke Petry later claimed her words had been misrepresented.

An email written by Petry was subsequently disclosed that revealed the underlying strategy: “Pointed, even provoking statements are essential in gaining the ear of the media. They first garner us the necessary attention and the media’s focus for a while, so that we can then be portrayed more knowledgeably and more fully.”⁹

The strategy proved fruitful: in 2016 local elections in four states and in Berlin brought the AfD results in double figures. They made the largest gains in Sachsen-Anhalt (24.3%) and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (20.8%), becoming the second biggest faction in both places. These wins bolstered the party as a whole, but most especially the state-level organisations in Eastern Germany, whom observers regard as particularly extremist.

Racism and anti-Semitism in the parliaments and on the streets

In Baden-Württemberg in 2016, the anti-Semitic theories of AfD regional delegate Wolfgang Gedeon, which had long been a matter of public knowledge, and known to friends of the party, were finally made more widely known. There was talk of excluding him from the party, but no action initially followed. Ultimately, Gedeon left the parliamentary group of his own accord, but remained a party member until March 2020 – only then was he expelled by an internal arbitration board. The political scientist Hajo Funke described this process as a “pretence”, as even after formally leaving the parliamentary group, Gedeon continued to work with it. And “pretences” like this are an integral part of party strategy. A series of party expulsion proceedings have been initiated vis-à-vis AfD members who have displayed particularly extremist views, but very few of these have achieved any result, and most are not even concluded. However, the mere existence of such procedures enables the party to claim that action is being taken against the extremists amongst its ranks.

While this was going on, Frauke Petry was under increasing pressure. The AfD’s national conference of April 2017 in Cologne showed similarities with the Essen conference of 2015 only this time instead of Bernd Lucke, Petry was removed from power. Petry’s aim had been to make the party capable of functioning in government in the longer term. But the delegates decided that the role of the AfD was to act as a permanent opposition party. Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel were nominated as primary candidates for the Bundestag elections in September 2017, at which the party garnered 12.6% of second (party list) votes, and made its Bundestag début with 94 deputies. On the day after the election, Petry stated that she would be serving as an independent delegate from then on. Shortly afterwards she announced her departure from the AfD.

The deliberately provocative derogatory statements by right-wing extremists outside and inside the various parliaments had their intended effect. And the party continued to rise in the polls, while Gauland described “Hitler and the Nazis” and thus also the Holocaust, as a “bird crap on more than a thousand years of successful German history”¹⁰ and the then chair of the Bundestag judiciary committee Stephan Brandner took to Twitter to threaten the artists of the “Zentrum für politische Schönheit” collective with a machete.

The riots in Chemnitz, which drew national attention, were a key moment in this phase of radicalisation. They were triggered by the killing of Daniel H., who was stabbed on 25 August 2018, allegedly by Farhad A. and Alaa S.



*“Refugees Welcome! Stop the AfD”: in March 2013 Berliners took a clear stand against the rightward drift in politics.
© imago images/epd*



Björn Höcke alongside Lutz Bachmann (“PEGIDA”) on the so-called “memorial march”. © imago images/Kai Horstman

The following day saw a massive mobilisation of far-right groups, who used the foreign heritage of the alleged offenders to parade their racist slogans on the streets. On the Sunday right after the attack, 800 right-wing extremists gathered in Chemnitz and marched together through the town, and 6000 demonstrators arrived the very next day. Security forces lost control of this demonstration, which resulted in various right-wing extremists and other participants hounding political opponents and people they assumed to be migrants through the streets. On the same day, the AfD’s regional associations in Thüringen, Sachsen and Sachsen-Anhalt

began to mobilize for a “march of silence”. An alliance comprising those three associations, “Pro Chemnitz” and “PEGIDA” brought out 4500 people to Chemnitz on 1 September, in a demonstration which saw AfD representatives such as Björn Höcke, André Poggenburg (still a party member at the time), Uwe Junge and Andreas Kalbitz appear alongside notorious right-wing extremists like Maik Arnold (formerly of the “Nationale Sozialisten Chemnitz”), Christian Fischer (formerly of “Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend”) and the violence-prone neo-Nazis Lasse Richei and Pierre Bauer from Braunschweig.¹¹ Figures associated with the so-called “new” right-wing, such as Götz Kubitschek, owner of the “new”-right publishing house Antaios Verlag, and the leader of Austria’s “Identitäre Bewegung Österreich”, Martin Sellner, were also present. During this demonstration, the crowd chanted the neo-Nazi slogan “Free, social, national” alongside the usual AfD catchphrases “Merkel out”, “Resistance” and “The media lies”.¹² Chemnitz witnessed the AfD publicly closing ranks with extreme right-wing groups.

Popularity – hindered or helped by radicalisation

The images from Chemnitz made those media and politician who had initially presumed that most voters were choosing the AfD as a form of protest reconsider their assumptions. As the party grew more and more extremist, only to gain in popularity as it did so, surveys questioning voters’ motives, and contemporary academic studies showed that the AfD could no longer be confidently categorised as a party of protest.¹³ But rather, it turns out that the AfD’s constituency is not significantly different from that of other parties, AfD voters are not necessarily people left behind by social institutions, and party supporters are to be found in every socio-economic class. A study carried out by the German Socio-Economic Panel shows that neither educational attainment nor economic considerations effect the likelihood of voting for the AfD.¹⁴ The decisive factor is in fact racism. The more racist a person’s attitudes, the more narrow-minded they are and the more they are focussed on their own personal well-being, the more likely they are to vote for a far-right party.

Defamation of political opponents

However, the party is also, and especially, extremist in terms of how it interacts with its political opponents. The AfD most usually mocks the established parties by calling them “old parties”, but does not hold back from more personal attacks. An AfD regional delegate in the Bavarian parliament, Ralph Müller, has referred to Angela Merkel as a “Stasi, snooping chancellor.”¹⁵ After Bundestag delegate Renate Künast (Greens) called for the public to support a counter demo planned for an AfD gathering in Berlin Daniel Freiherr von Lützow, a member of the party’s Brandenburg executive committee wrote on Facebook: “This is the usual hatred for Germany, from a woman who can’t wait to go and live with her best friend Roth and a load of young africanwrn (sic!).”¹⁶ The verbal abuse sometimes escalates: in 2015, a member of the AfD executive committee in Saalfeld Rudolstadt was caught in the act of spraying the local election office for Thüringen parliamentary delegate with the words “K. König you far-left whore”, “To the devil with communist devil-spawn” and “scum”. The man subsequently vacated his role in the party.¹⁷

No end to increasing radicalisation in sight

At their party conference in late 2019 the right-wing nationalist and ethnocentric “Fluegel” faction of the AfD, in which Björn Höcke is a central player, demonstrated its influence in the party when Tino Chrupalla, a candidate from Sachsen with support from this “Fluegel” took over as party chair from Alexander Gauland, who did not run for the office. Similarly, the office of deputy chair was won by Stephan Brandner, also an adherent of the extremist “Fluegel”, against competition from Uwe Junge and Georg Pazderski, both regarded as critics of Höcke. Brandner had recently been deselected as chair of the Bundestag judiciary committee on the grounds that he had repeatedly made derogatory and contemptuous statements about minority demographics. No such procedure had occurred before in the history of the Bundestag.

Shortly after this conference in March 2020, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution officially categorised the extremist “Fluegel” as a far-right group and placed it under observation. The grouping, which had formed a loose alliance within the party, subsequently formally disbanded following a ruling from the AfD’s

national executive committee. However, experts see this apparent dissolution as merely a “ploy” which will not affect the influence exerted by the ethnocentric/nationalist tendency in the party centred around Höcke.^{18 19} This was also the conclusion reached by leading constitutional protection officials in Niedersachsen and Thüringen who described the break-up of the faction as “mere window-dressing”²⁰ and “a smokescreen”²¹. As the party did not distance itself in any way from the ideology of the faction, its dissolution was ultimately only a move to appease critics, allowing the “Fluegel” to continue its activities without the old label.

At the same time, the official observation by Office for the Protection of the Constitution served to fan the flames of the party’s internal power struggles. A key issue in this conflict is how the party should orient itself going forward: ethnocentric/nationalist tendency aims to establish the AfD as a popularly based movement, its purportedly more moderate representatives want to limit its scope to the sphere of parliamentary politics. The expulsion of former Brandenburg party chair Andreas Kalbitz in May 2020 was a significant setback for the ethnocentric/nationalist tendency, as Kalbitz had been an influential player in the former “Fluegel” faction. AfD national spokesman Meuthen had played a key role in Kalbitz’s expulsion, as part of a purely tactical calculation: like many in the party he wants to avoid a situation in which the whole party could be placed under observation by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Kalbitz’s expulsion is supposed to signal that the party is distancing itself from far-right extremism, but this is scarcely to be believed, as the move constitutes only a matter of form – there has been no examination within the party of the actual substance of Kalbitz’s pejorative pronouncements. On the contrary, there are wide areas where Kalbitz’s and Meuthen’s views overlap.

It is absolutely vital that democratic politicians and civil society as a whole clearly and substantively distance ourselves, in a confident manner, from anti-democratic, racist, anti-Semitic, anti-feminist, homophobic and transphobic viewpoints. The state and our civil society must make it clear that those people who feel themselves threatened by the AfD will be supported and defended, and that hate can in no way be considered an alternative for Germany.

The AfD – a contemporary, far-right party

Although the AfD was regarded as right-wing populist for quite some time, the demonstrations in Chemnitz where top AfD officials openly appeared

alongside right-wing extremists showed that it was high time for a re-evaluation. Thus the term “right-wing populism” could very well have the effect of de-emphasising the crux of what today’s AfD is actually about. Nonetheless, some people find it difficult to assign a clear clear-cut categorisation to the party, perhaps due to the continuing policy conflicts between sections of the party (an ever-shrinking fraction) who are seen as primarily neo-liberal and often regarded as the AfD’s moderate wing, and those elements with a clear ethnocentric orientation, supporters mainly of the Thüringen party chair Höcke.

These apparent inconsistencies however may prevent a clear view of what is actually important and can also be construed as deliberate distractions. Racism and a rejection of liberal democracy are the AfD’s unifying components of the AfD, which all regional associations and internal factions have in common. These core common denominators form the foundation of the party and help it cohere. It is accurate to refer to the AfD of today as a contemporary far-right party, due to its hostility to fundamental liberal values, and its repeatedly articulated acceptance of violence.

This categorisation is founded upon the sum total of the political positions which are put forth in and by this party. So although supporters of the AfD must not necessarily be seen as far-right themselves, they are at least supporters of a far-right party.

Interviewed by Spiegel magazine in September 2019, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated that “Each party must decide where they mean to position themselves; whether they are ethnocentric and collectivist or open-minded and civic. It is not possible to be both.” He went on to say that civic society, constitutional democracy and individual civil liberties are all inextricably linked. “If you consider yourself part of this tradition, you cannot at the same time give credence to any exclusionary, authoritarian, or, worse, ethnocentric ideology. Such an ideology is the opposite of civic: it is “anti-civic.”

Because it rejects liberal democracy and repeatedly shows that it accepts violence, today’s AfD should be referred to as a contemporary far-right party.

Opposing immigration and diversity

Hostility to immigration into Germany, and to ethnic and cultural diversity is a core preoccupation of the AfD. In their manifesto for the Bundestag elections, and in their activities in the Bundestag to date, the AfD deploy racist stereotypes. They consistently refer to a supposed threat posed by “criminal foreigners” and present this as a “major problem”.²² These claims always contain a recurring and open denigration of people whom the AfD portray as “foreigners”, as derived directly from neo-racism disseminated by the “new” right-wing. The AfD considers ancestry to be the determining factor in deciding who is “German” and who is not – as their Bundestag election manifesto illustrates.

Neo-racism is a “contemporary” variety of racism. It claims that there are ethnic and cultural characteristics which inescapably define a person. This is why adherents of this ideology claim that Muslims in particular do not “fit” Europe and must be excluded from it. The AfD expands on this racist attitude in their manifesto by claiming that controlled migration is “ethically indefensible”. This ideology cannot be reconciled with the humanist and democratic values of the German constitution.

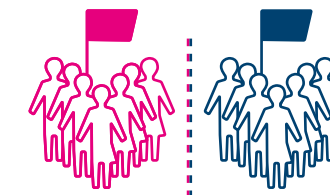
See also: www.idz-jena.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Factsheet_Identitaerer_Neorassismus.pdf

Far-right extremism

Based on Cas Mudde’s definition of the “populist radical right” (2016)

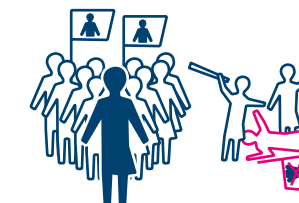
nativist

in terms of the idea that a state can only be inhabited by those people who were born within its territory, or who are declared to belong to that state. People to whom this does not apply can and must be excluded.



authoritarian

in terms of the conviction that it is essential to follow one united leadership. Resistance and criticism must be punished, so that the claim to leadership can be executed. Unconditional obedience is elevated to a moral obligation.



populist

in terms of the exaggerated simplification of society into two opposing sides: an idealized “us” – (the Volk) and a demonized “them” (the elites). The interests of the “us” group are expressed by the “will of the people”.



Quotes from AfD figures

“Today we show tolerance, tomorrow we’re strangers in our own country.”
Alexander Gauland

“Merkel, that whore, is letting anyone in, she can do that. It’s just unfortunate that it is the body of OUR people that is being violently penetrated. [What’s happening] is a genocide, which will be accomplished in less than ten years, if we don’t stop these criminals.”
Peter Boehringer

“The day will come when we will bring all the ignorant, all the supporters, appeaser, advocates and activists of this “culture of welcome” to account, in the name of its innocent victims. That’s what I live for and work towards. So help me God!”
Uwe Junge

“If you live in a country where you are penalized for fishing without a licence, but not for illegally crossing a border without a valid passport, you have every right in the world to say that this country is governed by idiots.”
Alice Weidel

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The absolute authority of the “Volk”

The party is becoming increasingly extremist as the influence of the ethno-centric/nationalist tendency in the party centred around Thüringen party chair Björn Höcke expands. Höcke has repeatedly made racist statements in the past. For example, in a position paper issued by the AfD group in the Thüringen parliament, he railed against “mixing the German population with people of a different skin colour”. This phrase implies that group affiliation is a matter of biology, i.e. immutable, and also exaggerates its significance. Moreover, it is based on the premise that there is in reality such a thing as a homogeneous “Volk”, or indigenous ethnic group or “people”, in Germany, members of which have certain particular characteristics and behaviours. The diversity of the human population is thus whittled down into crude ethnic and national “identities”. The rights of “ethnic Germans” is posited as the most important remit of all political activity.

This supposedly biologically determined German “Volk” (or “people”) is, according to the AfD’s national manifesto, in danger. In the various parliaments, their obsession with the “Volk” is demonstrated for example by their queries as to whether there is any link between migration and disabilities or their proposal to officially survey the numbers of certain demographics such as gay people (in Thüringen)²³ or Sinti and Roma (in Sachsen).²⁴

**Es geht uns alle an:
Wachsam sein für Menschlichkeit**

Wir sind entsetzt über die Anfrage der AfD im Deutschen Bundestag zur Schwerbehinderung in Deutschland. Die Fraktion der AfD erkundigt sich vordergründig nach der Zahl behinderter Menschen in Deutschland, suggeriert dabei jedoch in böswärtiger Weise einen abwegigen Zusammenhang von Inzucht, behinderten Kindern und Migranten und Migranten.

Es vermittelt sich darüber hinaus die Grundhaltung, Behinderung sei ein zu vermeidendes Übel.

Die Anfrage der AfD-Fraktion erinnert damit an die dunkelsten Zeiten der deutschen Geschichte, in denen Menschen mit Behinderung das Lebensrecht aberkannt wurde und sie zu Hunderttausenden Opfer des Nationalsozialismus wurden.

Wir rufen die Bevölkerung auf, wachsam zu sein und sich entschlossen gegen diese unerträgliche Menschen- und Lebensfeindlichkeit zu stellen. Wir sagen „Nein“ zu jeder Abwertung von Menschen mit Behinderung und zu jeglicher Form des Rassismus. Ideologien der Ungleichwertigkeit menschlichen Lebens haben keinen Platz in diesem Land.



Der Paritätische (V.i.S.d.P.) www.vielalt-diese-alternative.de

In response to a parliamentary query from the AfD group in the Bundestag, charities put out an eye-catching advert opposing the denigration of people with disabilities and ideologies that identify some people as superior to others.

The assertion that there exists a supposedly homogeneous German “Volk” is a core concept in far-right and right-wing extremist ideologies and in garnering support for these ideologies. Groups of people that can be defined by the AfD as belonging to this imaginary “Volk” are portrayed as being in contention with “corrupt elites” and with liberal, pluralistic society as a whole. Alexander Gauland’s declaration after the latest general elections, “We will hunt them”²⁵ is, in view of the events in Chemnitz and how recently after the election it was uttered, just one further step down the road to extremism. The AfD is playing off the lowest common denominator uniting their adherents, namely their supposed “German-ness” against the way that society is progressing. Anyone who cannot or does not want to belong to the “true community of the Volk”, as dreamt up by the far-right imagine is despised by these extremists as an “enemy of the Volk”, a “traitor to the Volk”, or described as “controlled by foreign forces” or “manipulated”, and is considered an enemy. This ethnocentric mindset encompasses anti-feminist and misogynist ideas in addition to the AfD’s fundamental racist focus. The AfD regards policies furthering equity as an obstacle to their demographic policies.

An ethnocentric culture war

In evaluating what the AfD says and does, it must be remembered that Germany’s extreme right believes itself to be fighting a culture war – and its objective is to install a cultural hegemony. To this end, it is making use of some of the central pillars of liberal democracy (freedom of opinion, representative participation etc.), in order to replace this liberal democracy with an authoritarian system. So therefore there is a fundamental difference between carrying on a discussion between democrats who hold differing opinions, and debating with enemies of democracy, who see freedom of opinion as a weakness of liberal democracy and want to use this right as a weapon with which to destroy this institution. The ultimate aim of this ethnocentric culture war is the establishment of an authoritarian system in which civil society no longer exists, but has been replaced by an “uncivil” society, governed by strict parameters set by the state.

This objective is reflected in numerous speeches and parliamentary proposals by the AfD which make clear just how much they are disconcerted by their dependence on civil society. But as even the AfD and the

so-called “new” right comprehend that a cultural hegemony can only be installed very gradually and by means of cunning strategy, they focus on certain particular pillars of our current social set-up, which are publicly called into question, painted as controversial and used as attempted examples.

The AfD’s strategy of provocatively stretching the bounds of what is statements and actions are currently acceptable is a core element in this culture war. This culture war necessitates a division of labour between the parliamentarians of the AfD and the extra-parliamentary right-wing extremists within and outside of the party. Götz Kubitschek, a prominent ideologue in the so-called “new” right, set out their game plan explicitly: “Before Höcke, Gauland, Weidel or Kalbitz can bring something that has been made usual into play, it has to be normalised by people who don’t have to be elected.”²⁶ This “normalisation” that Kubitschek describes is nothing less than the step-by-step implementation of a far-right idea of how society should be. Accordingly, the so-called “new” Right makes no bones about the fact that their aim is to preserve or resurrect inequalities which they see as “inherent”, such as gender inequality and socio-economic inequity – alongside the engineering of an “ethnically homogeneous” German population. The AfD has plainly stated how these aims are to be brought about. For example, in reply to a statement by Aydan Özoguz, Federal Commissioner for Immigration, Refugees and Integration, that “there is no specifically definable “German”, outside of the German language”, Gauland said publicly: “That’s according to a Turkish-German. Invite her down to Eichsfeld and we’ll tell her what specifically German culture is. Then she’ll never come back, and we’ll be able to dispose of her in Anatolia thank God.”²⁷

Populist momentum

Whereas political populism usually focuses on conflict between the “elite” and the “populace”, the AfD has concocted a confrontation between “the people’s one true voice of opposition” (AfD) and all the other parties. In this unconditional conflict between the “Volk” and the “traitors to the Volk”, it is once again very apparent that the AfD is making use of the momentum of populism to establish themselves as opponents of the state, its institutions and its representatives. Markus Frohnmaier, a Bundestag delegate and spokesman for Alice Weidel made this clear as early as 2015, in a speech in Erfurt. He referred to the other parties as “one great mass of

corruption”, and announced: “When we get there, we’ll clean up, we’ll muck out, and we’ll go back to making laws that are for the people and only for the people – because, friends, we are the Volk.”²⁸

This example shows how the party are supplementing their ethnocentric agenda with an authoritarian concept of democracy. In this context, the AfD’s populism primarily fulfils a strategic function, as a way of more effectively presenting their modernised, right-wing extremist ideology to the general public. Their mask of civic respectability allows them to distance themselves in the public eye from neo-Nazi groups such as the NPD, in contrast to whom the AfD portrays itself as less extremist and thus potentially electable. It should be pointed out that the party has won over a larger voter base than preceding extreme-right groupings and parties like the NPD. On the other hand, the populist momentum in the party is leading into an ethnocentric agenda with an anti-pluralist claim to be the only party to represent “the real Volk”.

Anyone who publicly calls this image into question is insulted and derided, be they politicians, media figures, trade unionists, scientists, religious leaders, civic organisations, movements or associations, representatives of the judiciary and the courts, or simply members of the public who do not agree with the AfD’s claim to sole representation. This deeply authoritarian arrogation of status must be resolutely opposed by political parties and by civic society as a whole.

The AfD as an antidemocratic party

The constitutional protection authorities of the German federal states came to a similar conclusion in early 2019, as did the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) when it announced that the AfD was to be listed as a test case. The President of the BfV set out four key areas in which the AfD’s behaviour had given cause for concern: in infringing the principle of the inviolability of human dignity, and the principles of upholding democracy and the rule of law, and by engaging in revisionism about the Nazi era. In February the AfD successfully appealed against their official categorisation as a constitutional test case, so that the BfV is no longer permitted to refer to the party as a test case.

The court took this decision on the grounds that the BfV is not supposed to publicly disclose that a party is being put under observation – And thus did not pass any judgement on the validity of the BfV’s decision in itself. In its assessment of the party, the BfV affirmed that the AfD as a whole had demonstrated questionable behaviours which justified official investigation. For example, that “certain top-level party officials repeatedly [make use of] terms which at least show parallels to extremist right-wing discourse”. Taken as a whole, the BfV continued, this gave a clear impression that the AfD aims to bring about a society in which “the status of the individual [...] is subordinated to the status of a certain collective, in the present case that of the German Volk, a body which the party asserts is worthy of protection”. This, the BfV asserts, is “not reconcilable with the guarantee of human dignity enshrined in the constitution”.²⁹ However the report came to the conclusion that is it not currently possible to categorise the AfD unambiguously as an anti-constitutional body above and beyond those grounds for suspicion listed above, in view of the significant role of the political parties in general and the democratic representation currently performed by the AfD.

However, this restrained evaluation does not apply to every component of the AfD. In March 2020, when categorising the “Fluegel” faction as far-right, the BfV declared that: “The political positions adopted by the “Section” are irreconcilable with the German constitution”.³⁰ The Federal Agency based its conclusion on, amongst other things, the multiple occasions on which Fluegel adherents had infringed on the inviolability of human dignity and “their systematic collaboration with the right-wing-extremist milieu”.³¹ At the same time, the BfV categorised the whole of the AfD’s Thüringen regional association as a suspicious organisation, and shortly after, the Brandenburg regional association was added to that list. The AfD’s youth organisation “Junge Alternative” has been under observation as a suspicious organisation since January 2019.

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution considers the AfD to have potentially violated the constitution by infringing the principle of the inviolability of human dignity, and the principles of upholding democracy and the rule of law, and by engaging in revisionism about the Nazi era.

The AfD and the general public

The AfD has an ambivalent relationship to the established mainstream media: On the one hand, the party decries the media as “Lügenpresse” (liars), “blind-spot afflicted” and Pinocchios” and claims that it is unfairly treated by the media. It has harshly criticised the publicly funded radio stations: the AfD’s national manifesto says that they are undemocratic and their funding is forced upon the taxpayer. On the other hand, no other party has so frequently been able to showcase their own concerns, especially on the public broadcasters’ programming. In these broadcasts, the AfD acts according to an effective rhetorical strategy: “Provocative statement – retraction – restatement of the provocation”. This ensures that they maintain a high profile in the media.

Concurrently, recent years have seen the development of an ever-growing media environment, particularly online, by and for another right-wing section of the public. These media channels host discussions of societal issues from a heavily distorted perspective, in which a supposedly omnipresent “threat” posed by “the other” is blended into narratives dominated by conspiracy theories.

AfD paper on communications strategy

A leaked strategy paper from 2017 disclosed that as far as its public communications are concerned, the AfD does not prioritise getting to grips with the issues in any meaningful way: “It is more important to highlight the old parties’ weak points than to get entangled in discussing solutions with the experts.[...] Focus rather on being catchy and plausible than being coherent, hard-edged, provocative slogans are more useful than involved quotes involving nuance that try to be all things to all men”. So the AfD is breaking taboos on purpose, and aiming to build on the public attention this brings them. Thus the paper: “The AfD has to repeatedly [...] and entirely strategically be politically incorrect”.

Source: www.talk-republik.de/Rechtspopulismus/docs/03/AfD-Strategie-2017.pdf

“Shocked and overwhelmed”

Interview with Alice Lanzke



© Stephan Pramme

Alice Lanzke is a freelance journalist, consultant and editor. A member of the Neue deutsche Medienmacher (NdM, New German Media Professionals) association, she lobbies for more diversity in German reporting amongst the new German media landscape. Her key issues are migration, anti-racist and non-discriminatory language, hate speech in social networks and right-wing far-right communications strategies.

Your work looks at right-wing populist communications strategies. How do these groups communicate with the media – and is the media letting itself be exploited?

