

Vote Seeking and the Strategy of Provocation: An Initial Analysis of the AfD's Impact on the German Bundestag*

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INTRODUCTION

The outcome of the 24th of September 2017 German Federal Election shook the German political class and sent shockwaves across Europe. The cause was the political arrival of the right wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party as a third force in German politics, which finished the election with 12.6 per cent of the vote and 94 seats in the 709 seat Bundestag. In a country known for consensual politics and a traditionally risk-averse electorate, the success of the AfD marked an historic juncture in the Federal Republic's political development.¹

The AfD's rise has provoked alarm in some quarters because the party has progressively radicalised since its formation in 2012 and is now an explicitly right wing populist party that mobilises distinct sections of the electorate, including previous non-voters. Populism is a 'thin' ideology that articulates the idea of an antagonistic relationship between 'the people' and a morally suspect 'elite'. As a rule, left wing populism tends to define the people along class lines, whilst the right wing variant focuses more on ethnicity and national identity.² Right wing populist parties like the AfD often use 'nativist' rhetoric that plays on voters' concerns about immigration, multiculturalism and Islam. The AfD's hard-edged electoral campaign explicitly

¹ C. Lees, 'The Alternative for Germany: The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in the Heart of Europe', *Politics* 38(3) 2018: 295-310. DOI: <http://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/NkXgkYYR5SvZaVAFAGda/full>

² See B. Stanley, 'The Thin Ideology of Populism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13(1) 2008: 95-110; C. Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*. 39(4) 2004: 541-63.

mobilised these concerns to a pitch and with a degree of success that was unprecedented in contemporary German politics.

In order to assess the tactics employed by the AfD, particularly the party's behaviour in parliament since the Federal Election, this article draws upon Wolfgang Müller and Kaare Strøm's analytical distinction between 'policy seeking', 'office seeking', and 'vote seeking'.³ Müller and Strøm's typology captures the strategic trade-offs that confront political parties and how their leaders address them. Sometimes these leaders have to make hard choices. For instance, a party leadership may choose to eschew votes in order to keep faith with a long-cherished but electorally unpopular policy proposal ('policy seeking' trumps 'vote seeking'), or they may decide to drop a key policy in order to enter a coalition government ('office seeking' trumps 'policy seeking'), or decide that the electoral costs of being in government outweigh the benefits and therefore rule it out ('vote seeking' trumps 'office seeking'), or that the best way to keep an electoral coalition together is to avoid clarifying the party's position in a contentious policy area ('vote seeking' trumps 'policy seeking').

All political parties must make these trade-offs from time to time. However, new parties face additional pressures to build organisationally and programmatically for the longer term whilst ensuring their survival in the short to medium term.⁴ As a result, in the early stages of their development, new parties tend to favour vote seeking over office seeking or policy seeking. In addition, newly emergent populist parties also run the risk of alienating their core vote by appearing to be co-opted by the despised elites if they pursue an office seeking strategy. Thus, although there have been instances where European left wing populist parties have successfully made the transition to the political mainstream and even into government,⁵ the radical edge that characterises right wing populism in Europe has made this transition more difficult for right wing populist parties.⁶

³ W. Müller and K. Strøm (eds.), *Policy, Office, or Votes: How Political Parties in Western Europe make Hard Decisions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁴ R. Harmel and L. Svåsand, 'Party Leadership and Party Institutionalism: Three Phases of Development', *West European Politics* 16(2) 1993: 67-88.

⁵ Y. Stavrakakis, 'Populism in Power: Syriza's Challenge to Europe', *Juncture* 21 (4) 2015: 273-280.

⁶ T. Akkerman, 'Populist Parties in Power and Their Impact on Liberal Democracies in Western Europe', in R.C. Heinisch, C. Holtz-Bacha and O. Mazzoleni (eds.), *Political Populism*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2018: 169-80.

At present, the conditions do not exist for the AfD in Germany to make the transition to the mainstream. The party has only just established itself in the Bundestag on an anti-establishment party program and it has been isolated by the mainstream parties, which currently refuse to co-operate with it. Just before the 2017 Federal Election, Chancellor Angela Merkel used a speech in the outgoing Bundestag to call on all of the mainstream parties to unite against the AfD, which she described as ‘not just a challenge to the CDU ... it is a challenge for all of us gathered in this house’.⁷ Given the obvious electoral appeal of the AfD’s anti-system stance with its core voters, as well as the deliberate isolation of the party within the Bundestag, this article argues that for reasons of expedience as well as strategy the AfD’s current activities are almost entirely devoted to vote seeking.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. In the next section, I provide a theoretical and empirical analysis of the coalition formation process in Germany after the 2017 Federal Election and show that the AfD’s pariah status within the Bundestag meant it was unable to be office seeking even if that had a strategic objective. Following that, I examine the impact of the AfD on Bundestag business and argue that its provocative tone in parliamentary debate is designed to enhance its electoral offer and that its role in parliamentary committees and in the Bundestag executive are currently secondary to this goal. I conclude by arguing that it remains to be seen whether the AfD will eventually overplay its parliamentary hand, whether the other mainstream political parties will be able to forge and maintain a coherent strategy to contain the AfD, or if access to Federal funding will eventually professionalize the party and moderate its current strategy of provocation.