It's important to not firstly that many people are surprised that the right-wing populists etc. even have such a thing as communications strategies – the level of professionalism in the far-right is still grossly underestimated, because the dominant image in the public eye is still that of the dim-witted skinhead. But whenever a certain narrative – such as the one that encompasses the refugee issue – takes prominence in public debate, it's the result of a skilfully orchestrated campaign by far-right groups. In public discourse, far-right parties make use of the full spectrum of established communications strategies, from emotionalization to personalisation, from issue-hopping to setting themselves up as iconoclasts. In the process, journalists are portrayed as an enemy, as representatives of an “establishment system” that can be evaded primarily in the social networks.

Narratives are stories we use to explain and structure our world. They determine the perspective we view society from. They can be influential over long periods, create correlations between different phenomena, offer justifications for our own outlook, and like any story, they inspire emotions and motivate us to action.

Is the media coverage of right-wing populism appropriate? And has it changed since AfD rhetoric has started to be heard in the Bundestag?

I get the impression that recent developments in German politics and society, and the increased right-wing populist tendencies these have brought about, initially found many of my colleagues unsure of how to react. The initial AfD election results in particular found many editorial teams shocked and overwhelmed. Of course, lots of people were appalled by the AfD's electoral success – but some of the coverage made it almost seem as though the party had actually won the election outright. Also, the frequently allowed themselves to be caught up in the AfD's game by reporting excitedly about whatever their latest controversial pronouncements were, ignorant of the fact that this plays right into the hands of the populist extremists: they live off public attention, and occasions for uproar.

So now the AfD has been inside parliament since autumn of 2017. And since then, the media has calmed down somewhat in their coverage – but this does have two sides to it. Although it's to be welcomed when the AfD do not get to stir up their storms of indignation in the media, some media outlets seem to have decided to treat the AfD like a normal political party – which is exactly what they are not. And here I'm not even talking about their political orientation, but rather that here is a party which has taken up seats in the Bundestag and for which it is a manifesto position to consider the media as their enemies. Again and again, we see reporters attacked at AfD events, and party representatives tried to prevent the press from doing their job. This makes reporting on a fair and respectful footing impossible. A party that exempts itself from the rules of democratic discourse, which encompass the media, is not a normal party. And coverage of them should reflect that.

The media should also be reporting on how the AfD's admittance to parliament has actually altered the rhetoric of nearly every other party. It is a victory for the AfD's communications strategy that we are now talking about so-called “asylum tourism” – even though it was principally CSU delegates who first used the term in public debate. But this is how the boundaries of what we consider acceptable language are being shifted, right across society. And this is why I recommend that journalists, and others, look more at the theory of political framing, which many people are already starting to do: it's a positive result of the events we've been talking about. That journalists are starting to think about how language can be used in a non-discriminatory way, about the effects of their reporting, and to talk publicly about the difference between an opinion and an attitude. And in my opinion this can really do us some good.

Immigration and integration are ever-popular issues for media coverage, but reports on these topics are often based on stereotyping. The organisation “Mediendienst Integration” aids journalists in their research on these issues, and helps them produce nuanced, anti-racist reports.

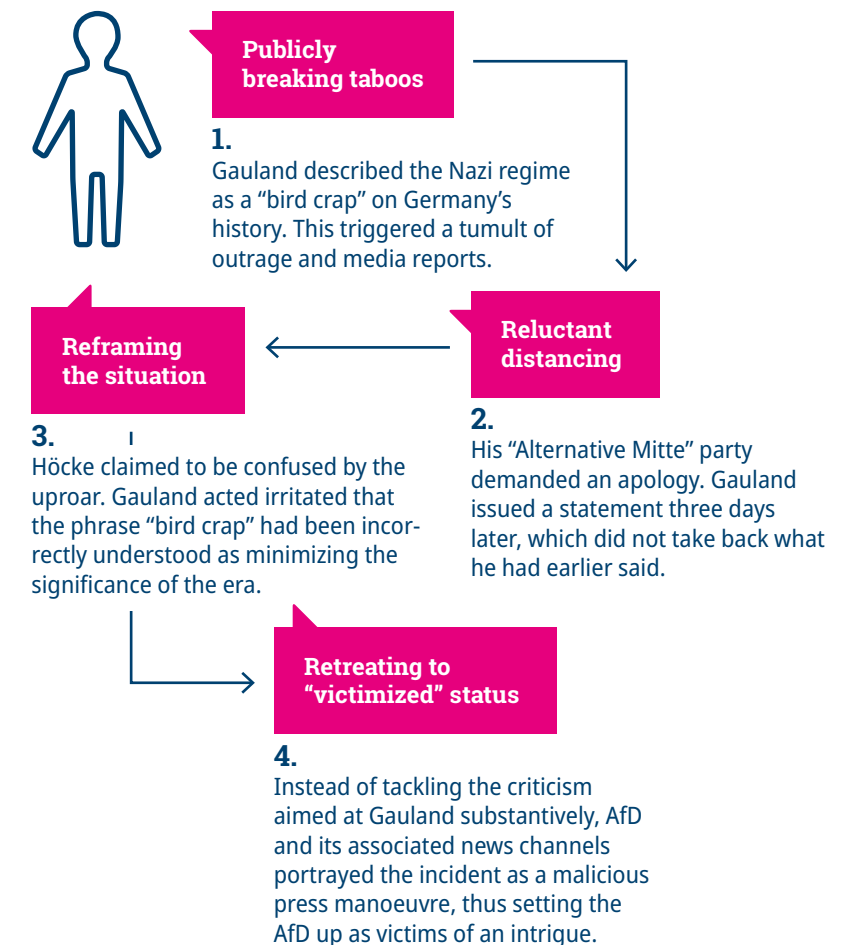
Phone 030. 200 764 80

mail@mediendienst-integration.de

www.mediendienst-integration.de

Creating scandals

As exemplified by Alexander Gauland, starting in June 2018



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What do you think professional coverage of controversial issues such as refugees and asylum should look like?

These issues require the same values to be applied as in any other area of professional journalism: reporting should be appropriate, accurate and non-judgemental. This includes the concrete terminology used in reporting. Journalists' language should not further the polarisation efforts of the populists. All this may sound very obvious, but we "new German media" creators are in fact finding that the language of right-wing populism can easily creep into your reporting if you are not extremely cautious. I mentioned before that the previously unmentionable term "asylum tourism" is suddenly being used in the public arena; this is just one example of the kind of at best thoughtless or at worst malignant terminology that can paint people fleeing war and torture as nothing but holidaymakers. We have developed a glossary that suggests words and phrasings appropriate to a society in which migration plays a major role, to help ensure that media reports are more sensitive and accurate, and I can only recommend it to anyone working in the industry. Medien-schaffenden nur ans Herz legen kann.

The NdM association has put together a glossary, with new terms and expressions for an "immigrant society". It is based on long discussions with media professionals, academics and workers in practical areas.

The glossary is available at:
www.neuemedienmacher.de/wissen/wording-glossar/

Professional reporting however should also of course cover the images used, the points of view represented, contexts, and the choice of subject matter. Just think of how many political talk show programmes there are about issues to do with migration, or how often AfD personalities are invited onto these shows: there is no correlation here with the actual political landscape, or with the interests of most citizens. For instance, before the latest elections to the Bavarian parliament,

a survey asked what voters thought was the biggest problem facing the state, and most locals answered that it was Minister-President Markus Söder and the CSU – and not, in fact, the refugee issue.

How can your journalist colleagues avoid inadvertently playing along with right-wing populists' communications strategies?

As journalists, we arrange information, we analyse it and we tell stories. So in the face of simplistic black-and-white narratives from the right-wing populists and extremists, our job is to not only counter them with facts but with counter narratives that accurately reflect the diversity of our contemporary society.

Another point: We advocate well-informed reporting that also provides context. This may sound too basic to be mentioned, but it must be emphasised again and again.

I think it would help to present more different perspectives in the media, namely those of people with a migration background. After the incidents on New Year's Eve in Cologne, I found just one report in which people from the migrant communities were asked for their views. I myself am a German with a migration background. In view of the right-wing populist election successes, the attacks on refugee accommodation and the masses of right-wing hate speech in social networks, I am worried – so I would even describe myself as a "concerned citizen", which is usually a right-wing term. But I have never yet been able to find my fears reflected in the current reporting.

The Neue deutsche Medienmacher is a nationwide association of media professionals with varying cultural and linguistic skills and roots. By means of various projects the association advocates for more diverse editorial offices and balanced reporting that realistically reflects the immigration heritage of Germany's population.

Phone 030. 269 472 30
info@neuemedienmacher.de
www.neuemedienmacher.de

Summer interview reveals lack of policies in AfD

"I cannot explain it to you",
"I am not an expert on these issues either",
"We have not yet found a regulatory option either",
"We do not yet have an agreed approach".

These statements were made by AfD party chairman Alexander Gauland during the ARD summer interview in 2018. Host Thomas Walde kept control of the discussion with Gauland, and maintained journalistic standards in an exemplary manner by also asking the AfD about issues other than refugees and migration – such as climate change, digitalisation, housing policy and retirement provisions. These are issues on which the AfD has no answers, due to its one-sided focus on refugees. Climate policy? Not important for the AfD. Pension policy? No such thing. Digitisation? An invention of the FDP. By asking specific questions, the host showed the party to be without ideas in most areas. He repeatedly confronted the party chairman with provocative statements made by party colleagues* and pointed out contradictions. Alexander Gauland could not come up with any arguments, took refuge in relativization, and claimed that interpretations came from a "political opponent". All this revealed the party's lack of policies to such an extent that the host ultimately asked, quite rightly, "Can it be, Mr Gauland, that you are overwhelmed by these issues of tomorrow?" A prime example of how journalists should handle the AfD.

How far-right narratives and framings are changing the debate

The AfD's pet issues seem to be omnipresent in the media. At the same time, nationwide surveys repeatedly show that other policy areas, such as health and welfare, pensions and social policy, are of far greater concern to most people. One reason for this issue selection lies in the strategic communications performed by the AfD. Combining a threatening framing around so-called "knife immigration" and a simple and versatile narrative, the AfD manages to produce a level of buzz that often drowns out the real issues in current politics.

Framing – what "knife immigration" is supposed to imply

Framing is a tool in strategic communications. Its purpose is to evoke associations and contexts through the careful selection of own words and narratives which support the views you wish to put across.

So when Gottfried Curio (an AfD Bundestag delegate) talks about "knife immigration"³² and the AfD at the same time submits a question in the Bundestag on assaults carried out using knives, their plan is primarily to link the issue of immigration with the phenomenon of knife attacks and thus with a perceived threat. The AfD is also pushing this narrative with the "Map of Terror" on its homepage. The statement made by Uwe Junge (former AfD chairman in Rheinland-Pfalz) about "imported violent crime" in the Rheinland-Pfalz state parliament in March 2018, can also be placed in the same context. The AfD thus continues to trot out a racist framing of a supposed "violent foreigner" which has been a right-wing bogeyman for decades. In doing so, it equates migration with a supposed threat: This is for example reflected in posters in Köthen reading "We are Chemnitz! We don't want knife violence".³³

The purpose of such statements is to establish as strong a link as possible between immigration and crime/violence and thus to influence public opinion. “Frames”, once established, can also be reused across party lines. A prominent example of successful AfD-based framing is the adoption of the term “asylum industry” by the CSU. Here the human right to asylum is associated with a profitable business and presented as illegitimate.

Individual events that seem to fit a certain “framing” are ruthlessly exploited by AfD and exploited to stir up the greatest possible attention.

A unifying narrative – “illegal border crossings” and “traitors to the Volk”

The strategy behind these statements is to make up a larger narrative into which various AfD issues can be combined. At the core of this narrative is a strongly ethnically charged “contradiction” between “the elites” and “the Volk”. This also found expression in the election campaign slogan “We’ll take our country back”.

Part of this narrative is, for example, the myth that in 2015, the borders were “opened” illegally. Although this legend has no legal basis, it has enabled the AfD to rage against the German government’s humanitarian decision without at first glance appearing racist. In concrete terms, the party claims that the entry of thousands of asylum-seekers from Syria in August 2015 was made possible by a decision by Angela Merkel which was contrary to the EU’s Dublin Agreement and was therefore illegal. The Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe has dismissed this charge as inadmissible.³⁴

The narrative, however, brought the AfD support from conservative circles – in particular from those who disagreed with the Chancellor’s humanitarian policy, but did not want to be labelled as racists. The success of the same narrative was again demonstrated by the CSU, whose leader Horst Seehofer considered filing a lawsuit with the Federal Constitutional Court, to great media effect.³⁵

So, the basis of this fabrication on this story, the AfD was able to develop various “framings”, such as the expression “Merkel’s guests”, which is often used when an asylum seeker commits a crime. Following the terrorist attack on Berlin’s Breitscheidplatz, the term was escalated into “Merkel’s dead”. The aim of this framing was to simplify and personalise how blame for such grievous events is assigned: Chancellor Angela Merkel was to blame. The AfD made particular use of this assertion during the Bundestag election campaign, and ran a campaign calling the Chancellor an “oath breaker”, by which they meant that Merkel had broken her oath of office to protect the German people from harm.³⁶



This personalisation is a particularly important aspect of AfD narratives and framing. Instead of tracking the various causes which underly political decisions, clear culprits are sought and identified. This demonisation of individuals means that the AfD’s stories are more highly emotional, while at the same time leading to previously unthinkable scenes – such as when a “PEGIDA” demonstration in 2015 hosted a model gallows, and named the “traitors to the Volk” for whom it was intended.³⁷

Another consequence is that it encourages the notion that developments in politics and society can be reversed: when the AfD and its supporters insist that migration, pluralism and gender justice are nothing but the fault of the “leftie-eco-hippies”³⁸, they imply that these developments can possibly be reversed at a stroke, if only those responsible are got rid of.

A backlash against “gender” and societal diversity

Another key AfD “framing” connects disparagement of migrants and people perceived to be migrants with the party’s deeply rooted retrogressive attitude to gender. In this context, the racist “threat” narrative is combined with a patriarchal assumption of mastery over, and possession of, “our” women. This position is rooted in antifeminism: the far right has been attacking and propagandising against equality, equal rights, and the growing societal recognition of the validity of a broad range of life choices with increasing aggression. Demands for enhanced equality are ridiculed, while scientific efforts in this field are belittled as “gender gaga” or “gender ideology”. This latter term in particular is often featured in wider-scale conspiracy theories which are designed to raise fears of a pending “attack” on the larger population.

This mentality also draws upon the myth of a “great exchange”. This is a narrative deriving largely from the conspiracy theorist’s sphere. It posits that the “establishment” has a plan to entirely replace “the German people” by means of migration. This in turn derives from the “New” right-wing concept of homogenous folk groups, which can only retain their integrity and culture if any kind of heterogeneous element is kept out. This mind-set thus perceives anything “other”, or seemingly “other” as a threat that has to be combatted. The claim that Europe is threatened by some kind of “Islamification” is an integral part of this narrative, and adds a cultural aspect to the mainly ethnic nature of this “great exchange”.

In this narrative, the racists ascribe themselves the role of victim – the threat, after all, comes from the conspiratorial elites. Thus the roles of victim and perpetrator are reversed, as in, for example, AfD Bundestag delegate Hansjörg Müller’s defence of the Chemnitz riots of August 2018.

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Müller wrote that he was proud of the protests, asserted that the counter-demonstrators had been taking part in a “genocide against us Germans” and were “incorrigible, brainless anti-German racists”. He opined that it was “ordinary citizens” from Chemnitz who had defended democracy and decent values.³⁹



Demonstration against the planned construction of a new mosque in Rostock in March 2019. The AfD stages itself as a victim of a supposed foreign infiltration.
© imago images/BildFunkMV

“Resisting” political correctness

An important element in how both AfD and the self-styled “New” and extreme right lies outside of the narratives described. In a way, it creates the preconditions for the other narratives to be heard. Although discrimination is recognised as a problem in many parts of society and avoiding discrimination is seen as a concrete step forward in societal harmony, the AfD and other extremist right-wing groups are doggedly fighting against what is now derogatorily called “political correctness”. They are thereby simply demanding the right to carry out unfair discrimination, while at the same time setting themselves up as defenders of freedom against “language regulation by the elites”. This narrative is a deliberate distortion of measures that are designed to reduce inequality in society into measures of alleged “oppression”.

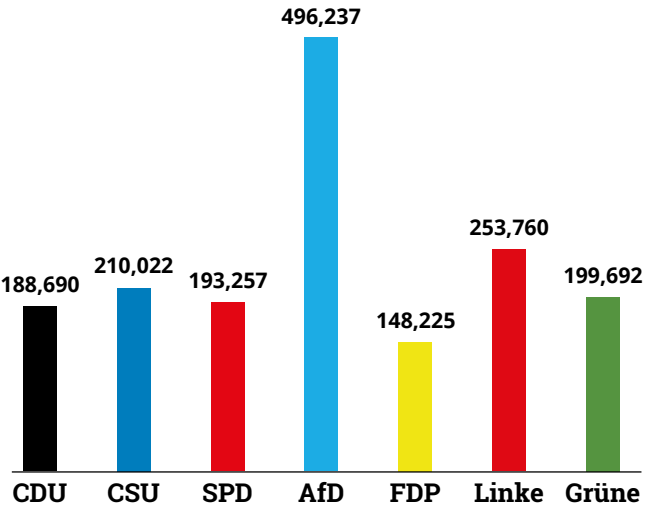
Distortion of scientific evidence – climate change

In addition to social science findings, for example on discrimination and its effects, the current scepticism towards the results of scientific research results is increasingly extending to the natural sciences. A particularly prominent issue is the denial or distortion of the facts about climate change. According to the AfD, man-made climate change does not exist. In its election programme for the 2017 federal elections, the party claimed that there were “serious” and “harmful effects on health” caused by the “shadow cast” by wind turbines. Statements like these ignore scientific research and serve to put political space between the AfD and ecological policies and measures. This narrative is widespread among the so-called “climate sceptics”, among whom AfD also numbers itself.

The AfD and the internet: organised rage

The internet offers a perfect echo-chamber for far-right and right-wing extremist theses and strategies – which is why AfD has been exploiting the sort of logic peddled on the Internet from the very beginning – with a lot of perseverance and with the help of many committed supporters.

Various parties’ Facebook “likes”



Stand April 2020

The Facebook page of the national AfD is used for its own announcements, such as party resolutions, programmes, election campaigns or to comment on current news. The main page shows almost exclusively the party’s own pictures and graphics, alongside brief statements and longer explanatory text in the body of each post. At the end of some contributions there are links to media reports, which are meant to support the short statements in the posted pictures. Specially produced videos are also shared. Thus the main AfD account on Facebook is used to address a more mainstream audience. The language used by the right-wing extremists is quite moderate and serious by their standards – but the comments beneath the posts are quite different, a forum for users to openly express their hatred of migrants, the media and other parties.

Indignation as a medium of success

AfD, better than possibly any other German party, knows how to use the most important feature of Facebook: interaction. By means of exaggerated, simple statements, it generates indignation among its users on Facebook. The issues are chosen to trigger emotions – usually fear and anger.

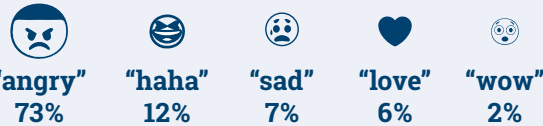
Facebook

AfD is less concerned with factual arguments in political debates than with stirring up emotions, as clearly shown in its social media strategy. The AfD parliamentary group was the first party to invest in a so-called “newsroom”.⁴⁰ The products of this “newsroom” are primarily aimed at the party’s social media channels. The AfD currently has the largest number of supporters and widest reach on Facebook, where its main page has many more “likes” than other parties.

Most of the posts are discussed intensively among its supporters: several hundred comments per posts, overwhelmingly by fans of the party, are not uncommon. Critical comments, much less counter arguments, are almost never found in the comments sections. By means of these forums of indignation and excitement, the AfD

The AfD’s national Facebook page in figures

Posts from 1.1.2018 to 30.1.19:	867
Total likes on posts:	1,962,272
Total likes on posts Ø:	2,222
Total number of comments:	826,058
Average comments per post Ø:	952
Total reactions to posts:	1,067,000
Average reactions to posts Ø:	1,067
Followers:	462,867
Likes:	447,008



Stand 31.1.2019

creates interaction among its fans. On Facebook this means that such content is more likely to be displayed to other users. Thus, the combination of emotionalising posts, angry comments and the absence of any kind of response makes the AfD's Facebook page a seething cauldron of outrage.

Twitter

The AfD is not as successful on Facebook as on Twitter. Of all the parties represented in the Bundestag, the AfD has by far the fewest followers on this service, coming in at around 159,000 fans (as of April 2020). In the "Twitter verse", users interact not only with their own community, but also with the entire Twitter network. This means that the AfD tweets do not just elicit reactions from inside their own bubble, making it difficult for AfD to spread their own theories via Twitter. Whenever, for example, false claims are presented as true facts, the democratic Twitter bubble usually reacts quite quickly with corrections. In general, there is a relatively large proportion of counterarguments in response to AfD tweets. Unlike on Facebook, unwanted comments cannot simply be hidden or deleted from the account holder's post; control over the party's page is simply more difficult on Twitter.

Nevertheless, the AfD has a large output on Twitter. The national party's account posts the same memes (pictures with statements) as on Facebook, but then links to the long explanatory texts on the Facebook page. This also suggests that the AfD sees Facebook as its central social media outlet and therefore redirects views to it time and again. The Twitter account retweets prominent AfD functionaries, but also retweets politicians from other parties – who are quoted either approvingly or with indignation. This in turn directs user hate to their channels.

The national AfD's Twitter account also shares and approvingly evaluates tweets from other far-right to right-wing extremist accounts – thus revealing networks within the right-wing extremist scene.⁴¹ The AfD receives massive extra publicity online from the spectrum of right-wing extremist groups. Its radicalisation has received broad support, especially online, from various hate communities. In this sense, the AfD is without doubt the ruling online party, at least for the hate-spreading part of the internet.

Social media accounts of AfD politicians

In addition to the nationwide AfD sites, there are also state sites, regional and municipal AfD sites as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts set up by individual politicians. Many AfD functionaries and politicians are more openly bigoted on their personal profiles. Clearly racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, sexist and anti-constitutional posts are not uncommon – which is entirely according to plan: the individual accounts are intended to appeal to the extreme right-wing electorate and attract the extreme right-wing scene to the AfD, while the main account remains relatively moderate.

AFD fans and followers

The party's fans come mainly from the wide spectrum of right-wing conservative, nationalist, racist and extreme right-wing online networks, which have probably been waiting years for promising political representation. While other parties' members and voters remain generally much less at home in social media, the AfD has known how to exploit the internet and its social platforms to create atmosphere and disseminate its own ideas since the party's foundation in 2013. Its own clientele was involved in this task from the very beginning.

Why is the internet so useful for AfD?

An online post, be it meme, video or graphic, is controllable, in a way that television interviews are not. Right-wing extremists can bring up issues online that are not covered in traditional media, and thus pander to the resentments of their followers without significant obstacles. By diverting its provocations through social networks in this way, the party and its politicians can end up featured in established media. This is because the way communication in social networks works corresponds to the rules of communication used by right-wing extremism and right-wing populism: provocation, exaggeration and insincerity spread more easily than factual arguments and nuanced discussion.

It is also useful for the AfD that, as its followers are more concerned with emotions than with facts, it is seen as no big deal when assertions in right-wing posts turn out to be false. For example, when the AfD's Berlin regional association issued a travel warning for Sweden

on Facebook and Twitter in 2017, the German Foreign Office condemned it with unusual directness as "fake news". Even the Berlin AfD called the post "objectively wrong, of course" – yet it did not immediately delete it. The AfD makes posts with this kind of laxity regularly, thus creating its own publicity, which often seems like something from a parallel universe.

Another example: in January 2019, the police in Sachsen took to Twitter to contradict an article tweeted out by an AfD district association which had linked a recent murder to asylum seekers, without any corresponding evidence. The State Office of Criminal Investigation simply called the statements "#FakeNews".⁴²

The AfD plays with people's fears online even more than it does offline. The hate that this stirs up amongst its own followers is then spilled out not only in AfD comment sections but also outside the far-right bubble in opinion pieces by other media, social media groups, parties and individuals. It is not uncommon for AfD accounts to specifically link to sites they do not like in order to direct their own followers to them, resulting in torrents of abuse aimed at the site owners, and to hate speech that can have significant consequences. Hate speech is used by the AfD in social networks to, firstly, demoralise or silence political opponents, and secondly to normalise abuse against their targeted demographics. Their objective is that people should get used to these abuses so that the boundaries of what can be publicly said can be shifted further and further. This creeping normalisation ultimately inspires action, from exclusion to violence.

The self-styled "New" Right on Instagram

Research centre [correctiv.org](https://www.correctiv.org) analysed thousands of far-right Instagram accounts, and discovered that the self-styled "New" Right is exploiting this supposedly unpolitical platform to influence young people and spread bigotry. The AfD is also trending on Instagram: hashtags connected with the party such as #Mutzur-Wahrheit ("stand up for the truth") and blue heart emojis can be seen on the accounts of every "New" Right group. Also, AfD officials are closely and unashamedly linked on Instagram with the right-wing extremist "Identitarian movement" – even though the AfD passed a formal resolution that members in both groups would be expelled.

Detailed results of the investigation, titled "Kein Filter für Rechts" can be viewed at: [correctiv.org/top-stories/2020/10/06/kein-filter-fuer-rechts-instagram-rechtsextremismus-frauen-der-rechten-szene/](https://www.correctiv.org/top-stories/2020/10/06/kein-filter-fuer-rechts-instagram-rechtsextremismus-frauen-der-rechten-szene/)

Recommendations for action: what can be done to counter hate speech, far-right sloganeering and online attacks

Argue and contradict

It may not be very useful to visit AfD sites and present arguments there, as critical contributions can usually be quickly deleted. So where to go to counter right-wing claims? Wherever AfD pictures or arguments are shared in your own timeline or in the comment sections of other Facebook pages, or if the posts suddenly appear in less political spaces, such as in regionally relevant Facebook groups. Statements that are prohibited under German criminal law (e.g. incitement to racial hatred, Holocaust denial, slander, defamation) can be reported to the site operator, or reported to the police via internet watchdogs.

But freedom of expression laws often allow for racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, sexist statements – it is up to private citizens to counter these, to bring objectivity into discussions and to defend our values.

It is important not to spread framings and ideas for the AfD. This also means not sharing the original post when drawing attention to far-right content. Instead, include a screenshot – if any reproduction is necessary. Otherwise users risk increasing the reach of the offensive content.

How social media account managers can proactively promote democratic values

Account managers have the opportunity to create discussions on their own site. Operators of social media sites have the right to a final say, and can influence the tone of discussions, define how users should interact, support constructive contributions – and should make use of these options! Discussions are better if the tone is moderate and people do not have to be worried about being attacked and insulted on the site.

Dealing with hate

Anyone planning a potentially controversial publication, online event or post on an issue that is likely to provoke emotional debate, e.g. on refugees and migration, must take into account the potential for abuse from AfD supporters. Any statement you make should be perfectly verifiable: it is advisable to consider what typical counter arguments might be raised, and prepare factual answers. Implementation/publication should then take place when you have time to moderate reactions and document any posts that may contravene criminal law.

Getting support

Attacks from right-wing extremists can be very discouraging, especially as it may seem that the sources of abuse are too many to deal with. So solidarity from allies is vital: democratic and objective counterarguments, as many as possible, are the best response. It can also be helpful to organise online support in advance, for example by soliciting likes and comments from people and organisations that share your concerns.

How to deal with hate speech in Social Media Management? The Amadeu Antonio Foundation's Civic.net project has put out a leaflet titled "Menschenwürde online verteidigen" ("Defending Human Dignity Online") which offers 33 suggestions for civil society groups using social media. The leaflet is available online, and can be ordered at: www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/publikationen

Defying organized attacks

Even when right-wing abuse is expected, preparation is key. The arguments made by hate-spreaders are very often similar, so whole blocks of text can be prepared. Advice centres and support structures you have looked up in advance can help in the event of these attacks. Friends, family or partner organisations can also become targets of these extremists, and should therefore be kept in the loop. It is important to keep in mind that violence in digital spaces can also have physical effects. So the key thing to remember is to protect yourself from the consequences hate-motivated attacks. Other people can be temporarily put in charge of the sites affected. It is often helpful to talk to friends and colleagues about what you have experienced. And do also note that usually the worst is over after no more than three days.

Monitoring

It can be useful to keep a regular eye on the AfD and its mouthpieces to be aware of how issues are being discussed in AfD circles and what AfD officials are saying. In some cases, it is possible to identify links and connections to with racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, right-wing extremist or anti-refugee individuals and parties.

For advice, training, skills and support aimed at improving public discourse

- **Civic.net:** www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/projekte/civic-net-aktiv-gegen-hass-im-netz
- **debate//de:hate – For democratic discussion culture online:** pedagogical praxis, empowerment, counter-speech, discussion culture, monitoring: www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/projekte/debate-dehate
- **Belltower.News:** Info portal for journalists, updated daily, about online and offline risks to democracy: www.belltower.news

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The parliamentary practices of an anti-democratic party

The AfD in the Bundestag

The AfD entered the German Bundestag for the first time after the elections of 24 September 2017. Collecting 12.6% of valid votes, it is the largest opposition party in the 19th Bundestag. The chairmanship of the Bundestag faction is shared by Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel. Immediately after the Bundestag elections, Gauland declared in front of live cameras that the AfD would “take back our Volk”; thus giving a foretaste of the ideology with which the AfD would poison parliamentary debate.⁴³

This opening salvo was followed by a total of 2014 minor questions (to the government), 11 major questions and 256 motions by April 2020. An evaluation of the parliamentary work of the AfD shows that about one sixth of all motions (17%) and almost one third of the minor questions (31%) stemming from the party are about migration – focusing mainly on criminalisation of migration and migrants.

The enrichment of a right-wing extremist party

The results of the Bundestag elections brought significant changes as regards the work of the parliament as a whole, and also for the AfD itself. For example, gaining its first ever seats in the Bundestag brought with it considerable financial support for the parliamentary group, which received a total of 56.4 million euros in 2018 alone. The party funding allocated to its 92 seats in the Bundestag have enabled the AfD to shore up its own structures. The 56.4 million euros covered expenses for AfD delegates, financing for the parliamentary group and its staff and financing for an office and staff for each delegate. This last item has already been used by some MPs to employ well-known right-wing extremists in the Bundestag.⁴⁴ Among these are neo-Nazis with connections to prohibited organisations and people who are part of the self-styled “New” Right.⁴⁵

In addition to strengthening the party financially and structurally, the AfD, as the main opposition party, has also gained political power at the federal level. It chairs three committees.

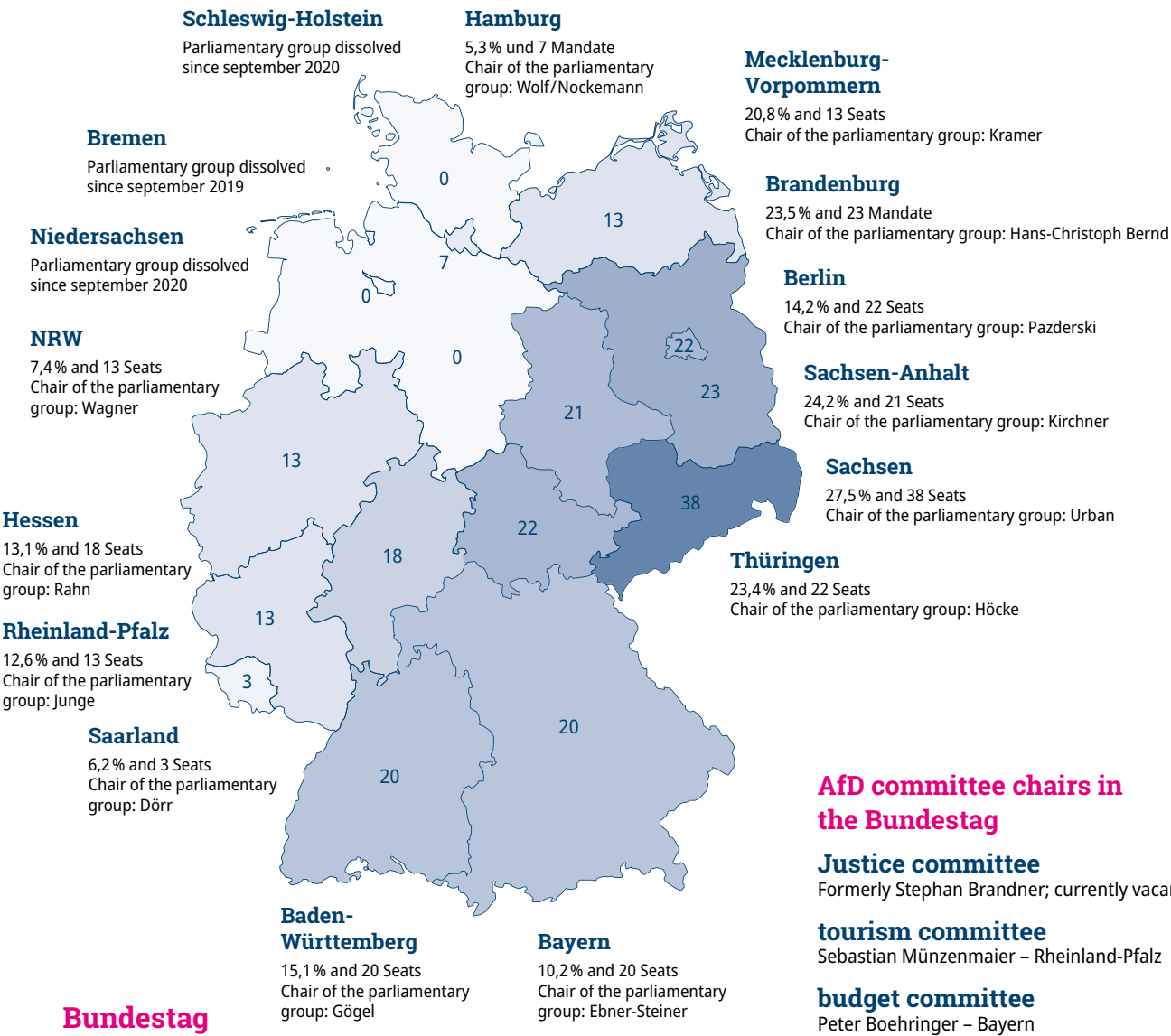
Changes in the work of the Bundestag

The AfD uses the plenum of the Bundestag to push the boundaries of acceptable discourse further and further. Alice Weidel, for example, has spoken pejoratively of the migration to Germany of “girls in headscarves” and “thugs with knives”. She was reprimanded for this by the President of the Bundestag, Wolfgang Schäuble.⁴⁶ The repeated, calculated breaches of taboo follow a clear pattern: a delegate uses a previously unacceptable expression, then distances themselves strategically, and claims to want to uphold freedom of expression, allegedly under threat. These regular breaches of decency by the AfD attack fundamental standards of civil interaction, following the pioneers of the self-styled “New” Right. One of the most urgent tasks for political parties and society at large is therefore to actively counter the authoritarian, anti-Semitic, sexist, racist and historically revisionist proclamations made by the AfD. Politicians from other parties are now less likely to fall for these manoeuvres and more frequently now challenge the AfD’s actions.

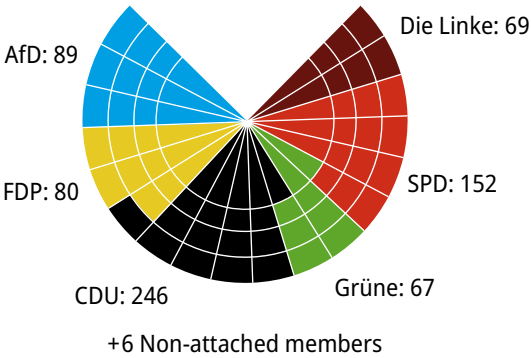
One of the most urgent tasks for political parties and society at large is therefore to actively counter the authoritarian, anti-Semitic, sexist, racist and historically revisionist proclamations made by the AfD.

The AfD in parliament

337 Seats, 248 regional parliament seats, 89 Bundestag seats



Bundestag
89 Seats
Chair of the parliamentary group: Weidel /Gauland



© Amadeu Antonio Stiftung

AfD committee chairs in the Bundestag

- Justice committee**
Formerly Stephan Brandner; currently vacant
- tourism committee**
Sebastian Münzenmaier – Rheinland-Pfalz
- budget committee**
Peter Boehringer – Bayern

Parliamentary activity by the AfD¹

	Migration	Other subjects
604 Minor questions	69 %	31 %
4 Major questions	50 %	50 %
107 Requests	83 %	17 %

¹ Recorded from 24.10.2017 until 03.01.2019

The AfD's debut in the Bundestag makes the devaluation of minorities and democratic values a very public issue. When this devaluation is normalized, it creates a negative example for society, and increasingly influences public mores. A decline in society's standards for human interaction is not only a side effect, but a key goal for the far-right AfD.



AfD-Bundestagsfraktion. © dpa

At the same time, the party is gaining in concrete political significance. Even back as far as late 2018/early 2019, some officials in CDU regional associations in Eastern Germany expressed positive opinions about possible coalition negotiations with the AfD. The federal CDU took a clear line to avoid forming a government with the AfD. The politically explosive potential of the AfD became clearer

when FDP politician Thomas Kemmerich was elected Minister President in Thüringen: For the first time in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, a Minister President had been elected by means of votes from a right-wing extremist party. In the face of heavy criticism, Kemmerich resigned one day after the election.

Considerations of governmental policy must not be allowed to impede our view of a party which has marched through Chemnitz alongside extremists. Under no circumstances, therefore, can any responsible politician or party aim to make any use of AfD in their own campaigns for political power.

Sabotaging parliamentary work

Elsewhere, the AfD has attempted to sabotage the parliamentary work of the other parliamentary groups by using the voting rules of the Bundestag. At a meeting in December 2018, for example, the party requested that the Bundestag's quorum be checked by means of the "Hammelsprung" procedure, in which all delegates must leave the plenary chamber and are counted when they re-enter. The AfD faction left the chamber in a closed session, but did not return, meaning to sabotage that day's work, but they miscounted. Contrary to the party's intentions, the parliament had a quorum even without the AfD.

The practices of the AfD in the Bundestag often seem like a performance, that is only aimed at stirring up its own supporters with the help of social media. So whether or not individual delegates appear in parliament can vary greatly, depending on what online posts are planned. The rules and customs of the parliament are largely ignored.

After a 14-year-old girl⁴⁷ was murdered by a person who had been an asylum seeker, an AfD delegate made use of the occasion by asking to use his speaking time for a minute's silence. In the Bundestag, however, the executive committee decides on such matters – partly and primarily in fact to avoid such exploitation by individual parties or delegates. The AfD parliamentary group did not request a minute's silence, although they had the option, but acted on its own authority. Bundestag Vice-President Claudia Roth reacted confidently in accordance with the Bundestag's Rules of Procedure and told the delegate to stand down. However, a video of the scene was then immediately afterwards distributed on the AfD's social media channels –with aggressive and derogatory comments towards Roth.⁴⁸ She was then insulted and threatened for days.

The practices of the AfD in the Bundestag often seem like a performance, that is only aimed at stirring up its own supporters with the help of social media.



Poster campaign by the artist Wolfgang Tillmans for the 2017 federal elections © Wolfgang Tillmans

The AfD in state parliaments

The AfD is now represented in all the state parliaments of the Federal Republic. A study from 2018 found that in Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz und Niedersachsen the work of the AfD is strongly dependent on the personnel involved. Some of the party's MPs act serious and generally calm, others aggressive and strident. The authors of the study see in this a division of labour that runs along the inner-party divide between extremist and "moderate" MPs.⁴⁹ This difference in behaviour poses a particular challenge for the other parties in dealing with the AfD. Rigorous measures, which would include measures against the "serious" MPs would allow the AfD to portray itself as a victim of the "old parties". This kind of self-portrayal is typical of how the AfD works. For example, a study from 2017 found that the AfD factions know how to use the plenum of the state parliaments in particular for their own benefit. They use the meetings to hold public speeches and disseminate them in social media. The background work, the actual day-to-day

parliamentary tasks, is hardly noticed by the AfD. The only way to undermine these staged performances is to have a well-researched, objective confrontation with the party, which, if the worst comes to the worst, must also solidly and clearly justify exclusionary measures.

It can be seen that the work of the AfD regional associations essentially follows the style of the party in the Bundestag. One difference lies in how the parliamentary groups are made up. While almost all party factions are represented at the federal level, things are different at the state level: for example, the Thüringen parlia-

mentary group headed by Björn Höcke is much more strongly influenced by ethnic-nationalist positions than the AfD state parliamentary groups in Schleswig-Holstein or North Nordrhein-Westfalen.

It is equally striking that in almost all state associations at least one delegate has left the parliamentary group or has been excluded from the parliament: out of a total of 157 state parliament mandates, there have been 43 resignations or exclusions.

The AfD in municipal parliaments

The AfD is now also represented in most municipal parliaments. This has left many parliamentarians unsure how to react. Strategies used in the Bundestag or the state parliaments for dealing with AfD cannot be transferred exactly to the municipal level.

"Parliamentary Practice of the AfD in German State Parliaments", by the Social Science Research Centre Berlin, is a detailed analysis of how the AfD behaves in state parliaments. It is available at: www.progressives-zentrum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Discussion-Paper-2017-102-12062017.pdf

At the municipal level, the lower level in the party hierarchy, the AfD is more heterogeneous than in the state parliaments or the Bundestag. Its actions are therefore much more dependent on the particular individuals elected, and the size of the parliamentary groups. Nevertheless, similarities can be observed. The working atmosphere in the parliaments has become more discordant, and the AfD has clear priorities at this level too: refugees, and Islam.

They tend to focus more on populist performances than committee work. So the behaviour of the AfD often depends on whether a meeting is public or not. In non-public committee meetings, voting behaviour often differs from that employed in public meetings, and AfD delegates often appear bored, disinterested or do not attend at all. In public meetings, on the other hand, AfD delegates like to present themselves as "one of the people", in populist performances involving a lot of motions and long speeches, often leading to endless parliamentary sessions. This is an enormous burden for other politicians, who often work in without pay, and paralyses parliamentary activity and case work. This is deliberate. The AfD also presents itself at municipal level as the advocate of the "little people" and often demands financial cuts when, in their opinion, money is being spent "against German interests": This applies above all to the areas of asylum, migration, youth welfare, promotion of women and equality.

In a study on the behaviour of AfD in the municipal parliaments in Hessen und Niedersachsen, the educational scientist Benno Hafeneger roughly differentiated three different AfD faction types according to their behaviour in parliament and their working methods.

Hafeneger's study comes to the conclusion that there is often a difference between urban and rural areas in how the AfD delegates act: "The bigger the city, especially in the city centres, the more provocative the AfD groups are. In rural councils, on the other hand, the delegates are more well-behaved, more reserved and more collegially".⁵⁰ In some AfD groups, there are delegates who sat for another party in the same parliament during the last legislative period. This makes it difficult for many people to deal with them. In these cases, it is recommended that delegates are regarded as inseparable from their current party's policies. If a party is racist, its delegates are members of a racist party and should be treated accordingly in the political setting.

Behaviour of AfD in municipal parliaments in Hesse and Lower Saxony

Behaviour

Aggressive: directly and immediately racist, nationalist and nationalist behaviour, using provocation and fabricating controversies as a means of demonstrating the greatest possible distance from the democratic parties.

Subtle: by appearing less aggressive, but rather covert and subtle with a more moderate and less explicit subtext, they stages themselves as the only party that asks critical questions and creates a public space for the so-called "true" interests of the German population – in clear contrast from the established parties.

Concerned: moderately and objectively raising everyday and factual topics that could have been or are being raised by other parties; presentation as "concerned" and "party of the little people".

Working methods

Hard-working: the political groups submit many motions and questions that keep the administration busy.

Lazy: the groups are, if at all, only physically present, they do not contribute to debates for months, they do not take part in discussions and generally do not participate in parliamentary life.

Incapable: resignations and splits sometimes lead to the rapid dissolution of political groups.

Source: Hafeneger, Benno u. a.: AfD in Parlamenten: Themen, Strategien, Akteure. Wochenschau Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 2018

Dealing with AfD in parliamentary work – positions

The AfD challenge

“The increasing support for the AfD among voters is due in particular to not enough examination of strong emotions, and uncritically accepting of arguments put forward, and to a lack of suggested solutions. My personal strategies, resulting partly from the conflict around a direct mandate with Alexander Gauland, are as follows:



© DBT von Saldern

Let people speak out, and challenge their ideological bubbles with questions. Do not immediately judge their experiences and views, but validate them and place them in a larger context. Always assume that they are capable of learning. Take part in discussion as a learner, as a person seeking advice.

Do not judge the person, but rather their views, their behaviour, focus more on the point if possible. Do not ignore or dismiss specific problems. Be recognisable, credible and clear as a politician (including in the media), if possible have personal encounters, act as a direct representative of the citizens, and reflect your own views in the way you live your life. Even if this contradicts your own party. Keep your language understandable, simple and as narrative as possible, without simplifying complex issues.

Tirelessly point out where AfD solutions are lacking or not practicable (lack of alternatives), where there is a complete lack of sustainability and, where their ideas would cause damage. Ask the other person about alternative solutions or ask them about the consequences of AfD goals: ‘Do you really want THAT?’ Encourage people in their involvement, challenge it and do not prejudge it.”

Martin Patzelt, CDU Bundestag delegate

Statement of the 1st Parliamentary Secretary of the SPD parliamentary group

“There is no doubt that the AfD is a special challenge for the other parliamentary groups in the Bundestag. After all, the right-wing nationalist party hardly participates in parliament at all, but instead exploits the Bundestag as a stage for its social media propaganda. In the plenum, the AfD does everything it can to keep the focus on the topic of migration, often by deliberately breaching the standards of decency.



Where AfD representatives express themselves in a contemptuous or historically revisionist manner, the SPD grouping will always clearly oppose them. When the AfD makes blatant contradictions or false assertions in debates in the Bundestag, the SPD tries to identify and correct things as briefly and precisely as possible.

But it is also clear that we would be well advised to just ignore some provocations, so as not to give AfD additional attention. Finding the right balance here is not always easy, but it is always the better option.

From the point of view of the SPD, it is equally important to convincingly elaborate on our own issues and positions. The Bundestag must not let the AfD set the agenda, it must tackle the real future issues on which this party has nothing relevant to contribute: rents, pensions, education, welfare. That is also a way to beat the AfD.”

Carsten Schneider

Position of the Party Bündnis90/Die Grünen

“The debut of the AfD into everyday parliamentary life is a new challenge. First of all, a sound knowledge of the Rules of Procedure is crucial, as is good preparation for the debates. We discuss borderline situations together and weigh up the situation carefully. Our principle: no



© Konrad Schmidt

special rules, but also no restraint if the great good of freedom of expression is exploited for hate and rabble-rousing.

The AfD is about self-dramatization, the systematic disruption of established procedures and, ultimately, the disintegration of democracy and the rule of law. It wants to gradually shift the boundaries of what can be said and done, and hopes that we will stand down at some point – online and offline. We must not allow that to happen. At the same time, we must prevent our opposition from leading to agenda-setting by the AfD alone.

We Greens therefore continue to work on progressive answers to the real questions of our time. We take the AfD seriously, but we do not forget why we were elected. There is no manual for this tightrope walk, much depends on the situation. But with constant critical thought, and a clear position, we are getting better and better.”

Claudia Roth

The FDP's strategy for dealing with AfD

“Political and parliamentary initiatives from the AfD are mostly aimed at stirring up emotions among their sympathisers. In doing so, their political course runs like the wing of an aeroplane: the more headwind there is, the more buoyancy it receives. In the long run, therefore, it is not helpful to simply respond to their contributions with indignation. They would then try to portray themselves as martyrs and present the party and its supporters as victims.

We would be well advised to deal with this grouping in a less emotional way and to conduct the confrontation mainly on the factual level. The AfD should not be taken more seriously than it deserves; after all, we do not want to spread its often crude and scarcely bearable ideas any further. But on the substantive level, we must confront it decisively and make it clear where borders are crossed, where it errs and wants to lead people astray; that we will not allow right-wing and left-wing populists to attack our basic liberal order and abuse it for their own purposes.”



© Chaperon

Nicola Beer

Position of the Party Die Linke

“The LINKE rejects any cooperation with the AfD and operates a clear political and organisational demarcation line. In all decisive political issues DIE LINKE stands



contrary to the ideas of the AfD. As a matter of principle DIE LINKE does not support parliamentary motions, initiatives and declarations from the AfD and will continue to focus on its own positive alternatives. It must be made clear that

the positions of the AfD are unimaginable in a united, democratic and egalitarian society. In order to prevent any normalisation and trivialisation of the AfD, it is crucial to deal publicly with its concrete statements and its connections to the extreme right, and to counter its brutalisation of language and democratic activity in parliament – without responding to every single provocation. No parliamentary practices should be changed in order to do this. In all our actions, it must be clear that the AfD is not a democratic alternative.”

Dr Dietmar Bartsch, Chairman of the parliamentary group DIE LINKE in the German Bundestag

Recommendations for handling parliamentary debates

In general, it is always important to have a clear position, knowledge of the (local) AfD and a good speaking style.

Determine your own issues

The most important way to counter AfD performances inside and outside parliament is to proactively raise and argue your own issues, your own image of society and democratic, pluralistic narratives. Values such as democracy, freedom of opinion, human rights or a society based on solidarity should always be underpinned by concrete substance – otherwise the concepts will be hijacked and turned into the opposite. So: do not limit confrontations with the AfD to responding to their own contributions and parliamentary initiatives.

What to do with AfD motions?

- Where nonsensical, racist and discriminatory motions are made, if possible, employ only one counter argument from the democratic parties. Otherwise, there is a danger that the AfD will make itself the centre of the debate by alleging incorrect behaviour. As a rule, only the AfD itself benefits from this. But: false factual claims and discriminatory statements must never remain unchallenged.
- In the case of substantive motions, the sometimes differing positions of the other groups should be taken into account. In these situations it is often counterproductive to formulate only one counterargument, as there are different positions within the democratic groups which must also be given time. This is beneficial to the promotion of objective work and a diversity of viewpoints, and refutes the image propagated by the AfD that there is a “united establishment front”.

Developing your own strategy for dealing with AfD

The AfD’s presence in the parliaments has increased the exigencies of the other parties’ work. So a consistent strategy for dealing with right-wing extremists in the parliaments should be developed within the party, to help to respond to the professionalization of the AfD. Publicly comprehensible resolutions are helpful. It should be clear that minimum democratic standards are not negotiable: protect minority rights and human rights! That also means not taking part in the framing narratives of right-wing extremists: e.g. when talking about Islam, terrorism is not a relevant issue.

Do not use the AfD as a starting point

The AfD should not be given a platform, even if the goal is to “unmask” it. Debate should mainly be about factual issues, not about the AfD. In other words: suggest alternatives, present your own image of society and your own key issues with confidence.

Preserve opposition rights

The AfD tries to paralyse the substantive work of the administration and institutions by using long lists of questions. The answer must not be to curtail opposition rights. However, substantive work should not be hindered. If, for instance, the AfD calls for weekly updated figures on refugees in the municipality, a reasonable schedule should be agreed upon instead, e.g. quarterly figures.

Do not plan to benefit from AfD votes

Right-wing extremist and right-wing populist parties sometimes vote strategically for motions raised by democratic parties in order to seem to be useful in gaining majorities, and thus as important players in parliament. It should therefore always be clarified in advance whether your own motion can obtain a majority from the democratic parties.

Avoiding normalisation

The AfD is an enemy of open, united and democratic society. Local AfD groups cannot be viewed in isolation from the national party. So:

- No formation of joint political groups or voting blocks, no joint motions or votes.
- No appearances at events organised by the AfD.

Exposing and identifying AfD strategies

Examples can be used to briefly and concisely point up AfD strategies and thereby expose them – for example, if the party votes differently in public and non-public meetings, fabricating controversies by means of exaggerating and lying, issue-hopping or the presenting the party as some kind of victim.

Another popular AfD strategy is to portray democratic parties as a detached elite. It is important not to fall for that, but to argue objectively and with determination. So in confrontations, therefore, you should not just highlight the unacceptability of individual statements, but also make it clear that these “slips” are perfectly in line with the ideology of the party and its programme.

Differentiation between the AfD and its voters

Avoid cosying up to AfD voters, but distinguish between the party and its voters. Take their concerns seriously, but contradict them where facts are left behind: identify racism and anti-democratic narratives.

Showing solidarity with those targeted

The AfD often tries to focus on individual politicians, civil society actors or democratic institutions, malign their work and paralyse them politically. Democratic parliamentary groups as well as individual delegates should publicly show solidarity with democratic figures, ask if they need help doing their work and, if necessary, increase their budgets so that, in addition to answering parliamentary questions, they can continue and improve their ability to carry out their substantive work in full.

The Federal Association for Mobile Advice Services and the providers of mobile advice services in the individual federal states offer issue-based workshops, seminars and training sessions for parliamentary delegates to help them deal with right-wing populism/right-wing extremism. The mobile advice teams also co-host and facilitate joint consultation processes between parliamentary delegates as they plan how to deal with right-wing populism.

Phone 0351. 500 541 6
kontakt@bundesverband-mobile-beratung.de
www.bundesverband-mobile-beratung.de

What THEY will do:

Insist on the invitation

A key strategy of far-right and right-wing populist figures is to get invited to as many public events as possible. If not invited, they have the opportunity to portray themselves as victims. So it is important to be prepared.

1. The far-right will use any podium to prove that their demands are legitimate.
This can be prevented if experts are present at the event to publicly call the party what they are.
2. The AfD speakers are not, generally, untrained party followers.
So it is vital to be well prepared. The facilitators and the other speakers should know what to expect.
3. It is perfectly possible to have a balanced, productive debate without the AfD.
Even though the AfD has gained seats in various parliaments, there may be good reasons not to invite the party to your event. There is nothing to be gained from repeatedly exposing yourself / your organisation to the AfD's provocations and destructive rhetorical methods.

Appear in different guises

There are various different kinds of right-wing populist and far-right extremist speakers. They may present an **aggressive, dogmatic front** and so dominate the discussion, or they may act **jovial and lively**.

In the **first** case, the main difficulty is to counter their attempts at intimidation. It may be useful to **point out the aggression** explicitly so that the audience is clear what is going on.

In the **latter** case, it is vital to make sure you **make a good case for what you represent** and what your positions are. Otherwise the audience's sympathies may be won over, and the extremists may be able to depict themselves as the underdog.

Rhetorical strategies ...

WHAT-ABOUTISM – but what about in this other case ...

Arguments are hamstrung by bringing in an only partially related and frequently wholly hypothetical issue.

Objective: To sidetrack discussions and discredit the other party's arguments.

Example: "Instead of spending so much money on refugees, politicians should prioritize looking after the German homeless and OAPs."

MAKING THEMSELVES THE VICTIM – freedom of opinion?

If contradicted, the speaker says they are being prevented from expressing themselves, and their basic rights are being attacked. Verbal incitement is thus characterized as valid opinion, as a legitimate part of discourse.

Objective: To reverse the roles of victim and perpetrator in order to further their argument

Example: "If you can't call a spade a spade anymore, then freedom of expression is a thing of the past."

ISSUE-HOPPING – from the 100th to the 1000th

During the debate, various issues are brought up and mixed up seemingly at random. Lines of argumentation are run into the sand, because the speaker is always changing the subject.

Objective: To be seen as dominating the discussion and to spread confusion.

Example: "Refugees are only after our women, and halal butchery is just pure cruelty to animals!"

SILENCING – just you wait and see ...

Explicit or veiled/coded threats of verbal or physical violence against anyone with a different opinion.

Objective: To make the other side retreat into silence and to demonstrate your own (supposed) strength.

Example: "When it's our turn in charge, we'll deal with people like you first thing!"

... And tips on how to counter them

Identify what is happening

Identify attempts at relativization or distraction, and do not allow them to succeed. Either dismiss the change of subject using plenty of factual knowledge, or insist that the discussion focuses on your own talking points.

Clear distinctions, clear explanations

Clearly differentiate between what is a threat to their freedom of expression, and what is your right to contradict them. Clearly identify any bigotry or hate speech. Make it clear that your own objections are rooted in democratic, humanist principles, which also entail firm opposition to hate speech, and so your objections are legitimate.

Remain on-topic, keep your arguments organised

Do not try to keep up with rapid changes of subject. Demand that priorities are set, and issues are covered one after the other. If necessary, stop the subject from being changed by interrupting. Bring the discussion to a halt if it is clear from the speaker's style that no serious debate will be possible.

Do not play the hero

If the AfD speaker is bringing up unacceptable ideas, make this clear, and explain how this threatens you. In these circumstances it may not be possible to continue the discussion. Take any threat of violence seriously, and solicit support.

What YOU can do:

Be prepared

Right-wing extremists and far-right populists may use thoroughly reasoned lines of argument when talking about their key issues, and they may have been trained in public speaking.

They usually employ destructive strategies in the discussion, which boil down to denunciation of "the elites". Counter-arguments may get bogged down in fending off a host of accusations.

So it is important:

- Not to underestimate your opponent.
- To counter their destructive, accusatory strategy by demanding concrete examples and potential solutions.
- To insist that their demands are spelled out in detail, to the point where the anti-constitutional, oppressive core ideology is exposed.

Take action in your own social sphere

Far-right extremist and populist notions are increasingly encountered in everyday life. And this is where we can achieve the most: amongst friends and family, where there is a relationship to work with.

Racist, sexist, anti-Semitic etc. pronouncements can be challenged even at this level. You do not have to argue at the most detailed level, it can be enough to prompt your friend or relative to **rethink** and **question** their assumptions.

Point out:

- generalizations ("Islam", "women")
- "Us" versus "Them" thinking
- the logical consequences of their statements
- your own opposition to bigoted attitudes

When having these conversations with friends or relatives, **your aim** should not be to "win", but for each person to gain insight into the other's point of view.

The point of view of the people most affected

The language used by far-right extremist and right-wing extremist figures is often hurtful. So especially in the case of **public events**, there is a danger that people will stay away solely because such figures are going to attend, so that they are not exposed to this verbal abuse. It is therefore vital to consider how to cater to people targeted by the far-right when planning your event.

HOW TO DEBATE RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS

Debate conditions

The **more public** the debate will be, the more important it is to carry it out successfully. However, what any sole individual can achieve in this context is highly dependent on the **format** of the debate and the **conditions** it is held in. Therefore: **Wherever right-wing extremist or right-wing populist figures have been invited to an event, it is vital to debate with them and to deliver opposing arguments.**

In a **one-to-one setting**: There is an opportunity to explore and question the other person's stance empathetically. There is usually plenty of time.

In front of a **small audience**, e.g. on a podium: This is usually all about citing your respective opinions. There is practically no opportunity to actually change the other person's mind. The target of both parties' arguments is the audience, who may be interacted with, and who may applaud to signal agreement etc. Your speaking style should be tailored to suit the audience.

In front of a **large audience**, such as on a radio or TV programme or in a live-streamed event: The above largely applies again, with the difference that there is no possibility for feedback. In these situations, it is even more important how you choose your words, and generally you will have only a very short time allocated. Therefore it is vital to use the time allotted to you to advocate for your own beliefs and not to concern yourself with countering what your far-right opponent has said. Your priority should be to show a clear distinction between your own ideas and attitudes, and the bigoted beliefs of your opponent.

What role does the **precise situation** play?

The Desiderius Erasmus Foundation – a perfectly normal foundation?

The Desiderius Erasmus Foundation (DES) is the AfD's party-specific foundation. All parties represented in the Bundestag have one. In all probability, with the start of the next legislature in 2021 and the probably continued presence AfD in the German Bundestag, the Desiderius-Erasmus Foundation will again be entitled to receive federal funding amounting to millions. The AfD expects state subsidies of at least 70 million euros per year.

The founding and honorary chairman of the DES, Konrad Adam, describes party-specific foundations as “an aberration of democracy in the Federal Republic”.⁵¹ In criticizing these foundations, the co-founder of the AfD expressed what many in the AfD think. Nevertheless, the AfD decided, at its national party congress in June 2018, to recognise the DES as a party-specific foundation in order to establish “a level footing” with the “old parties”. The foundation has since become almost wholly uncontroversial in the AfD. The advantages for AfD outweigh any substantive concerns. In addition to the millions of euros in funding, (and party-specific foundations do not yet have to show in detail how this funding has been used), the foundation also offers the option of providing financial and substantive support for future elites and the potential to exert a strong influence on the scientific and cultural scene.

In this context, it is not surprising that the internal factional battles within the AfD, which is less about more extreme and less extreme positions, but rather about the right strategy in dealing with the threat of monitoring by the BfV and different ways (to be a popular party or a purely parliamentary party) to reach their goals, are also being fought in the DES. Both sides aim to make the foundation useful for their own side, their own people and networks. A key organization for the faction around Björn Höcke, who advocate making the party movement-based, is the association “Institut für Staatspolitik” (IfS), which is categorised by the BfV as a “suspected case” in terms of right-wing extremism and is considered one of the most important sources of right-wing extremist personnel in Germany. Its importance within the AfD and DES is illustrated i.a. by the fact that both active and former functionaries and lecturers of their academies have been appointed to top positions in the DES.

Since March 2018, Karlheinz Weißmann, a founding member of the IfS and probably the best-known mastermind of the self-styled “New” Right, has been a member of the DES board of trustees. He left the institute in 2014 in a dispute over its orientation. But even in Weißmann's time, the IfS trained right-wing extremist personnel who are or were active in organisations monitored by the BfV, such as the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and the “Identitarian movement”.⁵² Given Weißmann's ideology, this is not surprising – he seems to have a deep contempt for large sections of the population. He describes both the upper and lower classes as “antisocial”. His particular hatred is reserved for “those asocial persons in the under-class, who form an ever-growing bunch of parasites because they are neither able nor willing to work”.

Erik Lehnert, the current head of the IfS, even temporarily sat on the DES board as secretary – although he is an avowed critic of parliamentary democracy and advocate of an authoritarian or even, in some statements, fascist state.

During a talk in front of members of the Markomannia Aachen Greifswald fraternity, which has been targeted by the BfV due to its suspected right-wing extremist machinations, Lehnert complained that “democracy has become a sacred cow” and if you are not a democrat, you are considered to be someone from the “kingdom of evil”. Lehnert regards democracies as a temporary phenomenon, which is why, he asserts, it is necessary to “think beyond this time frame and think further”. Lehnert believes that the abolition of democracy may sometimes be necessary to ensure the preservation of the polity. He regrets that “even” this is considered an anti-constitutional proposition. He describes the party state as the “basic underlying evil” and likes to philosophise about whether there should be an equal right to vote or whether people “who have more knowledge” or more wealth should be given greater voting rights.⁵³ Removing equal voting rights is a natural idea for opponents of egalitarianism such as Lehnert and Weißmann. In their view of the world, it would be foolish if the small elitist group of those who “know more” and “do more” were to have much less influence in elections in percentage terms than the “weaker, stupider part” of the population.

Position paper from the Evangelisches Studienwerk against cooperation with the Desiderius-Erasmus Foundation:

In its position paper, the Evangelisches Studienwerk warns that in the shape of the DES the AfD can promote an intellectual elite, “which – at least according to the statements of several party members that are currently becoming known – does not feel committed, at least in part, to the central values of the Basic Law. It should also be noted that this foundation denies the validity of scientific quality standards wherever these conflict with political positions of the AfD.” The position paper goes on to say: “Right-wing populist, ethnocentric and nationalist ideas that conflict with our values and convictions are currently threatening to become socially acceptable again. In recent years, we have been horrified to witness verbal and physical attacks on refugees, people with a migration background, minorities and dissidents. With the political rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and its debut in the Bundestag in 2017, ideas that exclude people, stir up fear, insecurity and hatred have gained influence.”

Source: www.evstudienwerk.de/images/stories/pdf/presse/Positionspapier_final_sicher.pdf

It is not surprising that “civic education” as well as “the scientific education and training of gifted young people” are core concerns of the DES. Lehnert is of the opinion that “the most important task of politics is education and the question of how education can be used to achieve a ,character selection for state politics”. Lehnert describes very enthusiastically in various articles how such a state, for which the IfS and soon also the DES mean to promote “character selection for state politics”, might look. In the IfS’s own theory journal “Secession”, he mentions the authoritarian, fascist dictatorship in Portugal as a political model.⁵⁴

This clear advocacy of an authoritarian, fascistic form of government has not brought Lehnert any noticeable criticism within the DES or AfD. The fact that he was nevertheless voted off the board in May 2020 is due to the internal dispute within the foundation and the party about handling the BfV. His removal from office was solely due to the BfV’s categorisation of the IfS as a suspected case of right-wing extremism. It was meant to signal that the DES was keeping its distance from the new-right IfS. Even after his forced resignation, Lehnert himself said that it was even tactically superfluous, that he had “as a DES board member only made statements which were completely in line with the free democratic basic order”.⁵⁵ Lehnert and other DES board members are therefore very aware of what they are allowed to say in their foundation roles, and what they are allowed to say as private individuals. The foundation’s democratic disguise must not be torn by thoughtless statements. But even after Lehnert’s expulsion, other IfS-related individuals are still represented in the DES top management. Besides the above-mentioned “mastermind of the New Right” Karlheinz Weißmann, there is Dr Jan Moldenhauer, a former leader of the disbanded right-wing extremist AfD group ‘Patriotic Platform’. He occasionally writes for ‘Secession’ and appears as a speaker at IfS training seminars.

The board of trustees also includes Harald Weyel, an AfD Bundestag delegate who regards the current Germany as a “provisional Federal Republic” and believes that Germany can only blame itself for one thing during the First World War: “having lost the war”. Weyel, who went into politics in order to “finally regulate German affairs in such a way that normality, as it still prevailed in the Empire” can be restored, is a speaker at the IfS and employs Lehnert as a staff member in the Bundestag.⁵⁶ So even after Lehnert’s dismissal, there are currently at least three people in leading positions at the DES who are ideologically associated with the extreme right-wing “New” Right and who are very close to the IfS or who have even headed the IfS.

However, there people within the DES leadership who have close contacts with or are part of the extreme right beyond the IfS milieu. The Austrian Hans Hausberger, on the DES board, has been closely connected to the extreme right for decades and who was considered a close confidant of the former extreme right-wing Republikaner leader and former Waffen-SS member Franz Schönhuber. Hausberger supported the Republikaner as far back as the 1990s, involved in three party-related foundation projects. According to Lobbycontrol, therefore, his personal background raises the question of “whether the AfD is supported by old right-wing networks that used to support the Republikaner”.⁵⁷ Hausberger was also the author of the right-wing extremist magazine “Staatsbriefe” (State Letters), which was discontinued in 2001. In the AfD and the DES, he is considered a close confidant of Alice Weidel and sits on the board of the AfD’s Bodensee district association with her. It was also he who persuaded Erik Lehnert to join the DES board, as he was “urgently looking for ‘right’ people”, and he together with Erika Steinbach engineered Lehnert’s de-selection.

These DES personnel, and the other members of the board of directors and the board of trustees, demonstrate that the DES does not seem to have a problem with even anti-democratic and pro-fascist positions. This is another way for the DES to set itself apart among the party-specific foundations.

Recommendations for dealing with the DES

Keep a clear distance from enemies of democracy

Many clubs, associations and foundations have been working together with party-specific foundations for a long time or invite scholarship holders to attend at the beginning of each semester. So it is vital that organisations set out a clear internal position on how to deal with DES and its activities in advance, before DES receives state subsidies in the millions. An amendment of the organisation’s statutes or a binding board decision may be useful. These should clearly state that any cooperation with foundations and associations which cultivate right-wing extremist ideas or where persons with such ideologies are present on the board of directors must be rejected.

Confronting DES ideologies

The DES names some key tasks as the provision of civic education, the promotion of science and research, of developmental cooperation, and of art and culture. In these and other fields, DES will increasingly try to intervene ideologically and promote the normalisation of its own ideologies in science, art and culture. It is therefore necessary to deal in detail and critically with their ideas, strategies and positions and to formulate and develop democratic counter-positions and strategies. Work here should not (only) focus on the DES’ most extreme statements, as these are often only used as battering rams to make other bigoted, anti-democratic and anti-scientific positions, which are not so stridently presented, appear moderate and acceptable.

Attacks on civil society

Civil society has been feeling the growing influence of right-wing extremist actors in parliaments and the media most clearly. As of spring 2019, the AfD chairs almost 20 specialist parliamentary committees in the regions and three specialist committees in the Bundestag. This means that many associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also being confronted with the party. Organisations are put under pressure, slandered and threatened, especially if they are in policy areas which the AfD considers its targets such as migration, Islam, gender justice, sexual identities or child and youth policy. Defending against these attacks takes up more and more energy and ties up resources.

Associations and NGOs are generally confronted with one of the main narratives of right-wing extremist ideology: that current politics is a conspiracy against the country and its “Volk”. Right-wing extremist groups such as the AfD claim to be the only true voice representing the will of a supposedly homogenous “Volk”. This anti-pluralist view is opposed by civil society initiatives and associations dedicated to promoting democracy. Organisations which speak out in favour of refugees, freedom of religion or the self-determination of sexual identity quickly come under suspicion of acting against “German interests” as defined by the AfD and are slandered as “traitors to the people”. In addition to the long-standing threat posed by right-wing extremists to individual activists, entire projects and initiatives funded by the federal states and the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs’ Demokratie leben! (“Living democracy”) programme are now being targeted and attacked. The aim of these attacks is to call into question whether the organisers are worthy of sponsorship, and to enforce the withdrawal of state funds.

Such attacks are accompanied by systematic defamation via blogs, conspiracy-theory-oriented and right-wing alternative media. Once a controversy has been achieved, it can be picked up by individual broadsheet and mass media publications, and thus give further publicity to the AfD’s demands. The party uses petitions to try to halt public funding. Targeted hate campaigns lead to attacks on the organisations’ websites.

These attacks become particularly threatening when of private individuals’ personal data is published (also called “doxing”). Intimidating “inspection visits” are also part of the extremist right-wing’s strategy in dealing with political opponents.



Demonstration against the AfD state party conference in Niedersachsen in October 2018 © picture alliance/Hauke-Christian Dittrich/dpa

Negative campaigns and parliamentary questions as a strategy

Right-wing extremist MPs in the AfD are equipped with material resources and rights of inspection, information gathering, and disclosure, which they systematically use to put pressure on civil society. Targeted, sometimes personal negative campaigns are part of the strategy. Women experience additional pressure because the campaigns are often sexist in nature. This harassment includes presenting sponsoring organisations as a problem in minor and major parliamentary questions⁵⁸, in enquiry commissions⁵⁹, parliamentary question-sessions⁶⁰ and local committees. Frequently voiced accusations include allegations that organisations have violated their duty of neutrality or data protection regulations, are suspected of embezzlement/fraud, or should be reviewed by the Court of Auditors and the tax office, or have questionable non-profit status.⁶¹

In addition to more formal accusations, the work and activities of these organisations are also made the subject of attacks. Accusers ask for the location of events, and what the aims of activities are, as well as for details about speakers, the origin and use of funds, or even attempt to scrutinize employees’ political affiliations. All this aims to stigmatise the associations and NGOs objectives as extreme left-wing and to block their work. In August 2017, for example, the Berlin AfD parliamentary group submitted a question to the local parliament entitled “Left-wing extremist networks in Berlin”. The submission contained 129 questions on the personnel and financial connections of an arbitrary selection of 40 organisations from sports clubs to trade unions. The attacks are even more direct where right-wing extremists are part of the administration at local level, for example in Berlin, where AfD members run district offices.

No matter how thoroughly the initiatives concerned refute every accusation, right-wing extremist groups like the AfD never cease in their attacks. Under certain circumstances, this can lead supporters finding themselves in a constant “defensive struggle”. This ties up resources and can put employees under stresses that extend into their private lives. Thus it is clear that defending against right-wing extremist attacks is always also a fight for democratic discourse.

The association **Miteinander - Netzwerk für Demokratie und Weltoffenheit in Sachsen-Anhalt e.V.** has been doing essential work for 19 years: it supports people affected by right-wing violence, maintains a comprehensive educational programme and creates networks of civil society actors in the fight against right-wing extremism. In several reports, the association has now addressed how the AfD is interconnected with the right-wing extremist scene, and thus has become a party target. Since then, the AfD has been attacking the association on a massive scale, trying to silence it and make it unable to act. The AfD is trying to link the association close to anti-constitutional left-wing extremism by means of parliamentary questions made by the local state parliament grouping. In June 2018, the parliamentary group tried to stop state subsidies to Miteinander e.V. But democratic organisations supported the association in October 2018 with a public appeal and large billboards in Magdeburg. More than 40 organisations signed the appeal for solidarity and made it clear that an attack on Miteinander e.V. is an attack against the entire democratic society and concerns everyone.

Legal disputes with the AfD

The establishment of AfD at the local and municipal level has not brought an end to legal disputes. For example, the Berlin district of Treptow-Köpenick was made to delete an announcement concerning an AfD-critical event from its homepage. The administrative court considered that excess undue influence on the people's decision-making process had been proven, including with regard to local parliament elections. No legal advice can be offered by the current publication, but we may note a paper written by the Academic Service of the German Bundestag (WD 3 - 3000 - 193/15), about the constitutional limits of financial subsidies, using the example of initiatives against right-wing extremism. The paper attaches great importance to freedom of opinion. The particular importance of balance, distancing vis-à-vis the constitutional state, and the requirement for objectivity are emphasised as important concepts for discussions with political parties. The German constitution includes a mandate to avert dangers to the liberal and democratic order using resources of the constitutional state.

This means that statements should be factual, well-founded and balanced. Calls for demonstrations or votes can be formulated in terms of values, e.g. in favour of democracy and against right-wing populism. On the other hand, state-funded projects should avoid making exclusionary or action-oriented statements about individual parties. The duty of neutrality, to which state-funded projects and indirectly also their supporting institutions are subject within certain limits, is increasingly applied, especially during election campaigns. In this respect, legal or funding reasons can only be cited to a limited extent in order to prevent a conflict with a party's problematic positions.

Recommendations for action for healthy civic organisations

Create or adapt mission statements

Many organisations have a mission statement. These should be reviewed: is it clear and unambiguous (no empty phrases!) enough to be used in dealing with AfD? Does it need to be adapted to current challenges? If a mission statement does not exist, one should be developed, preferably in collaboration with staff and external consultants, such as the Mobile Advisory Teams against Right-wing Extremism or the Amadeu Antonio Foundation. It is important that the mission statement is in line with the statutes. If, for example, it is decided that no one can exercise honorary or full-time functions in the association if they are at the same time publicly working for parties or organisations who promote racism, anti-Semitism or bigotry, this must be covered by the statutes – otherwise the statutes must be adapted.

Review statutes

Organisations should check whether their own statutes are up to the current challenges. A position against racism, anti-Semitism and denigration of specific groups that is anchored in this document enables clear positions and action to be taken against bigoted ideologies.

Internal training session

In many cases, there are great uncertainties in dealing with AfD. And personnel may have very different sensibilities in terms of their sensitivity to racism, anti-Semitism, sexism and other ideologies of inequality. Internal training should therefore be offered – e.g. on the strategy and ideas of the AfD, how to deal with the party, argumentation training, public relations, dealing with organized social media attacks, legal options for action, but also in general on ideologies of inequality etc. Organisations should regularly survey what needs they have for other training courses.

Develop organisational strategies for dealing with right-wing extremist actors and set these down in binding instructions

A strategy for dealing with AfD should be developed in collaboration external experts. It should set out concrete rules of conduct for your own organisation in the form of instructions, covering e.g.:

- Whether to participate in discussions to which the AfD is also invited?
- How to deal with invitations from the AfD, e.g. as expert witnesses at committee meetings
- Press distribution list: will right-wing extremist delegates be included?
- Are AfD members to be invited to the organisation's events or only those members who sit on the relevant committee? Or should AfD members be entirely excluded?
- Should personnel be made available for joint photos with AfD members?
- How should the AfD be referred to in press statements?
- ...

It is important that these instructions are made binding on the whole organisation, so that there are no different strategies or behaviour towards AfD within the organisation.

There should be an internal discussion within the own organisation about potential for attacks, i.e. about:

- applications submitted
- strategies used
- issues covered
- the public relations work carried out

Any attacks against the organisation, such as derogatory press releases, statements or parliamentary questions in the same vein, should also be documented and the organisation's strategy should be reviewed at regular intervals to see whether it is still up-to-date or needs to be adapted. Larger organisations in particular should allocate resources for this purpose and appoint competent personnel who will be named as responsible for this function.

Dealing with negative campaigns

Even though the accusations made by right-wing extremists are usually without foundation, they can under certain circumstances have a negative impact on the public image of your organisation. Therefore, it makes sense to react appropriately to the accusations and negative campaigns. This usually includes publishing a clarification, and countering the accusations on social media channels. It is also helpful to promptly inform donors and organisation members about where the negative campaign is coming from. In serious cases, an external expert opinion can be a powerful tool for countering these accusations.

Public funding and discussion of neutrality

According to Article 3 (1) and Article 21 (1) of the German constitution, the state must guarantee equal opportunities for political parties. This important principle is used by the AfD to exert pressure on associations and NGOs. This must be countered:

- NGOs are free to express their opinion on socially undesirable developments. (Art. 5 (1) GG)
- The requirement for neutrality regarding political parties applies to state organs – state-funded NGOs are not legally state organs!

Scientific reports from the state parliaments in Brandenburg, Berlin and from the Bundestag can confirm that associations and initiatives have acted in a legally unchallengeable manner in their dealings with the AfD.

Organisations are therefore advised to closely study the AfD's current right-wing extremist behaviour, so that they will be able to continue to promote their own objectives in a changing societal situation, to be able to defend themselves against attacks, but also to help personnel deal confidently with the AfD and its positions.

According to Prof. Dr. Friedhelm Hufen, Professor of Public Law, Constitutional and Administrative Law at the University of Mainz, “Private organisations are entitled to basic rights themselves, and these must not be impaired by excessive neutrality requirements”. He elaborates on this in a detailed article entitled **“Political education for young people and the duty of neutrality”**, to be found in:

Füssel, Hans-Peter et al. (Pub.): Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens. Zeitschrift für Schule, Berufsbildung und Jugenderziehung. Issue No. 2, 2018

Refuting allegations regarding non-profit status

Many organisations rely financially on the tax advantages associated with non-profit status. For this very reason, right-wing extremists are deliberately and publicly questioning the non-profit status of organisations that take a political stance. According to § 52 of the German Tax Code, an organisation “pursues charitable purposes if its activities are aimed at selflessly supporting the general public in the material, intellectual or moral field”. The promotion of Germany’s democratic political system is explicitly recognised as such a “support to the general public”. It is important for non-profit status that the concrete activities of your organisation fit in with the non-profit objectives outlined in its statutes. The statutes should therefore be carefully reviewed with this in mind, if necessary, with the help of a tax lawyer.

Taking data protection seriously

The new DSGVO, which provides for comprehensive provisions on data protection, came into force on 25 May 2018. It requires that personal data must be handled minimally, and verifiably, and that this must be documented in detail. Your organisation should regularly check that it complies with data protection standards.

Data protection is also important for the protection of your organisation’s own employees. Organisations must check that any information published is not sensitive in this sense. If, for example, your organization can avoid publishing the names of employees, there is less likelihood that they will be targeted in negative campaigns. It also makes sense to set up online accounts so that no private addresses are visible.

Positioning

As a civic organisation you act in a social context. Other organisations, but also individuals, pay attention to which if any positions of principle you adopt. A clear stance against racism, right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism is useful when dealing as an organization with these bigoted ideologies, and it also encourages others to confront them.

Networking

Brainstorming and networking are helpful when dealing with AfD and right-wing extremist actors. This can be limited to your own social space, your organisations area of activity or can go beyond these. Networking helps organisations reassess their own strategies, exchange valuable experience and knowledge and to reenergize. It also brings the certainty of having the backing of other groups who are on your side.

Internal and external solidarity

When people within the organisation are attacked or other organisations are exposed to right-wing extremist abuse, solidarity is vital – both individually and through the organisation as a whole. Expressions of solidarity should be made as publicly as possible. Nevertheless, non-public expressions of solidarity are also important and strengthening, especially when individuals have been the target of attacks.

Civil society organisations take a stand against right-wing extremism

- Many organisations are already positioning themselves clearly and effectively. For example, stating clearly that “In the name of tolerance, we should reserve the right not to tolerate intolerance”, the Paritätischer Gesamtverband has taken a clear stand against ideologies of inequality and the AfD: www.der-paritaetische.de/schwerpunkt/viel-falt-ohne-alternative/positionierung/
- The Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund has likewise detailed its rejection of business relations with the AfD in a public statement: www.asb.de/news/asb-erste-hilfe-kurs-fuer-afd
- After the logo of the WHITE RING was misused by a local AfD association, the NGO stated: “What the AfD now stands for is not compatible with our code of conduct for victim support.” Consequently, their national executive committee decided not to accept any donations from the party in future and “that in future no one can exercise honorary or full-time functions in the WHITE RING if they are at the same time publicly active for parties or organisations who promote racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia”: weisser-ring.de/media-news/meldungen/15-09-2018-0
- The Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde has also taken a clear position: “Because fundamental values are at stake in Europe today, we, the leadership of the Evangelischen Brüder-Unität cannot remain silent.” www.ebu.de/fileadmin/media/Dokumente/Erklaerung_gegen_Rechtspopulismus.pdf

Defamation campaigns against democratic projects

A typical sequence of events

Right-wing blogs alternative publish disinformation

1. Right-wing blogs may edit quotations, take facts out of context and use them in the latest hate-inspired fabrications.

The AfD creates a controversy

2. AfD makes use of this fabrication to ask questions in parliament, and gather further material for an artificial controversy. This is then widely distributed via social media.

The tabloids and some broadsheets provide coverage

3. Traditional media report on the fabricated story. Simplified contexts and defamatory distortions of the truth are broadly disseminated - the situation escalates.

Escalation turns into a field day for hate

4. The defamation campaign reaches a peak, and triggers large-scale attacks in the form of hate-filled emails and on-line comments, some including specific personal attacks, often with a tinge of misogyny. There are death threats and threats of attacks

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Antifeminism and attacks on equality

The AfD is seen by the public primarily as a racist, anti-refugee and Islamophobic party. Its anti-feminist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic politics, on the other hand, are little noticed and little discussed. This gives the AfD the opportunity to express its bigoted positions in the seemingly harmless context of gender and family policy without much contradiction and thus to normalise them.

Family policy seen as population policy

AfD basically sees family and gender policy measures as population policy. The basis for this is their adherence to the idea of a fundamental gender binary, from which the AfD's election platform for the Bundestag extrapolates a "natural differences between the sexes", which in turn results, they state, in a gender system in which men and women are assigned different roles and social positions. This gender system dictates a heterosexual, reproductive relationship between men and women and a traditional concept of the family, consisting of a father, a mother and the child(ren). The aim of AfD is a pro-active family policy to save "the German people" from supposed extinction. At the same time, the influx of people from other countries is to be combatted in order to prevent what they see as "foreign infiltration". To this end, the AfD in its Bundestag election manifesto and elsewhere paints a picture of a "child-poor Europe" which it places in opposition to a racist conception of Africa, where it claims population figures are exploding. In a continuance of this racist narrative, it posits as a consequence an inevitable migration towards Europe, which the party wants to counteract by sealing the continent off at the external state borders. As a further measure, the party proposes in its Bundestag election manifesto to transform the Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth into a "Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and Population Growth".

The AfD promotes an exclusionary, supposedly traditional image of the family and refuses to "extend the meaning of the word 'family' as per Article 6 (1) of the German



The AfD instrumentalises feminist issues for its racism.

constitution to other models of cohabitation"⁶². The AfD's family policy is also directed against "single-parent families", by which predominantly single women are meant. According to the AfD election manifesto, the general public is made liable for the poverty resulting from "single-parent families".⁶³

Part of the AfD's population policy is to reject families made up of LGBTQIA+ people.⁶⁴ Homophobic and transphobic discrimination is also evident in public statements by AfD politicians: The AfD delegate Andreas Gehlmann has demanded prison sentences for homosexuality in the Sachsen-Anhalt parliament.⁶⁵ Corinna Herold of the AfD in Thüringen asked in its parliament how many homosexual, bisexual and transsexual people live in the region and why they are "particularly in need of protection".⁶⁶ Nevertheless, there are openly gay AfD politicians and a few openly transsexual AfD politicians who form a sub-group of the party.⁶⁷ They deny that there is any homophobia etc. within the party and often take the position that their own sexual orientation or gender identity is purely a private matter. Equality for LGBTQIA+ people is only mentioned when it can be considered threatened by "external enemies", such as "Islam" or asylum seekers. For example, when marriage equality was extended to gay and lesbian couples in October 2017, the milestone was dismissed as unimportant by Alice Weidel, leader of the AfD in the Bundestag, while she at the same time invoked up a racist doomsday scenario: "Marriage for all, while the country is being Islamised."⁶⁸

In its Bundestag election manifesto, the AfD also opposes modernising sex education in schools, in order to better deal sexual and gender diversity in an interdisciplinary way. Diversity-conscious sex education of diversity is maligned by the AfD as "early sexualisation" and "unacceptable interference in the natural development of our children".

Positions against gender equality work and women and gender studies

The anti-diversity gender system and the corresponding family image are reflected in the AfD's positions on gender equality policies and on women's and gender studies. The Bundestag election manifesto states: "Gender ideology marginalises natural differences between the sexes and calls gender identity into question. It aims to abolish the traditional family as a life plan and ideal. This is in clear contradiction to the Basic Law [...]"⁶⁹. The term "gender ideology" covers women's and gender studies, gender equality policies and (queer) feminist movements and activities and attempts to discredit them as ideological phenomena.⁷⁰

The AfD describes gender studies as unscientific and calls for the abolition of "gender professorships"⁷¹ and equal opportunities officers, whose activities it declares to be a "waste of tax". In addition, it has made repeated requests to abolish gender-neutral language.⁷²

Attacks on equality policies and measures such as gender mainstreaming are now also to be found in the Bundestag. Nicole Höchst gave a speech there on International Women's Day and defamed equality policy as "totalitarianism of equality"⁷³. Structural disadvantages, such as lower pay or a lower proportion of women in leading positions, are ridiculed: these phenomena are, it claims, "like a yeti. Everyone talks about him, no one has ever seen him".⁷⁴



International Women's Day 2018:
Demonstrators take a stand against the
far-right. © imago images/IPON

Muscling in on feminist and women's political issues

Another strategy of the AfD is to link gender equality and gender policy issues with racist stereotypes. Women's rights and feminist concerns, e.g. (sexualised) violence against women, are only addressed if they can be racist exploited. "Violence against our women and children" is a central rabble-rousing slogan for right-wing populist, far-right -wing and extreme right-wing actors. This is shown by AfD stunts like the "Women's March" (Berlin)

or the "Kandel Women's Alliance". Female AfD politicians are involved in the organisation and permit processes of these events and as speakers.⁷⁵

Reproductive rights and proximity to anti-choice activists

Under the slogan "A welcoming culture for children", the AfD election manifesto aims to restrict women's right to self-determination and reproductive rights. For example, the number of abortions is to be reduced. Hence Uwe Junge's (former AfD state chairman in Rheinland-Pfalz) has called Pro Familia, which works on sex education and family planning and offers pregnancy conflict counselling, an "abortion association"⁷⁶. In a Bundestag debate, AfD delegate Mariana Iris Harder-Kühnel indirectly blamed abortions for the "demographic catastrophe" threatening Germany.⁷⁷ The AfD is supported by its links to right-wing conservative, fundamental Christian and anti-feminist networks, which are also involved in the "March for Life". Beatrix von Storch, deputy leader of the Bundestag group, as well as former AfD politicians such as Anette Schultner (formerly of Christians in the AfD, now in The Blue Party) and Steffen Königer (former AfD delegate in Brandenburg, resigned at the end of 2018) have demonstrated several times at the "March for Life".⁷⁸

Counter-strategies: a gender policy celebrating diversity

Analysing and criticizing family and gender images

The family and gender policy positions of AfD are directed against the realities of life for many people. The first step is to raise awareness of the anti-feminist positions that AfD represents in election manifestos, speeches and public statements or on its social media sites. These must be analysed in terms of the consequences for different target groups. The positions of the AfD can thus be examined with regard to your own organisation's positions, and tackled from the point of view of an individual association or field of activity.

- The Federal Working Group on Municipal Women's Offices and Equality Bodies, in collaboration with the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, has commissioned a study on "Antifeminism as a threat to democracy. Equality in an era of right-wing populism", which analyses anti-feminism and attacks on equality work by the AfD and other right-wing extremist actors: www.frauenbeauftragte.org/sites/default/files/uploads/downloads/antifeminismus_als_demokratiegefaehrung.pdf
- The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's regional study on right-wing populism and women in Europe "Triumph of Women - The Female Face of the Far Right in Europe" analyses and compares gender political positions of far-right political actors in Germany, Hungary, Austria, Poland and Sweden: library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/14630.pdf

Do not fall for instrumentalization – sexualised violence is a problem for society as a whole

The topic of sexualised violence is emotionally charged and, presented as violence against "our women" or "our children", is enormously mobilising for the extreme right, contemporary right-wing radicals and right-wing populists. Basically, women's rights and sexualised violence are only addressed if the alleged or actual perpetrators are in some way "non-Germans". Even if it initially brings more much-needed public attention to the issue, anyone who uses the national origins of perpetrators and victims as a basis for unequal treatment, who generalises racism, who turns a blind eye to sexualised violence by white men and demands a restrictive asylum policy as a "solution" instead of strengthening tools for female empowerment cannot be an ally.

We need an inclusive concept of family

The AfD pursues an exclusionary family policy that aims to support the few and puts the many at a disadvantage. This exclusionary view of families must be countered by an inclusive understanding. The German Women's Council writes: "Family is independent of the legal form on which it is founded, wherever people live with each other in a relationship that is designed for the long term and/or based on responsibility". The Parität Baden-Württemberg describes family as including "all forms of private cohabitation where people support each other", very similarly to the Future Forum Family: "where people assume long-term responsibility for each other, provide care and give attention." These examples reflect a lived reality in Germany that is diametrically opposed to the positions of AfD.

Identifying exclusion and discrimination, raising awareness of the realities of life and calling for democratic treatment

If people are devalued because of their demographic, way of life or identity, it is important to intervene, to point up the rules of democratic coexistence and to demand they are upheld. This is particularly true in cases of sexist shaming and gender-based hate speech. Women and others who do not fit into the heteronormative image of AfD are particularly affected.

Experts at the **Lola for Democracy organization in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern** have produced the first comprehensive study on homophobia and transphobia for the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It offers an insight into the everyday experiences of lesbians, gay and trans people and presents a variety of experiences of discrimination, but also show the resistance and counter-strategies of those affected. The exhibition “Wir* hier! Lesbisch, schwul und trans* zwischen Hiddensee und Ludwigslust” highlights a diversity of LGBTQIA+ realities to those who may be unaware of them:
www.un-sichtbar-mv.de/ausstellung

Showing solidarity and adopting a position

It is important to expose the anti-feminist and anti-diversity positions of AfD, to name them clearly and take a stand against them. Attacks on equality, sexual diversity and sex education must be rejected in solidarity. It is also and especially in this field that it must be made clear that the basic human rights to live together in a diverse and open society are not negotiable. Gender justice, anti-discrimination and equality policies and the (legal) achievements of the women’s movements are basic democratic values that are not open to question. Attacks on these values are attacks on democracy. It is important to take those affected seriously, to involve them and make them heard. Broad alliances and networks send an important signal – for democratic values, for women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ rights, and for solidarity with those affected by discrimination and violence.

The economic and social policy of the AfD

The AfD likes to present itself as the “party of the little man”. In reality, however, this image does not have much to do with its substantive positions. The AfD is clearly divided on issues of economic and social policy: While the party’s ethno-nationalist tendency, under the strong influence of Björn Höcke, tries to win over those affected by social cuts and deregulation to the AfD by making protectionist demands and by some anti-capitalist rhetoric, the neoliberal hardliners in the party are attached to a combination of prosperity chauvinism and racist biological ideas. Despite all these differences, however, it is evident in economic and social policy that racism and nationalism form a link between the party’s factions. Thus the policies of the ethno-nationalist wing are also directed against the socially disadvantaged such as the long-term unemployed or homeless, who are excluded from the AfD’s ideal “national community” as mere “benefit recipients”. In recent years, the nationalist forces have succeeded in gaining influence within the party, especially in the East German state associations, but the radical market camp continues to dominate the party in terms of both policies and personnel.

A glance at the party’s economic and social policy policies shows that it stands above all for social welfare cuts, deregulation of the labour market and a neo-liberal restructuring of the state. Not only discrimination against migrants and refugees, but also the exclusion and devaluation of socially disadvantaged people are an integral part of the AfD’s political agenda.

Restructuring the tax system in favour of companies and higher earners

Since its foundation, tax policy has been one of the AfD’s main issues. The focus has been on reducing the tax burden on companies and higher earners and narrowing the scope of the welfare state.

This can be clearly seen in one of the key focal points of the party: the reform of income tax.

Income tax is one of the main sources of government funding. Until now, income has been taxed progressively: those with higher incomes are also taxed more heavily. The idea behind this is simple: strong shoulders can bear a greater burden than weak ones. The AfD wants to replace this progressive income tax with a phased model that significantly reduces the burden on top earners.⁷⁹ The state is thus threatened with massive revenue losses. The AfD also wants to put another of the most important sources of municipal income into question: business tax. While the party is thus depriving municipalities and cities of their financial resources, it also wants to dissolve the joint liability agreement between federal, state and local governments. This would mean that in future, local authorities and federal states would also risk insolvency – with devastating consequences for both the affected population and public sector employees. Alongside inheritance tax, rent caps are also to be abolished. Again those who already can scarcely find affordable housing are to bear the brunt. On the other hand, banking and tax secrecy regulations are to be tightened, which would make investigations against tax evaders considerably more difficult.⁸⁰

Social cuts and neo-liberal restructuring of the state

While the main beneficiaries of this tax relief will be the wealthy and businesses, the costs will be borne by the general public.

From the outset, AfD has pursued a strictly neo-liberal path, focusing on the privatisation of state infrastructure and the dismantling of social security systems. These demands for neo-liberal restructuring of the state also affect the democratic constitution of our society. Parts of the AfD are even calling for the withdrawal of voting rights from the unemployed.

The objective of AfD is the withdrawal of the state at all levels. The state is to be reduced to the task of providing free infrastructure for companies. The party’s basic manifesto states: “Only a lean state can be a good state”. Public services for the general welfare are to be transferred to private hands as far as possible.

A similar policy characterises AfD labour market policy. Representatives of the party repeatedly call for the flexibilization of the labour market at the expense of employees, the forced employment of the unemployed and for the reduction of employee rights.⁸¹

Trade unions targeted by the AfD & Co.

The rise of AfD since 2013 has also been accompanied by a change in its voter base. Despite its attacks on workers' rights and radical market demands, the party owes its rapid rise above all to the fact that it has won votes from large sections of the working class. If the AfD wants to achieve its declared goal of establishing itself as a popular party alongside the CDU/CSU and SPD, it will have to rely on further gains in votes from the working class. The trade unions, in particular, stand in its way, as they have repeatedly taken a clear stand against the far-right party. The AfD is therefore calling more and more openly for a fight against independent workers' representatives.

Against independent trade unions

The number of threats, intimidation and even physical attacks on trade unionists is growing. On the fringes of a trade union rally against the AfD in Hanau, for example, a steward was attacked from behind by two AfD supporters and seriously injured.⁸² In the weeks and months prior to this attack, the DGB union in Hanau faced a real smear campaign by the AfD. Due to their commitment against the far right, the AfD has repeatedly defamed the unions and their officials as “left-wing extremists”. The trade unions have been subject to harsh accusations, particularly in social media. This anti-union propaganda by the AfD reached its peak to date with a rally against “left-wing extremism” in front of the Hanau Trade Union Centre, just a few days before the above attack.

In federal politics, too, top AfD politicians have repeatedly taken aim at the trade unions. The deputy AfD party leader Beatrix von Storch calls ver.di an “official criminal organisation. A danger for democracy. Enemies of the constitution!”⁸³

The AfD's attacks on trade unions also target the organising principle of the unions themselves. The DGB trade unions see themselves as representing the interests of all dependent employees, irrespective of their origin, residence status, nationality or sexual orientation, and as a single trade union independent of political parties. Time and again, AfD functionaries have called on AfD workers to leave this umbrella union and join the party-political workers' organisations of the AfD. There are now three of these, all of which compete to represent the interests of workers in the AfD.

The interest group “Workers in the AfD” (AidA) was founded on 1 December 2015, largely propagating the neoliberal restructuring of the state as demanded by the AfD.

In contrast to AidA, the “Alternative Vereinigung der Arbeitnehmer e.V.” (AVA) does not act as a recognised federal interest group of the AfD, but as an association. It was founded in Dortmund in 2015. Like AidA, AVA is an advocate of further neoliberal deregulation and the dismantling of social security systems. For example, the association calls for Hartz IV recipients to be obliged to do charitable work and for harsh sanctions in cases of system misuse.⁸⁴

While AidA and AVA see themselves exclusively as employee sections in the AfD and also largely support their business-friendly policies, the “Alternative Employees' Association of Central Germany” (Alarm), which was founded in 2017, is concerned with much more. Jürgen Pohl, founder of “Alarm” and an AfD Bundestag delegate, claims that the DGB unions have betrayed the interests of employees and are no longer real trade unions. “That is why we need a new one, and that will be ‘Alarm’” Pohl stated.⁸⁵ The organisational focus of ‘Alarm’ is on the East German states. The association's first activity was a demonstration on 1 May in Erfurt. In front of some 1,200 participants, Pohl said, referring to the DGB unions' demo: “We will wrest Labour Day from the hands of these traitors to the workers.”

Right-wing campaigns around works council elections

In the 2018 works council elections, the DGB trade unions faced a concerted right-wing extremist campaign. In alliance with parts of the AfD, the “One Percent” initiative and the magazine Compact, the “Zentrum Automobil” association ran for election of the interest representatives in several companies with their own “alternative” works council lists. The plans were presented to the public at a conference of the far-right magazine Compact in Leipzig at the end of November 2017. Prominent far-right ideologues were present. In addition to the Compact publisher Jürgen Elsässer, the conference was attended by Pegida founder Lutz Bachmann, the leader of the “Identitarian movement Austria”, Martin Sellner, Philip Stein from the right-wing initiative “Ein Prozent” and Björn Höcke from the AfD.

This coordinated campaign was intended to establish “Zentrum Automobil” nationwide. In the works council elections, the association not only tried to gain a foothold at various Daimler locations, but with the support of its partners also called for the election of right-wing extremist lists in other companies. In the aftermath of the works council elections, “Zentrum Automobil” talked of its “gigantic success”. A closer look, however, shows that the envisioned right-wing extremist landslide failed to materialise.

For example, the campaign candidates only managed to win 19 of the 78,000 works council seats in the IG Metall organisational area targeted by the AfD-related election lists. 17 of the 19 mandates for right-wing extremist works council members are in the automotive industry. In addition, there are two seats at the chainsaw manufacturer Stihl in Waiblingen. There, the AfD-list “Courage to Change” succeeded in getting into the works council.

However, despite the mediocre results of the right-wing lists in the works council elections, it would be a mistake to underestimate company-focussed activities stemming from the far right. Particularly in view of the growing level of approval for AfD in some sections of the working class, it is to be feared that AfD will continue its attempts to establish itself in workplaces in the future, and that racism, discrimination and exclusion will thus continue to grow in the workplace context.



Union activists set up a symbolic “wall” to isolate the AfD’s stall at the “Democracy Boulevard” in Magdeburg in 2018. © imago images/Christian Schroedter

Recommendations for action for a progressive workplace – against exclusion and hate

Right-wing agitation in the workplace concerns everyone!

Argue back and hold your positions

A good and non-discriminatory working atmosphere depends on each individual. Racist incitement and discrimination in the workplace must not remain unchallenged. It is not unusual for right-wingers to think, act and speak in the name of a “silent majority”. This makes it all the more important to take a clear position.

Identify right-wing propaganda

Often, right-wing ideas raised in conversation are played down or dismissed as trivial remarks. However, in order to counteract racism and discrimination in the workplace, it is necessary to call them what they are. Racist incidents are not a trivial offence, but can have serious consequences under criminal and labour law.

Show solidarity with people affected

Discrimination usually affects individuals. Right-wing agitation deliberately seeks to exclude and isolate its targets. This makes it all the more important that these people receive encouragement and support from colleagues.

Look for support

Unity is strength. This is also true when dealing with racism and right-wing agitation. If you are confronted with right-wing slogans, it is often worthwhile to involve others in the discussion and ask them to take a stand. Support in dealing with exclusion and discrimination is also offered by the elected workplace interest groups, such as youth and trainee representatives or works and staff councils. The company-based interest groups are obligated to take action against racism in the workplace.

Strong workplace representation of interests – strongly against right-wing agitation:

Workplace interest groups in particular have a special role to play in the fight against right-wing agitation. After all, the statutory tasks of the works council, which are explicitly mentioned in the Works Constitution Act, include combating racism and welcoming employees from other countries. It is therefore compulsory for works council members to take action against right-wing agitation.

Draw up a works agreement/guiding principles

The works council can actively raise the issue of dealing with racism, regardless of whether there has been a specific incident or whether it wants to take preventive action. One possibility is to draw up a company agreement to combat discrimination and to welcome employees from other countries into the workplace. This document can be used to agree with the employer on a binding procedure in the event of right-wing incitement to hatred, but also to establish regular information and training measures in everyday operations.

Critical confrontation with AfD positions

Works council members are often unsure how to behave towards the AfD and their like, because party-political action is taboo for the works council. However, this means above all that they must not abuse their role for the purpose of, for example, campaigning for a particular party. The discussion of political issues with regard to the employees’ interests is, however, explicitly enshrined in law as a valid activity. There is therefore nothing to prevent the positions of the AfD and other parties from being critically examined, for example at a works meeting.

Prevention not reaction

In order to prevent racist and nationalist incitement from arising in the workplace, the best thing works councils can do is to act rather than react. And there are many ways of doing this. The regular works meetings in particular can be used for education and training measures.

Use existing rights

The works council also has a particularly important role to play in combating racism and exclusion because, unlike many other issues, it can force the employer to act. If an employee repeatedly attracts attention through racist behaviour or other discrimination, and thereby disturbs the peace in the workplace, the works council can demand that the employer transfer or even dismiss them. In addition, the works council can also intervene in the recruitment process if the employer selects someone in the application procedure who is probably racist.

Look for support

No one has to deal with right-wing agitation alone. Works councils are confronted with so many issues that no single body has the perfect plan for everything. This is one of the reasons why there is a legal entitlement to employer-paid seminars on issues necessary for works council work, or to calling in external expertise on an issue. This also applies to the fight against racism and other measures against discrimination. The trade unions in particular have a wide range of knowledge, material and qualified people to provide assistance. In the event of an acute racist incident, it is also advisable to contact victim support centres, to provide those targeted with expert support.

The AfD between climate change denial and heritage conservation

In the summer of 2019, Alexander Gauland proclaimed disparagement of climate protection policy as a key issue for the AfD. In the face of all scientific evidence, the party is sceptical of the human influence on climate change and is trying to mobilise an anti-ecological electorate. At the same time, parts of the party see themselves as avowed conservationists. That sounds highly contradictory. However, the AfD makes it clear that the protection of nature and local heritage homeland does not automatically have to be linked to a global perspective or even to climate action.

Protection of “native” nature

The “Dresden Declaration of AfD Bundestag and State faction environmental policy spokespersons” published in July 2019, states that the organisation sees itself in the tradition of Alexander von Humboldt, who “recognised the necessity of ecological thought and action”. It mentions how vital it is to protect Germany’s “native” plants and animals from “invasive species”. This clear commitment to nature and species conservation is coupled with a rejection of environmental and climate protection measures. In the same declaration, the AfD calls climate protection measures “regulatory mania” and disparages any expansion of renewable energies.

These positions are the expression of a nationalist understanding of heritage protection, which has a long tradition in Germany with the fiction that there is a naturally generated connection between the “Volk” and their “Raum”, or space. In this context, Sachsen’s AfD chair Jörg Urban promoted “honest nature and heritage protection” as early as 2017. As former chairman of the Jörg Urban, Urban even comes directly from the nature conservation association milieu. And Björn Höcke also supported this approach to nature conservation policy in a statement in which he bemoaned the fact that green issues are promoted by progressive parties, calling them “hostile to life”.

The tradition of ethnocentric heritage protection

When, towards the end of the 19th century, industrialisation, urbanisation and rural exodus was having a visible impact on nature and the environment in the German Empire, the first nature conservation movement to emerge was the “Heimatschutz” movement. However, the conservative “heritage protectors” were not only concerned about nature, but also about the “homeland”. They based their ideas on the supposition that the environment, the “Raum” (space), shapes the “Volk” living in it and vice versa. According to them, the “soul of the Volk” was inseparably linked to the landscape and nature, and the “German people” would suffer considerable damage if nature were to be destroyed.

Connections between this heritage protection movement and the Nazi regime were fluid, both in terms of personnel and concept. The idea of a naturally generated connection between man and his environment could be easily integrated into the “blood and soil” ideology of the National Socialists. The party leadership around Hermann Göring recognised the ideological similarities early on, integrated leading conservationists into the state apparatus and commissioned the draft of a Reich Nature Conservation Act, which came into force in 1935.

The Specialist Unit for Prevention of Radicalisation and Commitment to Nature Conservation (FARN) investigates current and historical links between nature conservation and right-wing extremism. Further information can be found at: www.nf-farn.de

Climate change denial

Beatrix von Storch, AfD politician, believes that the sun is responsible for global warming. On Twitter, she has described climate protection measures as mere hysteria on the part of “Climate nazis”.⁸⁶ This goes beyond even what the AfD set out in its Dresden Declaration: “The climate has been changing (sic!) ever since there has been an atmosphere on earth”. The party describes climate protection measures as “ideology-driven”. This also coincides with the AfD’s basic manifesto, which denies the harmful effects of CO₂. With such positions, the AfD is far adrift of the scientific consensus and the established facts about climate change.

The AfD has benefitted from making disparagement of climate protection measures a major issue. In doing so, it specifically solicits support from climate change deniers, of whom there are a conspicuously large number in the far-right and extreme right. The European Institute for Climate & Energy (EIKE) is just one example of their national and international networking activity. This Jena-based association, which calls itself an institute, is closely linked to the AfD in terms of personnel and substance. At congresses and through publications, the association desperately tries to invalidate the evidence for man-made climate change, and presents the results as scientific findings. These are then disseminated by far-right politicians* and in alternative right-wing media.



A banner opposing “EIKE”, an organisation with close ties to the AfD, at a “Fridays for Future” demo in November 2019 in Munich. © imago images/Alexander Pohl

Infiltration of environmental organisations and projects

AfD exploitation of nature conservation ideas for the purposes of climate change denial can be observed in debates about wind turbine construction.⁸⁷ Local alliances and initiatives against the construction of wind turbines are active in many places. This is not uncommon for mega-projects that require local implementation. The AfD specifically engages in these alliances and citizen protests and solicits support for them. In Thüringen, the AfD has even described itself as “the parliamentary arm of the anti-wind energy movement”.⁸⁸ A study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) has examined in detail the overlap between the AfD and such citizens initia-

tives against wind power plants. The research and study results show that the AfD uses nature conservation arguments against renewable energy projects. For example, the party often talks about the birds and insects killed in turbines, the forest clearances required, and how wind turbines may affect the appearance of the landscape in arguing against the expansion of wind power plants.⁸⁹

In these citizens’ initiatives, right-wing extremists sometimes work together with democratic organisations. Even though many groups clearly distance themselves from the AfD’s attempts at instrumentalisation, the party manages to trumpet its positions in the mainstream of

society and to normalise them. Local cases may only concern e.g. stopping one wind turbine being installed, but there is always a political calculation involved in the AfD’s involvement in alliances and initiatives.

Border control and population policy for environmental protection

Denial of man-made climate change is the AfD’s central climate policy position of AfD, but there are also voices within the party that contradict this view. David Eckert, then head of the Berlin Young Alternative, for example, expressed criticism of it after the EU elections in 2019 and called on the “leaders and officials our party to stop making the dubious statement that humans have not influenced the climate”. This was immediately rejected by Gauland. Behind Eckert’s statement, however, there is a new right-wing interpretation of climate policy, which is particularly popular in the more extremist and ethnocentric part of the party.

The **Klimafakten.de** project interprets the results of climate research in a reader-friendly presentation, in collaboration with a scientific advisory board. It does away with the oft-repeated claims of climate change denialists, and also subjects the AfD’s basic manifesto to scientific review.

www.klimafakten.de

The Junge Alternative is in contact with Felix Menzel, who has repeatedly set out an ecologically based critique of economic growth in his magazines “Recherche D” and “Blaue Narzisse” as well as in “Secession”. His reasoning is not about the question of whether and what influence humans have on the climate, but rather about the number of humans there are. Ecological criticism of economic growth in this sense means population reduction in the global South. On the one hand to reduce consumption, on the other hand to prevent migration. Underlying this is the neo-colonial Malthusian and racist idea that there are “too many people” and that this is causing ecological catastrophe. In this argument, the people living in the southern hemisphere are “too many”. The Junge Alternative, for example, has called for developmental aide to emerging countries to be linked to the introduction of a one-child policy in order to “counteract one of the biggest climate problems, overpopulation”.⁹⁰ If these people were to also immigrate to Germany the argument goes, their consumption of resources would automatically increase.

Post-growth economics from the right

The anti-ecological and pro-industry arguments of parts of the AfD are countered by ethnocentric positions that argue in for the environment and against growth. For example, under the pseudonym “Landolf Ladig” Björn Höcke in 2012 wrote texts with an ecological slant for a magazine run by NPD party deputy Thorsten Heise.⁹¹ One such text about the “crisis of liberalism” included, alongside a reckoning with progressive environmental policy, ideas about how a post-growth economy could look from a far-right perspective. A retreat to a regional focus, a reinforcement of local identity via consumption of regional goods and a decoupling from globalisation and financial capitalism would, the right argues, be a prime opportunity for “identity-based opposition to the system”. This criticism of growth is given ecologically justifications, as is the criticism of population growth in the Global South.

The positions of the AfD show that a nationalist nature and heritage conservation policy can certainly go hand-in-hand with a rejection of global environmental and climate action policies. However, there are also major differences between the economically liberal and ethnocentric parts of the party on ecological issues, which ultimately cannot be reconciled. It remains to be seen whether and how the party will face these differences.

Recommendations for action for democratic nature and environmental conservation

Raise awareness and question legacies

Nature conservation and environmental protection is regarded by the general public as fundamentally progressive, liberal and alternative. The ways in which past and present nature conservation and environmental protection in Germany is connected to extremist right-wing and ethnocentric ideologies are often overlooked (or erased). This lack of knowledge and the associated lack of awareness ultimately makes it easier for anti-democratic element to become active in nature conservation and environmental protection groups. Nature conservation and environmental protection associations must therefore come to terms with their own history and to bring to light any entanglements and intersections that their organization may have had with extremist right-wing ideology.

Identify motives and adopt clear positions

The objectives of right-wing extremists in terms of nature conservation and environmental protection often coincide with those of democratic groups. The underlying motives, however, differ considerably. The extremist right-wing nature conservation and environmental protection ideas of groups such as the AfD must always be understood as “homeland-” and thus “Volk-” oriented. Democratic and antidiscriminatory nature conservation and environmental protection, on the other hand, has a perspective encompassing global justice. Making the motives of your organization and its members transparent, and setting out a clear statement of principles in a statute or mission statement can help to prevent anti-democratic forces from finding their way into your organization in the first place.

Discussion and networking

Many nature conservation and environmental protection associations have already had experience with right-wing extremist or far-right ideologies already or potentially inside the group. Often these experiences and the resulting strategies are not talked about across association itself or beyond the parts of the group directly affected. However, the increasing attempts of AfD to gain ground in these groups make discussion and networking absolutely vital. Only then can a common strategy against infiltration attempts be developed, so that clubs and associations can support each other.

In November 2019, **diversu e.V.** carried out an online survey among the member associations of the **Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR)** about the spread of right-wing extremism. The study revealed the following results: 25 % of the association members questioned stated that they had already had experience with people with right-wing extremist ideologies in the course of their activities. These experiences included being sent information material with an ethnocentric slant, racist incidents during activities and excursions, facility rental requests or discussions at events or information stalls and even concrete requests for collaboration. Approximately 10% of those questioned stated that there were members with far-right ideologies within their own association.

www.diversu.org

Being political

Based on a rather narrow idea of what “political” means, many nature and environmental protection associations think that the party affiliations of individual members should not matter and that it is not the role of such organisations to make political statements outside its “core area”. But in fact, nature and environmental protection associations, as a major force in civil society, have a role to play in a democracy and are among the best networked sponsors of voluntary work, particularly in structurally neglected areas. So these associations must work with their members and in their committees to establish a democratic and human rights consensus. Binding guidelines for dealing with AfD ideas and personnel can also be developed the same way.

Take a stance, keep a distance

If anti-democratic actors such as the AfD publicly or personally support the ideas of your associations or concrete projects, it is important to counteract the impression that there any cooperation or further substantive overlap between you. Even if there are apparently certain areas in common, there can be no collaboration with bigotry. Environmental protection always takes place within a framework of social interaction, so ecological action must include a socio-political stance. In practical terms, it is important to distance your group from the far-right without giving any substantive ground, and to make clear to the public that the AfD poses a threat to democracy.

Greenpeace has spoken out strongly against cooperation with the AfD. The organisation has published a 10-page position paper titled “Against exclusion – for an open society” explaining why its work is incompatible with AfD ideology: www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/publications/greenpeace-position_zur_partei_afd_21.06.17_0.pdf

“If we were not the chosen enemy of AfD, we would be doing quite a lot wrong”

Interview with Lou Töllner

Lou Töllner is the press officer of Fridays for Future in Hannover. She founded the group with two friends in late 2018 and has been fighting for the climate ever since. She organises large demonstrations and is active in various working groups throughout Germany. Here she sets out just why climate justice and AfD policy are not compatible.

Fridays for Future is committed to a climate-responsible future and puts pressure on politicians to achieve this. All parties in the Bundestag agree that climate change is man-made –except the AfD. It still rejects all the scientific findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. How does AfD policy affect the work and commitments of your local group?

Of course, the denialist attitude of AfD is a problem. Nevertheless, our movement is more concerned with how we can now get the other parties to act.

What is really problematic is the fears of some parties that climate action policies will alienate voters and strengthen the AfD. They prefer to continue

to fish for votes on the right themselves, or to take no position at all, even for the benefit of business. At the same time, they fail to recognise that with each idle day that goes by, the measures needed become more radical – because the climate crisis is not ready for compromise. Nevertheless, we too are concerned with the question of how to combat the climate crisis with a socially aware perspective locally and globally. The AfD in particular likes to play social justice off against our demands for climate action. Again and

again we have to invest a lot of time in projects to correct the situation and show that climate justice also requires social answers.

The AfD has been attacking Fridays for Future since its foundation. Why is the party so hostile to you?

There are several reasons for this, I think. We are mostly very young people and also a very female movement. In particular, our well-known activists like Greta or Luisa are strong female figures, which offends the mentality of many right-wing populists*.

For more information about the Fridays for Future group in Hanover and a list of events, go to:
www.fridaysforfuture-hannover.de

At the same time, we are organised along bottom-up democratic lines and are committed to climate justice as well as to climate protection per se. We advocate for human rights and are active against any form of discrimination. When we comment for example on the racist murders in Hanau or organise a day of action in collaboration with Seebrücke we stand in opposition to the politics of the AfD. And I am quite proud of it. If we were not the chosen enemy of the AfD, we would be doing quite a lot wrong.

On the other hand, this hostility is often exhausting. Especially with regard to social justice, we see again and again that right-wing populists spread the idea that we do not care about the social consequences of the measures we advocate. Again and again it takes a lot of time to refute and counteract this.

When the climate emergency was discussed in Hanover, the AfD accused you of “propaganda” and claimed that CO2 makes the planet greener. How do you deal with such accusations and claims?

Initially we often laugh. Their assertions are usually so absurd and without scientific basis that they are not worth discussing. But of course, then we feel we do need to counter them. It is always a balancing act: how much of a platform we should risk providing to right-wing populists and how important it is to express our ideas and make our position clear. And most of the time we find a way that we can become even more effective. In the committee meeting in which this accusation was made, ScientistsForFuture scientists were also present to explain the facts. However, it is often problematic that the media then focuses mainly on whatever the AfD has said.

Would you like more support from politicians and environmental organisations in dealing with AfD and its climate policy?

We would definitely like support – we always get it from environmental associations. But what is particularly important to us, especially when dealing with AfD, is our demand for climate justice. This can only be realized by means of solidarity, unity and global measures. It includes issues like indigenous rights and

feminism. And that is precisely why it must be made clear time and again that right-wing “environmental protection”, which is often rooted in patriotism, simply cannot work.

We make even greater demands of political parties: we want to see clear positions against the AfD and its claims.

As a social movement, Fridays for Future sees itself as cross-party. Basically, everyone can join your protests, even concerned AfD members. Has this led to problems in the past?

Right-wing climate protection does not work. We make that clear time and again, and that is why climate protection and AfD never go together.

But our demonstrations are often too big to really know everyone’s political orientation. At the beginning of each demonstration we present our consensus, which clearly states that we do not tolerate any right-wingers in the demo, but it is rare that we can really make sure there are none. But in situations where we do see, for example, an AfD city councillor or someone wearing a right-wing T-shirt, we exclude these people from our demonstrations. With the help of the stewards and our local group this works quite well.

What advice can you offer from your experiences to other civic initiatives and environmental movements in dealing with AfD and its hostility?

Ganz klare Kante zeigen gegen rechts. Keine Bühne bieten und stattdessen Gruppen unterstützen, die zum Feindbild der AfD gehören. Und vor allem Zusammenhalten mit den anderen Initiativen, statt sich über kleinere Meinungsverschiedenheiten zu zerstreiten. Auch wenn wir unterschiedliche Themen verfolgen oder diese anders angehen wollen, kämpfen wir alle für eine gerechtere Welt – und können auch zusammen gegen die AfD eintreten.

Political education under pressure: the AfD in child and youth work

So far, young people have not had a prominent place on the AfD agenda – on the contrary: the term “young person” appears in the party’s basic programme mainly as regards crime. At the same time, massive consequences for public child and youth work are to be expected if AfD gains more influence:

the party is already attacking all who are critical of racism, misanthropy and exclusion. The statement by AfD Bundestag delegate Markus Frohnmaier “when we get in, we’ll muck out” may well be understood as an announcement of clean-up measures which are also to be directed against those who want to strengthen children and young people against resentment and prejudice and enable them to participate and empathise politically and socially.



As a sign against a demonstration which had the slogan “Stop gender ideology and sexualisation of our children” in October 2015, the Staatstheater Stuttgart put up a giant banner in rainbow colours.
© Matthias Wolf

An insight into the AfD’s ideas on public child and youth work is given by the AfD’s parliamentary group in Sachsen. Its “government programme”, which it presented before the state elections in early September, provides for an increase in the youth allowance and more investment in child and youth work, but at the same time emphasises that care must be taken to ensure that all voluntary projects are “ideology-free”. In a draft law “to create equal opportunities for the parties in political competition”, the Sachsen AfD writes that in future “grants for the purpose of forming public opinion and public intention, democracy education or other forms of political education or information” may only be granted directly to parties and voters’ associations. Civil society actors involved in democracy education are to be prohibited from accepting money from the federal government or foreign states – if they do so, the AfD wants them to face a prison sentence of up to two years.

In various other state parliaments the AfD also repeatedly raises the issue of democracy and extremism in the context of youth education in motions, questions and speeches in debates. It thereby pursues one main goal:

“The AfD is hostile to young people. It does not understand youth and does not give them the freedom they need”. Due to the AfD’s bigoted policies and its hostility towards young people, the German Federal Youth Council has published a resolution stating that it is incompatible with the party. The position paper can be found at:
www.dbjr.de/artikel/rechtspopulist-innen-entgegengetreten

services which it considers politically unpopular should best be discontinued. The party particularly insists on the principle of political neutrality and repeatedly slanders child and youth work organisations and institutions with untenable insinuations.

This attempt to equate political education work with indoctrination is striking. Public child and youth work is being deliberately placed under general suspicion. The right-wing extremists deny that there are clear legal framework conditions for youth social work, which include a more intensive examination of discrimination and the acceptance of diversity. Both in the Bundestag and in various state parliaments, the AfD repeatedly questions about the structures, work and financial resources of support programmes.

Large-scale federal programmes such as “Living Democracy” are being targeted, as are local agencies. Time and again, the AfD requests cuts to the budgets of the relevant funds, and in advisory councils, the party attempts to quash the voices of diversity-based projects and initiatives in particular. By means of enquiries and requests for information, the party ties up administrative resources and often creates pressure on employees and organisations to stop offering certain services or to provide them in a different form than before. At the same time, the party receives detailed information about the work of the initiatives and organisations, including personal data of employees, due to its parliamentary information rights.

“The AfD stands for a deeply inhumane agenda and an ethnocentric and authoritarian world view. This is in absolute contrast to the goals and values of youth organisations,” says Lisi Maier. She is chair of the German Federal Youth Ring. “Not only the political substance, but also the political style of the AfD is in our view incompatible with a modern, diverse and youth-oriented society.”

But the challenges for child and youth work are not limited to the growing influence of the party in committees and parliaments; in its everyday activities, youth work is confronted with resentment and everyday racism, which have become more and more normal in large parts of society as a result of the AfD.

Inspired by the proposition “When we get in, we’ll muck out”, a quote from Markus Frohnmaier of Junge Alternative, the trade union for education and science (GEW) is conducting an analysis of the AfD’s education policy:
www.gew.de/aktuelles/detailseite/neuigkeiten/die-bildungspolitik-der-afd-wenn-wir-kommen-wird-ausgemistet/

The example of Chemnitz

In September, the newly elected city council decided on the composition of the Chemnitz Youth Welfare Committee and elected the six voting members of the independent youth welfare organisations. For the first time, the umbrella organisation “Network for Cultural and Youth Work” was not given a seat. As a result, the 66 associations it represents no longer have a vote in the committee, which decides i.a. on provision for family support and financial subsidies of youth facilities.

As a result, most of the sponsoring organisations active in Chemnitz, including many with an alternative focus, are no longer represented on the committee. They now fear cuts or cancellations of funding for organisations and associations that take a stand against right-wing extremism.

The example of Döbeln

When in May 2019 the AfD gained seats on the town council of this small town in mid-Sachsen, the work of the Treibhaus association, which has been doing valuable youth work there for 20 years, became much more difficult. After the AfD submitted a minor question in the Sachsen parliament about the financing of the association, it learned that the region, the district and the city support the association annually with public funds. The AfD is now mobilising against it. The insinuation it has made is the association uses the funds to “fight against the state”. The association emphasises that its anti-fascist stance is based on universal values such as freedom, equality and solidarity – and hopes that the district and city will not give in to attacks by the AfD.

The example of Bautzen

While the parties at federal and state level strictly rule out cooperation with the AfD, any kind of strict distancing at lower levels is eroding massively. In Bautzen, for example, the SPD mayor Alexander Ahrens has said that “in dealing with the AfD, one must remain on the factual level”. SPD parliamentary party leader Roland Fleischer put on record that cooperation with the AfD is “a problem, but if the party raises social democratic issues, we support it”. Socio-cultural centres in the city fear for their future.

Intervention strategies in child and youth work

Critical scrutiny of the programme, ideology and themes of right-wing extremists

A critical examination of the AfD and right-wing extremist ideologies is indispensable for children and youth institutions and associations. It is important to take a clear position both within the team and externally.

Take a stand

Supporters of public child and youth welfare are advised to regularly review and reinforce their objectives, and to record these in mission statements and statutes. Social work needs self-confidence: it is not only an administrative force within society, but has the task of shaping it. This includes empowering groups which have been marginalized by racism or sexism. This can only be done if the relevant personnel maintain and advocate for concrete ideas of solidarity and democratic cooperation. These should not just be implicitly assumed, but explicitly formulated.

If this is assured, cooperation with the AfD can be excluded by the statutes; at events, the committee clause can be used to exclude people who express bigoted positions or are known for their involvement in far-right or extreme right-wing organisations. This is not undemocratic; rather it enables people who feel threatened by the presence of the far-right and right-wing extremists to participate in events without fear and to express themselves openly.

Dare to lead the discourse

Political debates current in society at large are brought into public child and youth work spaces. Youth work is cognizant of political issues and has a political effect. It should therefore be organised in terms of democratic mediation. Educators can create forums to discuss key AfD issues, such as refugees, asylum, the family, the media, the gender binary and “being German” in educational institutions, and can develop alternative concepts that are focused on diversity. In the context of U18 elections, educators can critically question and discuss antidemocratic and bigoted positions in election manifestos with young people. The strategies used by right-wing extremist groups, ideologies of inequality such as racism and anti-Semitism as well as similarities in ideology or personnel between the self-styled “New” Right, right-wing extremists, “Pegida” and other “Gida” movements and the AfD can be explained in workshops run by professionally trained educators, so that strategies for united action can be developed. For all these measures, intensive preparation is indispensable.

Boost your own arguments

Programmes educating people about democracy can be used to specifically promote skills useful in arguing against ideologies that are inhumane and antidemocratic, so that employees and young people feel more confident both online and offline. Projects and individual youth associations should not be intimidated by verbal attacks by AfD in parliaments, or by their parliamentary questions about funding. In difficult cases, it makes sense to take political or legal action. The mobile advisory centres against right-wing extremism, which exist in every federal state, can provide specific advice.

Demonstrate solidarity

Your organisation’s views on democracy, diversity and human rights should also be communicated to the wider public. It can be useful to encourage member organisations and partners to take an active and open stance against antidemocratic attitudes and contemporary right-wing extremists in their roles as important parts of civil society.

When child and youth institutions and associations and their staff are publicly defamed and attacked by AfD representatives, solidarity is vital. Attacks by the AfD or other right-wing populist and extremist right-wing organisations against individual associations, youth groups or staff must be fended off by joint action. Press releases, statements of solidarity, joint public statements and the formation of alliances are useful means to this end.

If young people are affected by racist, anti-Semitic, misogynist, homophobic or transphobic statements and policies in their own institution or colleagues, their perceptions and fears must be taken seriously. It is important to provide a reliably listening ear, and to consider with those affected what individual and joint strategies can be pursued in each case, and how empowerment can become a general guideline for your organisation's work.

Look for allies

The AfD's strategy is to discredit public child and youth welfare institutions in order to deprive them of financial support in the future. Due to their right to be heard local or district level or in advisory councils, there is a risk

that projects may for example be deprived of municipal funding. However, since state and federal funds are often tied to their co-financing arrangements, this can threaten the existence of the project. It is therefore urgently recommended that projects sponsors should contact representatives of the democratic parties and provide transparent information about their work so that they have defenders against any AfD attacks or allegations.

"We put people first, regardless of their origin, religion, gender (identity), sexual orientation, age or physical ability. We believe in a united, inclusive and democratic city".

Berlin's social agencies are publishing clear statements like this to position themselves against ideologies of inequality and the policies of the AfD. More than 170 organisations have signed the declaration, making a clear and effective statement.

The declaration can be viewed at: licht-blicke.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/18-07-16-Traegererkerklaerung-Unterzeichnerinnen-final-endgueltig.pdf

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation's "ju:an" practice for youth work that is critical of anti-Semitism and racism, is based in Berlin and Hanover, develops concepts and tools to help people think about and combat anti-Semitism and racism together. Their office advises, trains and coaches facilitators of (public) child and youth work in the implementation of sustainable anti-Semitism and antiracist action.

Berlin: Phone 030. 240 886 15
praxisstelle@amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de
 Hanover: Phone 0511. 897 343 33
praxisstelle-hannover@amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de
www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/projekte/juan-praxisstelle/

On the AfD's policies regarding Germany's history

an interview with Dr. Meron Mendel

Dr. Meron Mendel is an educator and director at the Anne Frank educational institution in Frankfurt am Main and Kassel. The institution aims to educate young people and adults by means of exhibitions, workshops and advisory services.

Dr. Mendel, the basic programme of the AfD states: "The German culture of remembrance" is currently narrowly focused, on the national socialist regime. It must be changed to encompass broader view of history, which also includes the positive aspects of German history which have formed its identity. What view of history does the AfD want to enforce? And why?

It should be said at the outset that the German culture of remembrance by no means only deals with national socialism. These kinds of statements deliberately spread the false idea that schools, for example, only cover national socialism and the Shoah and no other time periods. In reality, the Nazi era takes up only a modest place in history lessons. So this is a transparent rhetorical trick by the AfD. By "extended view of history" they seem to mean simply the relativisation of Nazi crimes. People have been calling for a line to be drawn under the Third Reich in Germany since the early 1950s and not solely, as Martin Walser's speech in the Paulskirche shows. Nevertheless: in the case of the AfD, this idea is being officially supported for the first time by the third strongest force in the Bundestag.

Leading AfD politicians have called national socialism a "bird crap" and the Holocaust Memorial a "monument of shame". But the party has been elected to all state parliaments and consistently scores high in nationwide polls. Is there still a consensus on how to remember the past in Germany?

Within historical research, of course, there is – but not within society as a whole. In fact, it is questionable whether such a thing ever existed. The difference is that extreme revisionist positions had no chance outside of cliques in old men's' pubs; today they are confidently presented for public consideration. Studies on the politics of remembrance show that a large part of the population has long held revisionist ideas. The AfD only expresses what many people have been thinking.

In recent years, memorials and museums have increasingly been the targets of the far right's culture wars. The new publication "Nur Schnee von gestern?" ("Only yesterday's news?") put out by the Mobile Advisory Service against Right-wing Extremism in Berlin offers these institutions support in dealing with far-right and right-wing extremist attacks. The brochure is available online and can be ordered at: www.mbr-berlin.de/materialien-2/publikationen-handreichungen/?lang=de



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In Wiesbaden, several AfD members who are also of the Jewish faith have joined together to form an association – called “Juden in der AfD” (“Jews in the AfD”). In response, many Jewish organisations and associations published a joint declaration stating: “If Jews depended on the AfD as a guarantor of Jewish life in Germany, Jewish life here would be in bad shape. The AfD is a party in which hatred of Jews and downplaying the Shoah to the point of denial are deeply rooted”. Signatories also called for united and open action against racism, anti-Semitism and ethnocentric ideologies:

www.zentralratderjuden.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Gemeinsame_Erklaerung_gegen_die_AfD_.pdf

cratic, anti-human rights and historically revisionist positions in their party”. Björn Höcke is even banned from the premises at events. Is this kind of ban an appropriate measure, or do educational institutions and memorial sites need to stay open to dialogue with everyone?

I can well understand the decision of the Buchenwald Memorial Foundation, because commemoration events are not occasions for debate. They must not be made ridiculous by the presence of people like Björn Höcke. However, educational institutions like ours have a different mission than

memorials: we work with all social groups. Racist, anti-Semitic and other misanthropic attitudes can be heard here time and again. The strategies of our educational work are aimed at combatting these.

“We need to avoid adopting the premises that these groups use in their staged escalations.”
Dr. Meron Mendel

There was an incident at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp memorial site where an AfD group from Alice Weidel’s constituency came and made loud historically revisionist and anti-Semitic proclamations. How do you prepare site guides for dealing with these “resentments”, anti-Semitic language from visitors or arguments based on conspiracy theories? Should they respond to provocations? Should it be okay for them to cut short such people’s visits?

It varies. Firstly, my organization is not a real place of remembrance. Many memorials are also a burial ground where people were horrifically murdered. Respect for the victims obliges us to stop such scenes immediately. Our employees can be prepared for these situations by means of the kind of historical-political training that we offer at the Anne Frank Educational Centre.

Björn Höcke has called for a “complete reversal of remembrance policy”. How can institutions involved in historical-political education and memorial sites avoid attempts to be appropriated by far-right politicians?

I would not interpret what Höcke said as an attempt at appropriation. Rather, he is trying to delegitimise institutions that are involved in historical-political education. Again, as with anti-Semitic and racist statements, it is necessary to always provide a counter argument. In our educational work, we discuss such statements with young people and work out together what exactly is problematic and what needs to be said to counter them.

On the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day, the Buchenwald Memorial Foundation declared that representatives of the AfD are not welcome at commemoration ceremonies “as long as they do not credibly distance themselves from the anti-demo-

After all, we are about education: things can be learned and unlearned. At the same time, however, it is important to say that certain discussions should not be entered into on principle, as they only benefit right-wing argumentation strategies. In extreme cases, seminars or exhibition visits can also be cancelled. As a rule, however, we find that young people who come out with right-wing and racist ideologies are open to challenge. Not every problematic utterance is evidence of a closed world view.

Historical-political education is not being denigrated at the local level, but also in social media. How do you deal with attacks via social networks?

If we have the impression that a reasonable answer is possible, we are of course open to dialogue. But much more often are targeted by coordinated attacks from right-wing networks, where there is no possibility of discussion. In such cases, one must be careful to not adopt the premises that these groups use in their staged escalations.

How can the use of historical artefacts such as documents, pictures, private letters, the diaries of the perpetrators or victims of national socialism help immunise young people against current forms of hate and discrimination?

Especially for young people, telling stories about individuals can have a great impact. Anne Frank is a prime example, and young people can often identify strongly with her. The experience of exclusion and hate can be made personal by reading Anne Frank’s diary. In our learning lab that we call “Anne Frank. Tomorrow more” we also work with biographies of other young people like Arie Karetz, a survivor from Bergen-Belsen, as well as young people of today who keep a diary or a blog. The message is: your voice counts. Everyone can say something and do something against hate and discrimination.

What can civil society as a whole do to stem the spread of inhuman ideologies? What is it already doing effectively, where would you wish for more action?

First and foremost, you have to protect those affected and shield them from danger – in real life as well as online. Express your solidarity with people targeted! Seeing friends remain silent and do nothing is often more painful than the discriminatory experience itself. We also have to learn to recognise right agenda-setting and to spread suitable counter-narratives. This is where the media are particularly needed. It is also not as if nobody is working to counter the shift to the right in our society: in almost every city there are committed groups who are doing amazing things and whose work can be supported.

The special publication on “**How the Right reinterprets history**” put out by the Anne Frank Educational Institution includes a run-down of current forms of historical revisionism by the AfD and the self-styled “New” Right. The publication is available online and can be ordered at:
www.bs-anne-frank.de/revisionismus

Navigating between neutrality and anti-democratic sentiment: the AfD and schools

Democracy must be learned. This insight is far more than a truism. In recent years, the question of how democracy can be taught and learnt has become particularly relevant. The debate is not so much about didactic issues, but rather about the fear of public denigration spread by the AfD. In several federal states, for example, the AfD is calling for teachers to be denounced. Neutrality, as the party sees it, means first and foremost to refrain from critical examination of the AfD. The reporting portals set up by the AfD – a public pillory for teachers – are intended to enforce this maxim.

What neutrality means for schools and democracy

The first question that arises is that of neutrality. The AfD often asserts that its rights as a party have been violated and the “democratic diversity of opinion” endangered.⁹² It thus sets itself up as the saviour of democracy.

Democratic educational work, as envisioned, for example, by Kurt Edler, the former head of department at the State Institute for Teacher Education and School Development in Hamburg, has nothing to do with party-political

issues and positions. Rather, it is about fundamental issues such as human rights and thus necessarily about the critical examination of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism and other discriminatory positions⁹³ – regardless of whether these are advocated by the AfD or other political actors. If the positions of the AfD collide with these fundamental rights, the problem is not the principle neutrality or the teachers, but the AfD. The denunciation platforms therefore only distract people from this fact.

Teachers who position themselves against bigoted attitudes in their lessons are doing their core job. AfD is no more than one, albeit relevant, issue among many. Tack-

ling with topics such as racism, sexism or anti-Semitism must therefore be a key task in German schools. Teachers should maintain their stance, and continue to confidently teach human rights as the basis of democracy. These essential learning targets were also expressly emphasised by the Conference of Education Ministers in October 2018:



In April 2019, students at the Hamburg Gewerbeschule (BS18) demonstrated against a planned event about the European elections, to which the AfD was also invited. © imago images/News4HH

“In view of the current situation, we strongly oppose online portals where pupils are supposed to denounce their teachers for alleged party-political influence. This leads to poisoning the school climate. To the contrary, we see it as a key social task to support teachers in their efforts to teach about democracy and human rights and to promote tolerance, respect and humanity in the sense of the German constitution. Democracy needs convinced and committed democrats. This means a concrete educational mandate for schools.”^a

Taking legal consequences seriously

The fear of lawsuits, disciplinary proceedings or other consequences can steer the work of a whole teaching staff, encouraging them in pre-emptive obedience. It should be noted that the AfD denunciation platforms of are fundamentally not clearly illegal. At the same time, any teacher can take civil action against these platforms, as they potentially violate an individual’s personal rights. Another factor to consider is that they entail the dissemination of personal data contrary to the DSGVO, which has been in force since May 2018. It may be worth checking if the AfD has violated this law.

Dealing with allegations

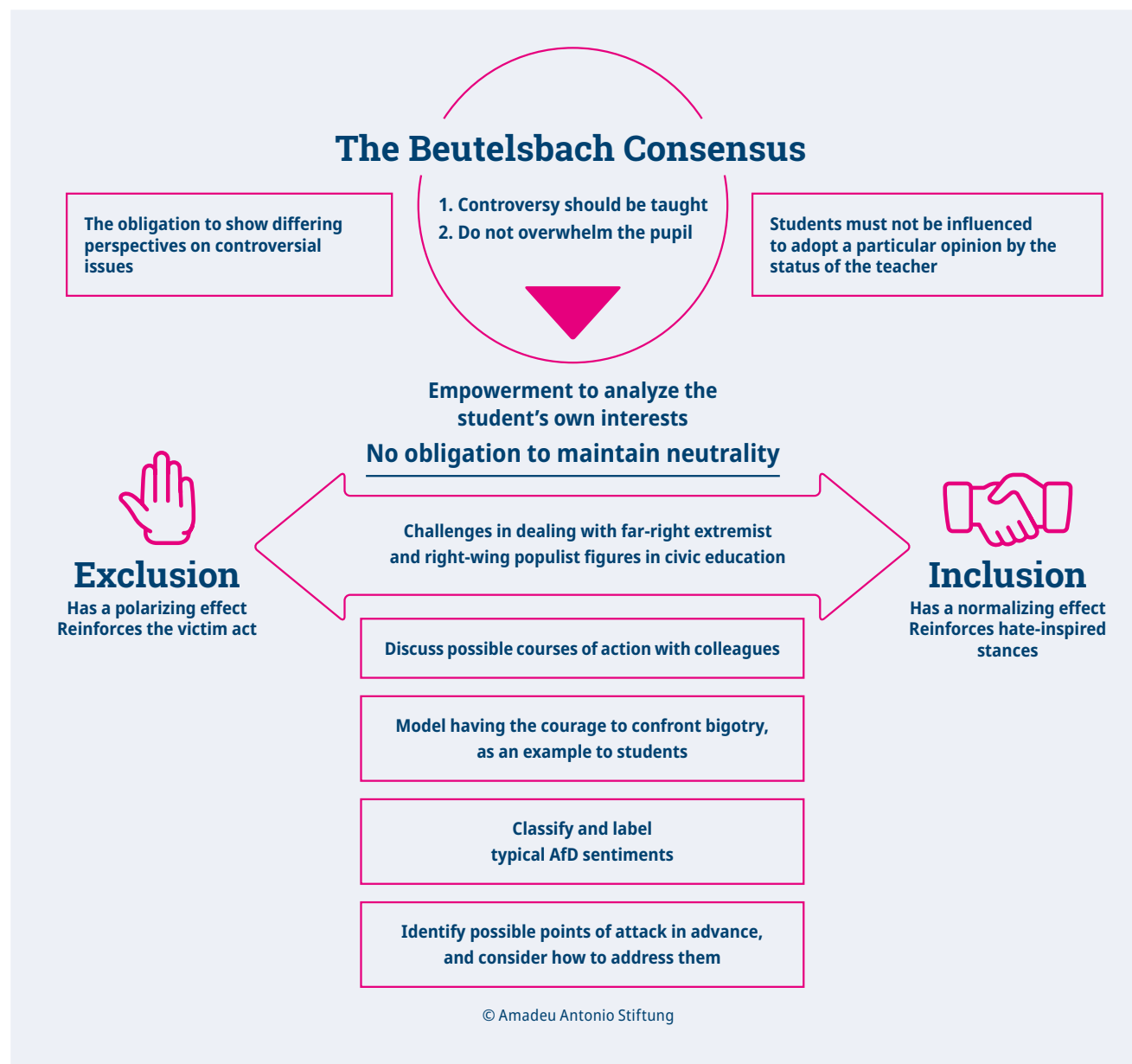
The AfD has now seeped into almost all sections of society. Teachers are more directly affected by it than perhaps any other professional group. Outside the classroom, they are confronted with AfD supporters in parent-teacher meetings, parents’ evenings and other forms of school participation. These situations can have a considerable potential for conflict – especially when the party’s “victimhood” narrative is dragged out by its supporters and for example the fairness of pupil assessments is called into question. Here it is important to remember your own professionalism, not to fall into the trap of justifying yourself, and to reach out for feedback and support from colleagues.

The Education and Science Trade Union (GEW) provides comprehensive support for teachers affected by AfD “reporting” platforms. If a denunciation to the AfD gives rise to an official complaint, their support includes legal protection.

For information on the “reporting” portals and the support provided by the GEW go to: www.gew.de/schule/fragen-und-antworten-zu-den-denunziationsplattformen-der-afd

^a Full press release: www.kmk.org/de/presse/pressearchiv/mitteilung/demokratie-braucht-ueberzeugte-und-engagierte-demokraten-empfehlungen-zur-demokratie-und-menschenr.html

How do I maintain the Beutelsbach Consensus?



The “Beutelsbach Consensus” defines the principles of civic education. It commits teachers to the differentiated and balanced presentation of information so that students can come to their own conclusions their own opinion and form their own opinion. The Beutelsbach Consensus does not, as is often stated, explicitly require perfect neutrality – it is rather about giving a balanced presentation of different political perspectives to help students “come to an independent judgement”.

Particularly as regards “controversy requirement”, i.e. the obligation for teachers to examine controversial issues from different positions, the AfD and right-wing extremist movements can be excluded or even included.

In general, AfD members with a relevant right-wing extremist past should not be given scope to act, under any circumstances. This is then not about confrontation, but about exploitation.

“Neutral does not mean not having a political position”

Interview with the Federal Office of the Network for Democracy and Courage (NDC)

Following the rise AfD, many parts of society are now confronted with the party and its provocations. What impact does this have on schools?

We see that the culture of “what it is acceptable to say” is changing and putting liberal democracy on the defensive. This means that many people, including in the school environment, must decide how to respond to provocations, harassment and anti-liberal statements. There are now anti-liberal “role models” in public politics, i.e. people who are in the public eye and who advocate for anti-liberal ideas there. Parties and initiatives that see the protection of minorities as an attack on themselves exert pressure and generate fear. Schools and nurseries, which are already the focus of strong social interest, are developing into venues where the right to determine opinions and interpretations is fought over. These institutions are now supposed to state which party they support and explain or clarify what democracy needs. All this is to be done in addition to and in line with the basic institutional task of effectively supporting all pupils and getting them through school promptly, often with insufficient resources. Under this kind of pressure, there is hardly any time for the staff to take part in training and decision making to meet all these demands. For the school social workers and teachers this means that they have to fill the gaps with incredible amounts of personal commitment.

The Network for Democracy and Courage (NDC) organises day-long school events countering exclusion and advocating mutual support. These are intended to encourage children and young people to take courageous action against discrimination and racism. The NDC also offers training courses for teachers and other educators focussing on basic issues about and options of action against discrimination and neo-Nazism.

Phone 0351. 481 006 0
info@netzwerk-courage.de
www.netzwerk-courage.de

In 2018, the AfD began to set up “reporting portals” in several states with the aim of getting people to denounce teachers who criticize with the party’s messaging. What reaction has this had in schools?

To the best of our knowledge, these portals or the threat of new ones have led to a range of reactions. Some schools, students and teachers have dealt with them in a very confident and “unaffected” way. For others, they have caused a great deal of worry. In some states, teachers, colleges, trade unions and pupils’ representatives have promptly made public announcements which have made it clear that they do not think much of these portals or this method of criticising teachers.

But we also receive requests from colleagues who are worried. Teachers are even in some cases no longer sure to what extent they are allowed to criticise, for example, the AfD and its positions and statements. There is uncertainty about their own educational mission with regard to the Education Act and the requirement of neutrality. This is exactly, I believe what the AfD wants to happen as a result of such media campaigns. In the worst cases, this concern can mean, and we are actually seeing this in schools, that critical situations or issues are not addressed at all. So important democratic discussions are being avoided in schools and nurseries – but it is the schools’ job to make sure they take place.

How can educator, despite increasing attempts at defamation by the AfD, speak critically about AfD positions, statements and activities in their lessons without fear of being publicly pilloried?

The Education Act, the neutrality requirement and a democratic attitude are all that teachers need. We know that this is easy to say. And yet it is good and important to know that sufficient and reliable foundations are already in place. We believe that AfD is deliberately misinterpreting the neutrality principle.

The principle of neutrality does not mean teaching in a value-neutral way, but on the contrary it means leaning on the basic democratic values to which teachers are committed. Neutrality does not mean not having a political position or not being “controversial” – we all have to distinguish between the one and the other here. We can and should point out when political programmes, statements and actions violate the fundamental values of the constitution. What we may not do, for example, is to interfere with people’s privacy or to spread disinformation when we are teaching about their statements or actions. It is also helpful not to regard AfD as a one-off phenomenon. It is precisely because it is so polarising that it takes up so much oxygen in public discourse. But if we look at mechanisms of exclusion and degradation, there are many other examples that can be found in all parties and movements, even before AfD and to this day.

Civic courage entails overcoming your own fears. Discrimination and exclusion are not marginal occurrences, they are an everyday phenomenon. Anyone who intervenes against bigotry can soon be singled out. It is therefore very important to counter these fears with powerful motivation. Taking a critical stance also means protecting those affected and valuing their perspectives, because democratic culture and a fair social order are important. In addition to providing legal and rhetorical resources, it is important that people support teachers personally. At training courses, such as the argumentation and action training offered by the NDC, teachers can practise new skills, bolster their motivation, and exchange feedback with colleagues. There is material available for a rapid introduction to these issues, e.g. from the Federal Agency for Civic Education, or teachers can invite extracurricular educational experts into their institutions for support.

Interpreting the neutrality requirement

The Education Act in Sachsen, for example, states: “§1 (5) 1. Students should in particular learn to act independently, on their own responsibility and in a social community, 2. Learn how to work and learn for themselves and with others, 3. Learn to develop their own opinions and make decisions, to defend these, and to demonstrate empathy and respect for the opinions and decisions of others, 4. Learn to view people without prejudice, irrespective of their ethnic or cultural origin, appearance, religious and ideological views and sexual orientation, and to advocate for a society free from discrimination, [...]”.

What responsibility do schools have in teaching skills and values that promote and preserve democracy, and what should they do in concrete terms?

The individual states are responsible for education. To quote the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK): “One of the primary objectives of school education is to enable young people to take their place in contemporary society and to evaluate political, social and economic issues and problems competently. They should be encouraged to stand up for freedom, democracy, human rights, justice, economic security and peace. In principle, all school subjects, but especially the social sciences, should focus on this overarching goal [...]”.

The Conference also states: “Education in support of democracy is a key task for schools and youth education – democracy and democratic behaviour can and must be learned. Children and young people should learn about the advantages, achievements and opportunities of democracy at an early age and should recognise that basic democratic values such as freedom, justice and solidarity as well as tolerance must never be undermined– even in times of profound social change.”

Schools have always had a great responsibility in this regard. They have to juggle challenges like the lack of teachers, the focus on MINT subjects, and the idea of school as a place for democratic education and maintaining a discrimination-free environment. Attacks on the negotiated basic values of democracy should be firmly countered at school as anywhere else. Initially this may mean that teachers do not ignore dangerous ideas, but rather follow up on them, turn the issue into a focal point and discussion for everyone in the group or school – ideally without timidity, with maximum support from the school management and school authorities. There are already letters of support for such courses of action from the regional education authorities, but more are needed. We have heard directly from teachers that they have many worries. Clearly defined practical approaches and discussions with colleagues can offer more security. We try to act as partners for schools in these situations by providing advice and passing on expertise.

Recommendations for action in the education sector

Organise events

Events run by political parties should only be held on school premises if they are clearly not only party-political, but are focussed on important issues in the country and society.

Provide educational context

It is vital that competent teaching staff are on hand to put party-political events in an educational context, especially if they take place at school. Reviewing these events with students can be an opportunity to inspire critical evaluation of the political debate and to question the goals, demands and strategies of the parties.

Prohibit election campaigning and other political confrontations

In the last four to six weeks of classes before an election, political parties are not permitted to visit schools or hold events in schools. School management can cancel party political events, making reference to the Education Act.

Furthermore, no party campaign materials may be distributed in schools. School management should not hesitate to ban people from the premises if this is attempted. This does not mean, however, that party publications should not be discussed in class. Pupils should look at them critically, and with the teacher's commentary.

Ensure political balance

In general, schools must ensure that no democratic party is favoured or discriminated against in terms of the invitations that are issued in the course of a year. The AfD is a democratically elected party, but it propounds undemocratic positions and inequality, for which the school does not have to provide a stage. This can also be argued with reference to the regional Education Acts.

Discuss substantive and topical issues

Classroom discussions should focus on substance and not on speakers. Any statements that are bigoted, i.e. racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, homophobic or discriminatory against Sinti and Roma, they should be identified as such – whatever the party affiliation of the person making them.

Seek assistance when preparing for events

When discussions with right-wing extremists are to take place, all participants must be well prepared in terms of factual knowledge and rhetorical skills. External organisations can provide support, e.g. in the form of rhetorical training.

Prevention beats reaction

Above all, preventive measures are vital in ensuring that right-wing extremist groups and parties such as the AfD can be dealt with effectively. Students should be made aware of their argumentation patterns.

Teacher training

Training measures can ensure that teachers are well informed about ideologies promoting inequality and aware of right-wing populist and far-right extremist argumentation patterns. It is important that there is scope for teachers to think about their own political positions, and to develop options for activities that counter anti-Semitism and racism.

Student empowerment

Special consideration must be given to students who are directly affected by anti-Semitism or racism. They should be supported in dealing with their experiences of discrimination in protected spaces and should be involved when countermeasures are being worked out.

Promote media literacy

Media communications play a huge role in children's and young people's everyday lives. Fostering the skills they need to decipher, understand and evaluate media information is an indispensable step in hindering the growth of right-wing populism and right-wing extremism.

Cultural policy: the victimhood pretence, and attacks on the freedom of the arts

More than any other party in Germany, the AfD defines culture as a central battleground. The spirit of the times, the sciences, the political system and, last but not least, art are all part of the concept of culture – it permeates all areas of life in modern society. As the parliamentary arm of the self-styled “New” Right, the AfD sees itself in a cultural struggle, and its actions must be evaluated accordingly. In right-wing extremist views of the world, culture is naturalised and populated by the “Volk” in order to derive a clear and exclusive identity from it. At the same time, the cultural sector is used specifically for political influence, since it functions as a political discourse space in which society is negotiated. Here, right-wing extremists use freedom of expression to normalise contempt for human beings, to reinterpret concepts and ultimately to abolish freedom of expression, by means of a strategic, piecemeal expansion of what can be said in society without being considered extreme. This is to be understood as a struggle for cultural hegemony and a shift of discourse to the right.

The cultural sector is clearly feeling the effects of this struggle: the AfD, for example, wants to replace federal and EU cultural funding, which in its view is “linked to ideological goals”, with funding guidelines “which serve to preserve cultural heritage or ensure its worthy continuation”, as it announced in its Bundestag election platform for 2017. Marc Jongen, the AfD's spokesperson for cultural policy, even threatened on Twitter that he wanted to “tackle the dismantling of the culture industry”.⁹⁴ The underlying idea is that Germany has a culture of reference that has developed naturally and must be protected from the influence of supposedly “foreign” cultures. An ethnocentric cultural struggle against a diverse and open society is reinterpreted as an allegedly already existing cultural struggle between “the Occident” and “Islam”. From the conspiracy fantasy that there is a threat to the Occident and thus to its own identity, the AfD has made up a need to “keep German culture clean” and is fighting a supposed suppression of the German language. It demands an amendment to the constitution which would oblige the government and politicians to give the German language special care and support.⁹⁵

In a joint research project, ARD and the Süddeutsche Zeitung have documented how cultural workers are put under pressure by the “New” Right. As of December 2016, the journalists have counted 39 cases in which theatres, opera houses, museums and their staff have been confronted with hate mails and death threats, minor and major questions in parliament, calls for boycotts and court cases. The following are just a few examples:

- **December 2016:** After the Altenburg Theatre put on a work dealing with the town's National Socialist past, the AfD demanded a boycott of the theatre. Actors were subjected to so many racist insults in the town that they decided not to extend their engagement.
- **February 2017:** At the opening of the anti-war monument titled simply “Monument” in Dresden, Lord Mayor Dirk Hilbert was shouted down by Pegida supporters. He received hate mail and death threats and had to be temporarily put under police protection.
- **October 2017:** The director of the Friedrichstadt-Palast venue in Berlin made a statement against the racist policies of the AfD. As a result, he received anonymous death threats, and a sold-out performance was delayed after a bomb threat.

This focus on so-called “Western” traditions and values, however, is used merely to distinguish them from traditions and values that do not fit the nationalist self-image of the right-wing extremists. Their “keeping culture clean” goes hand in hand with an attack on everything that reflects and promotes actual societal diversity. This not only threatens artistic freedom and diversity in cultural programmes, it also aims to free the tradition of commemorating Germany’s past from contradictions that arise from a critically reflective examination of, for example, National Socialism. The AfD intends to replace self-examination and pluralism with an exaggerated narrative on the identity of “the Germans”.

Self-portrayal as the victim of a supposedly politically correct mainstream

As in all other areas of AfD policy, an assumption of victimhood is a key party strategy in arts and culture matters. The AfD appoints itself as the only true representative of a “Volk” that is underrepresented in what it calls a politically correct art and culture industry and demands more German plays on the stages.⁹⁶ By claiming that there is a “left hegemony”⁹⁷ it justifies its attacks on the culture industry. The party talks about an aggressive theatre scene, against which people and “German culture” have to defend themselves. The assertion that there is too much “multiculturalism” in the cultural sector leads to the absurd claim that the AfD’s cultural policy would even contribute to pluralisation by adding an ethnocentric focus.⁹⁸ By means of such assertions, the party misrepresents who are perpetrators and who are victims: while minorities such as LGBTQIA+ people and people of color fight for representation in culture and thus for increased pluralism, the AfD apes their arguments and reinterpret them in an ethnocentric variant of identity politics. Neither the facts nor the basic absurdity of claiming that the majority society is underrepresented in culture concern the AfD culture warriors.

Attacks on art and culture

In late 2018 the former AfD delegate Andreas Kalbitz submitted a minor question to the Brandenburg parliament about the Piccolo Theatre in Cottbus, asking how many plays with “decidedly current social and/or political relevance similar to the play ‘KRG’” were being performed.⁹⁹ This was a play dealing with the dangers of a resurgence of fascism.

- **December 2018:** The organiser of the Essen literature festival “Literatürk 2018” received an anonymous letter: “Dear Turks, Literatürk is superfluous. Read this in Istanbul. Book many flights. Get out of Germany”.
- **March–May 2019:** After the Freiburger Theater initiated a reading on the subject of right-wing populism, the Facebook group “Bergstadtgeflüster” agitated against the event. Mayor Sven Krüger banned the reading in the theatre and forbade “such events from being organised and performed on the theatre’s premises”.
- **July 2019:** By submitting enquiry in the Baden-Württemberg parliament, the AfD aimed to determine how many artists working at regional venues did not have a German passport and what nationality they were.

Source: Laudenbach, Peter and Goetz, John: “Druck von rechts”, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 27 August 2019.

One way of networking and taking a stance against right-wing extremist agitation and attacks on the cultural industry lies in the “**Erklärung der Vielen**” (“**The Declaration of the Many**”). This campaign unites cultural institutions throughout Germany in drawing up public affirmations supporting an open and diverse society which convey a clear stance: that there should be no platform for nationalist propaganda: It also supports critical dialogue on right-wing extremist strategies and solidarity with people and organisations targeted by them. The association DIE VIELEN e.V. organises demonstrations as well as discussions, events and solidarity campaigns.

The “declarations” are online at: www.dievielen.de/erklaerungen

In 2017, the Berlin AfD applied to the Committee for Cultural Affairs to block or reduce funding for three theatres at once. Even though these requests were not granted, they had a symbolic power and were useful in the AfD’s self-promotion.

Elsewhere, the attacks of the self-styled “New” Right on artistic freedom are having an effect. For example, in 2018 the Bauhaus Foundation in Dessau cancelled a planned concert by punk band “Feine Sahne Fischfilet” at short notice after right-wing extremist groups had raised opposition online. A representative of the Foundation said that they did not want to become a venue for political agitation. The AfD celebrates such cancellations as a victory for its cultural policy, which aims to prevent a diverse range of cultural self-expression: it is instigating court cases against certain plays, demanding the dismissal of actors and questioning the whole rationale behind public funding.¹⁰⁰



Artists and activists from the culture sector demonstrated in May 2019 in Berlin “For a Europe of the Many”. © picture alliance/Annette Riedl/dpaw

One of their strategies to demand “neutrality” from all cultural figures who take up political positions, in order to purify cultural institutions of ideas that are unwelcome to the party. This must be countered by insisting that theatres and museums have a right to freedom of expression and artistic freedom, regardless of their funding.¹⁰¹ In the spirit of artistic freedom, the AfD must also put up with being critically examined on stage.

Preserving artistic freedom

The multifarious voices of culture creators in Germany, their work, initiatives and institutions together form a pillar of our free society. There must be a continuous dialogue with and by these those working in the arts and culture about the important role art and culture play in society and politics. In order to stand up to the AfD’s cultural war, democratic cultural institutions must be made stronger – politically, financially and in terms of the ideas they can express. So it is important that arts and culture representatives make greater use of the scope for political and civic action that we enjoy in our parliamentary democracy. Direct involvement by cultural workers in political organisations and the establishment of arts-and-culture-based political initiatives would represent future important opportunities for this demographic to influence political processes and cultural policy decisions.

Active advocacy of cultural diversity in all forms of culture must mean advocacy of the society that makes such diversity possible. This advocacy can embody the value and the impact of any forward-looking understanding of culture that opposes a culture of exclusion. The arts and culture industry must therefore reflect our transcultural society even more strongly than before, and counter right-wing advocacy of a German “culture of reference” with diversity in its casts and stagings. It is precisely our freedom of artistic production in terms of content that can make this possible. Anticipatory

deference to right-wing sensibilities when culture programmes are drawn up would mean a victory for the enemies of democracy. This also applies to culture managers, who must push for the promotion of culture as a social consensus. Freedom of the arts is a central public good and an expression of a democratic and liberal society. It must be defended against the far-right.

“Freedom of the arts is already under threat”

An interview with Kevin Rittberger

Kevin Rittberger is a theatre director and author. Often working from his own texts and research projects, he has worked at venues such as the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, the Deutsches Theater Berlin and the Staatstheater Stuttgart. His artistic vocation involves a commitment to countering the normalisation of right-wing extremism and fostering diversity on the stage – and therefore he is the target of hostility from the AfD.

Kevin Rittberger, in your play “Peak White – Wirr sinkt das Volk” at the Heidelberg Theatre, you critically examined the fears and the bogeymen of the self-styled “New” Right. The AfD then demanded cuts and even the cancellation of the play. What strategy is the party pursuing in its attacks on cultural projects that do not fit into its world view?

They demanded not just cancellation, but dismissal of the six actors taking part! It’s all aimed at permanent intimidation and attrition. It’s resulted in creeping self-censorship, when culture creators now aim to avoid being the subject of parliamentary questions by adapting their applications, projects and schedules to the aggravated situation and softening the form and substance of their proposals. The party’s short-term strategy is to further the fabrication that the AfD and its “Volk” are excluded, underrepresented and victimised by the cultural mainstream. Marc Jongen, the AfD’s spokesman on cultural policy, is trying to hijack left-liberal discourse by claiming that the AfD contributes to greater pluralism. Their vague accusations of violence and censorship directed at culture creators who oppose the AfD’s exclusionary policies then also contribute to this fabricated victimhood, which is also intended to draw the middle classes out of their reserve. But the AfD has no “right” for example to be invited to a podium discussion. Nor is its friend-foe schema underrepresented. Freedom of expression is not absolute; it is subordinate to human dignity and general human rights. It is not simply a kind of spice added to culture that sometimes just happens to be hard to swallow. That would be toxic liberalism – and this is what is often forgotten in tabloid-level discourse.

And this brings us to the medium-term strategy, to shift public discourse to the right: where we see figures in the mainstream of society arguing about whether talking to right-wing extremists contributes to democratic culture or not, and whether it is not in fact perfectly “reasonable” to want to protect cultural purity. While many people have focussed on just reacting to the agenda of the self-styled “New” Right, more important issues are pushed into the background: affordable housing for all, social policy, freedom of movement, climate justice. In the long run, a ruling AfD would

restrict the very diversity of opinion from which it now seeks to profit. The parliamentary enquiries it’s making here and there already show which schools, cultural projects, theatres, publishing houses, associations, etc. would have to close or change their personnel.

And theatrical programmes that are “rooted” in ethnocentrism would, as we are seeing in Hungary, drive artists into exile. Artistic freedom is already being threatened – and in the long run it would be massively restricted, hindered or even criminalised.

In March 2017, Marc Jongen, a member of the German Bundestag and often referred to as a key ideologue in the AfD, was invited to take part in a panel discussion at the Gessnerallee Theater in Zurich. The event was cancelled after public protests – you yourself had initiated an open letter calling for “No platform for the AfD and the New Right”. There seems to be a recurring discussion about whether to invite the AfD and figures on the self-styled “New” Right to such events, especially in the cultural sector. How should cultural creators deal with this?

I wrote the open letter in collaboration with many other politically active culture workers, since then we have written other statements, and we have subsequently worked on a glossary of the most important terms in the current debate – from A for “Alerta!” to Z for “Zensur”.

We have a clear stance: no platform for the AfD. And where the stage has already been opened up to them, i.e. right-wing figures have been invited, we make use of our freedom of expression and criticise the invitations, because we believe that only real pluralisation of discourse will help politicise the public. The AfD, on the other hand, wants to restrict discourse. We made this clear when we protested against Marc Jongen’s invitation to Gessnerallee Zurich in 2017, where no people with a migration background, Muslims, feminists, leftists or anti-fascists were invited – these being the very ones who Jongen would have denigrated.

There are various strategies, from open letters to discussions with organisers all the way to strategic disinterest. Our glossary is another attempt to help inform people who may then get involved in arguments with right-wing so-called intellectuals. Cultural workers following Enlightenment ideals sometimes think that if the ideological core of the discussion is exposed, the swing voters in the audience, and ultimately even the convinced right-wing extremists might be swayed by the more reasonable argument. But the AfD is not at all interested in the discussion, but in spreading doomsday scenarios, irrational ethnocentric mythologizing and its fairy tale of the “community of the Volk”. And we hear from former AfD supporters that they originally come to their beliefs internally, based on the party’s contempt for humanity and democracy.

This glossary of “new” right-wing cultural policy contains key terms and exposes right-wing extremist strategies. It is meant as a reference for art, culture and knowledge workers and is constantly being expanded. The glossary is online at: www.keine-buehne.org

“Freedom of expression is not simply a kind of spice added to culture that sometimes just happens to be hard to swallow. It is subordinate to human dignity and general human rights.”
Kevin Rittberger

Cultural workers who only want to attract attention are currently the most dangerous. Brecht talked about “Tuis” who willingly take part in dangerous games at the borders of democracy. The far-right is bending democracy to make it unequal and subject to the rule of the “Volk”. So much is very clear. This has nothing to do with a democracy that protects the rights of minorities. We must also work to ensure that the goals of freedom and equality do not fall victim to the silent coercion of economic conditions, which is why the right-wing’s friend-foe schema is simply too cheap.

By demanding cuts in subsidies, the AfD is specifically attacking artistic freedom. This is not only affecting the large major theatres in the big cities, but is increasingly aimed at small theatres in rural areas, which have fewer resources to fall back on. What advice would you give to these cultural institutions who are trying to deal with such attacks?

It is useful to network on a supra-regional level and to ensure, for example through the channels of the “Vielen” project, that you are not facing these attacks alone. Don’t intimidated. Do not allow yourself to be worn down, if only because this problem will have to be tackled for years, with perseverance. Use all the resources provided by our constitutional democracy, even those these failed in the case of the NSU or the latest series of right-wing attacks in Berlin-Neukölln. Promote solidarity, define anti-fascism as the common ground of a democracy and tell stories about transcultural harmony. Involve civil society and point out the divisions that populists and extremist right-wingers are trying to create by spreading racism and lies and by their conjuring a community which, when closely examined (i.e. if the party programme were implemented) would not be more social or equal at all. The resentment right-wingers claim, for example, on the basis that refugees are using up money needed by the welfare state lack is immediately invalidated when we look at the higher tax revenues. Demographic change also requires immigration. Looking into the face of a person who has been helped, says Bertolt Brecht, is looking at something beautiful. This is a topography that must be written upon every day in our free society, with, and this is the point, the resources of the culture sector.

Art and culture reflect, comment on and criticise society – sometimes indirectly and sometimes concretely. In dealing with right-wing extremist pronouncements, the cultural sector does not therefore have to just react, but can also exert active influence. How should the cultural sector deal with this role and the possibilities it offers?

As artists and cultural practitioners, we must make it clear that we will not let our cultural imagination be stifled, even if we are up to our necks in threats, hostility and actual violence from the far-right. Cultural imagination always means departing from the status quo and anticipating a different, more just world. What is called “anti-establishment” has simply changed its flavour these days, as right-wing populists and far-right extremists are spreading their stench more effectively and stealing the old symbols of rebellion. But critics of globalisation and transnational corporate interests are not wholly out of the picture: Fridays for Future, for example, is fighting on two fronts, against the right-wing climate deniers as well as against the defenders of the economic growth dogma. The cultural sector, which sees itself as an inclusive, welcoming part of a culture for all, which clothes a right to the world in new stories and creates speculative, inviting, inspiring statements for this purpose, will always offer something better than the narrow and exclusionary perspective of the far-right: a vision that can really take our free society forward.

Recommendations for action in the cultural sector

Convey a clear stance and assert your independence

The freedoms that have been fought for in art and culture are often taken for granted.¹⁰² As a result, there is a tendency not to take the threat to these freedoms from the revisionist and culturally pessimistic policies of the AfD seriously, or not to commit explicitly to the achievements of democracy. But artistic freedom is the basis for a diverse and open arts and culture landscape and means that it is vital to take a stand.

Draw up programmes strategically

The rise of the self-styled “New” Right and the AfD is a phenomenon that can also be critically addressed in the cultural sector. Artistic productions are a useful means of promoting critical debate. It is important to strengthen your own agenda and not simply to only react and be on the defensive. Deferring to anticipated attacks when drawing up your programmes harms democratic discourse.

For a more detailed insight into this issue as well as detailed recommendations for action, see the publication “**Alles nur Theater? Zum Umgang mit dem Kulturkampf von rechts**” by the Mobile Counselling Service against Right-wing Extremism Berlin (MBR). This handbook is available online (www.mbr-berlin.de) or as a free hard copy at info@mbr-berlin.de.

We also recommend the e-paper “**Die Kulturpolitik der Alternative für Deutschland**” by Manuela Lück: weiterdenken.de/sites/default/files/uploads/2017/02/manuela_luck_kulturpolitik_afd_farbsparend.pdf

Take diversity development seriously

The right’s demand to keep a spurious German culture “pure” must be countered by diversity. Actual current societal must be substantively highlighted in artistic projects and in terms of the personnel on stage.

No platform for right-wing extremists

Right-wing extremists use every platform they can for their political agitation. The AfD and its ilk will try to use these opportunities for media-friendly self-promotion. Pluralism does not mean giving a platform to people who foster contempt for humanity. A well-reasoned rejection is often a clearer statement than a public argument.¹⁰³

Develop democratic mission statements

Democratic culture must be put into practice as a culture of equality. Mission statements should include this objective, and can function as a public rejection of hate. Drawing up a suitable statement in-house can give personnel confidence when carrying out public communications.¹⁰⁴

Build networks for mutual support

If people or institutions are attacked or harassed by the right, your organisation should publicly demonstrate solidarity with them. Forming alliances or joining existing networks can help you provide effective support and work with allies to defend artistic freedom. Rural areas should not be neglected: in these areas, smaller institutions often depend on networking and mutual aid to defend themselves against hostility from the self-styled “New” Right.

Develop and apply pragmatic “crisis management”

The AfD’s methods for dealing with cultural projects they oppose are carried out on many levels and can tie up the resources of cultural projects and institutions. It is therefore particularly important to clarify some issues in advance so as to be prepared for attacks. For example, cultural institutions should agree on how to deal with disruptions by right-wing extremists, clarify whether they intend to actively ban people from the premises, and discuss whether special security precautions are needed. A prepared strategy for how to deal with demands for cuts and accusations of bias can be helpful in an emergency. Right-wing accusations should be refuted by making reference to artistic freedom. It is also advisable to seek expert legal advice in advance.

The Mobile Beratung gegen Rechtsextremismus Berlin (MBR) has drawn up, with legal advice, a clause covering the right to enforce house rules that can be used for your own organisation:

“The organisers reserve the right to make use of their domiciliary rights and to deny access to the event or to exclude people who belong to right-wing extremist parties or organisations, who are part of the right-wing extremist scene or who have made racist, nationalist, anti-Semitic or other bigoted statements in the past.”

The AfD from the perspective of migrant self-organisation

Germany has evolved into a country shaped by immigration, where almost one in four people have a migration background, and where migration experiences shape society.¹⁰⁵ German society can therefore be regarded as “post-migrant”. Migrant self-aid organisations represent the interests of migrants in all their diversity and should therefore be key consultants when it comes to questions of politics, the economy and government. The growing influence of the AfD is viewed with concern – and many migrant organisations are increasingly targeted by the party themselves.

The masking of migrant perspectives

Most migrants live in the former West German states, and so the majority of migrant self-aid organisations are based there. In the “New” federal states, the former East Germany, people with a history of migration make up only 6% of the total population. The AfD is particularly influential in these regions and is in some places very popular. This shows that phenomena such as racism are projections onto imaginary groups – a fact that was well described back in the 1990s by the, admittedly now problematic, term “xenophobia without foreigners”.

The results of the elections in Brandenburg, Sachsen und Thüringen, in all of which the AfD became the second largest party, confirmed the fears of migrant self-aid organisations that social divides were bound to increase. AfD policies have a direct impact on the social climate. The party fundamentally portrays migration as a problem, and stirs up hatred and prejudice against people with a history of migration. Unfortunately, in public debate about the AfD nowhere near enough attention is being paid to the perspectives of those against whom this policy is directed. Yet it is precisely the perspectives of those affected that can make the impact of racist policies clear.

The term “post-migrant society” does not refer to a cessation of migration, but rather describes social adaptation processes that take place in the post-migration phase.

There is no uniform definition of migrant self-organisation. Migrant self-aid organisations have sometimes considerable differences in their aims, functions and structures. The different activities reflect the different needs of their members. Activities may focus on intercultural exchange, but also on advocating for increased transcultural openness. By joining together and networking in umbrella organisations at regional and national, migrants can gain access to and participation in the regulatory structures and can better represent the needs of people with experience of migration. Nevertheless, migrants’ self-organisations have little influence in politics, science or the public discourse. In Germany there are more than 17,000 registered associations serving people with a migration background.

The director of MigraNet MV, the umbrella organisation for migrant self-aid organisations in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, see a connection between right-wing extremist murders and the politics of the AfD: “I hold the AfD responsible for the fact that people with a migration history are murdered in Germany! The AfD should be held to account!”¹⁰⁶

Mamad Mohamad, Managing Director of the State Network of Migrant Organisations in Sachsen-Anhalt (Lamsa e.V.), said, regarding the AfD election campaign in Thüringen: “The rhetoric of ‘Wende 2.0’ is perfidious: it is unmistakably aimed at white Germans and reads like a declaration of war for those who are not part white. This has already had concrete effects: “With the rise of the AfD, people are experiencing more racism in everyday life. We must not, however, take the rise of the AfD for a fait accompli, or dismiss it as an East German phenomenon”.¹⁰⁷

The exclusion of migrant perspectives is also reflected in the fact that migrant self-aid organisations are rarely invited to events, discussions and professional networking event. They complain that officials and politicians often have no idea that migrant organisations have vital expertise and knowledge on certain issues and can therefore act as expert consultants. The integration of migrant perspectives would make it possible to better reflect the existing diversity of society, to reduce discrimination and misunderstandings and to contribute to a broadening of perspectives. This is not only a democratic necessity, but also helps hinder right-wing extremism in the medium term.

Attacks by AfD on migrant self-aid organisations

The AfD has no interest in integrating migrant perspectives in this way. On the contrary, the AfD puts pressure on migrant self-organisations themselves. The party regularly asks parliamentary questions, at all levels from municipal to the federal, about how, by whom and to what extent migrant self-organisations are financed and what exactly their fields of activity are. The party uses these procedures to question the financing of migrant organisations and to slander their work.

DaMOst e.V., the umbrella organisation for migrant organisations in East Germany, fears that this strategy could in time be successful: “The entire functioning of migrant organisations is acutely endangered by the rise of the AfD. We therefore demand increased a political and financial support for community organisation by and for migrants in the East.

Lamsa e.V. shares these fears: “The AfD stridently calls for subsidies for integration to be set at zero. Its entire strategy is aimed at making us the object of suspicion, defaming us and paralysing our civic society work”.

In order to achieve lasting progress in the field of integration, migrants are increasingly trying to involve other allied organisations and to advance the integration process by working with them. The AfD sees the achievements of migrant self-aid organisations in their fight for comprehensive participation in society as a threat. Their response is a polemic about national identity that divides society.

Recommendations for action for migrant self-aid organisations

More participation at all levels

Establish firmer footholds for migrant self-aid organisations in civic society. This entails being even more proactive in the future: initiate dialogue with democratic parties, form alliances with other NGOs. It is important to look for commonalities in order to make best use of resources and join forces in the struggle for indivisible rights – this should result in political recognition.

Offering political education in simple German

Political education in simple German can help migrant self-aid organisations explain the decisions and actions of political parties at all levels more clearly to people who are not native speakers of German. Discussion of political programmes can help in argumentation.

Do not engage with the AfD

Avoid discussions and communications with the AfD. The manipulative, populist language used by the AfD as a strategy can lead to dead ends, resulting ultimately in even more attention and recognition for the AfD.

Collaborate with local councils

Demand that local authorities and administrations become more open. The reality of a society shaped by immigration, and its associated challenges must be taken into account. Integration concepts must be constantly added to, adapted and updated.

Create or adjust mission statements

The substantive focus of your MSO’s statutes must be reflected in the mission statement. The roles of the executive board, the full-time staff and volunteers must be clearly defined. Members must not be active in racist, right-wing extremist, anti-Semitic or Islamophobic associations, organisations or groups. Members’ inclusive and anti-racist attitudes must be integral to your organisation’s self-image.

Develop strategies against racist attacks

Strategies need to be developed and regularly reviewed. It is vital to establish and maintain networks with many other NGOs, but also with local authorities. Anti-discrimination offices, counselling centres and support networks must also meet regularly and provide mutual support. Online reporting portals must be used by your MSO to report racist and anti-Semitic statements and actions.

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Support projects supporting democracy and equality!

Since 1998, the Amadeu Antonio Foundation has been working for a democratic civil society that consistently opposes right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism. We support courageous initiatives throughout Germany. To date, we have supported more than 1,400 projects in many areas: in youth work and schools, in victim protection and victim support, and in municipal networks.

These are just some of the initiatives we have supported:

- **Projekttheater Dresden e.V.: “Aufspüren Jagen Entsorgen” (2018)**
The play uses original texts from the AfD to highlight the racist language of the “New” Right. The aim is to raise awareness of recent changes in communication and the tenor of public discourse.
- **Evangelisches Frauenbegegnungszentrum EVA: a discussion series, “Lila Sofa: Von Frauenrechten und rechten Frauen. Rechtspopulismus und Extremismus aus feministischen Perspektiven diskutiert” (2018)**
In six discussion sessions, topics covered included: Women in the right-wing extremist scene, right-wing men’s rights movements, “gender mania” – the womens policies of the AfD, “feminism so white” – an anti-racist perspective on the women’s movement and feminist activism against right-wing extremism.

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation is a member of the Federal Association of German Foundations and has signed the voluntary commitment set out by the Transparent Civil Society Initiative. The Freudenberg Foundation is a long-standing supporter and partner of the foundation.

The foundation is named after Amadeu Antonio, who was beaten to death by right-wing extremist youths in Eberswalde, Brandenburg in 1990 because he was black. To date, more than 200 people have died as victims of right-wing violence since the fall of the Wall.

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Contact

Amadeu Antonio Foundation
Novalisstraße 12
10115 Berlin

Phone: 030. 240 886 10
info@amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de
www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de
facebook.com/AmadeuAntonioFoundation
twitter.com/AmadeuAntonio

A free and pluralistic society in Germany can no longer be taken for granted. A far-right party, the AfD, has taken root in the Bundestag and in all the State parliaments and is undermining and attacking our fundamental democratic rights. Throughout the country, the AfD has triggered and inspired all kinds of intolerant discourse and activity. It is normalising bigotry, and legitimising violence to promote its ideology. Despite as suspicious by the BfV, the AfD is still a danger, especially in places where it is established in local councils and provides resources and structure for the far-right.

After years of experience in dealing with AfD, we can also look back on a learning process that was successful in many places, but bumpy in others. Representatives of our democracy have often found clear words, there have been important processes of self-understanding in civil society, and solidarity networks have been formed to counter the party's hostility. In addition, all parts of society are becoming more aware of how their own work is linked to our liberal democracy and how democracy enemies try to attack this basis of our pluralistic coexistence. Now is the time to make our democracy storm-proof.

This publication is intended to provide support to anyone affected by AfD attacks, and to provide everyone involved in civic organisations, the media, art, parliaments, education and other sectors with information and strategies to better tackle right-wing extremists. This fight is not merely a difference of opinion, it is about defending our free society and democratic community.