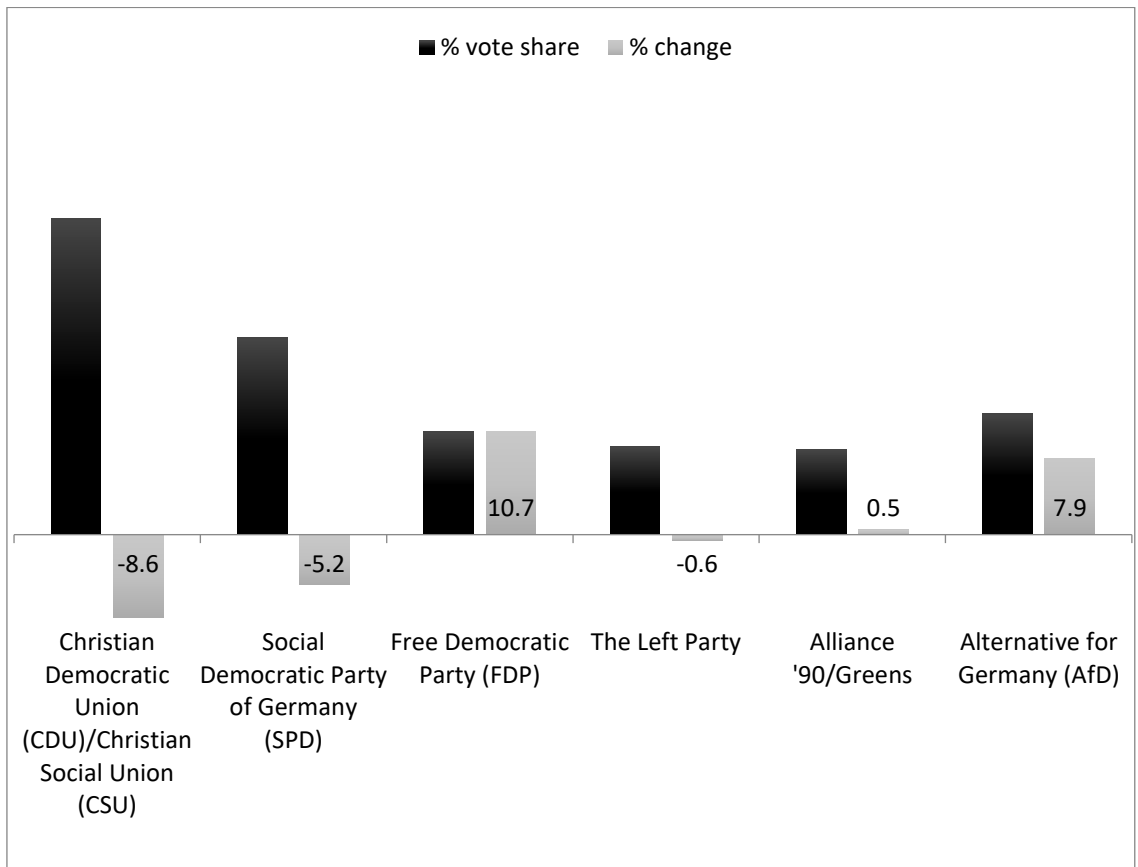
THE 2017 FEDERAL ELECTIONS

The results of the election are provided in Figure 1, below. The Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) emerged as the largest party for the fourth successive Federal Election, with 33 percent of the vote. The CDU/CSU’s Social Democratic Party (SPD) competitor was only able to poll a little more than 20 per cent of the vote: its lowest electoral share since the foundation of the Federal Republic in

⁷ J. Delcker, ‘Angela Merkel Urges German Unity Against AfD’, *Politico*, 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-urges-german-unity-against-afd-open-door-policy-on-refugees/>

1949. Support for the established smaller parties—the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Left Party (the successor to the ruling party of the former East Germany) and the centre-left ecological Alliance '90/The Greens—remained little changed from the previous election, with them winning 10.7, 9.2, and 8.9 percent of the vote respectively.

Figure 1. The 2017 German Federal Election: Parties' Percentage Vote Shares and Percentage Change from the 2013 Federal Election



Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2017. Accessed at: <http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Startseite/>

Germany's Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system sets an electoral hurdle of five per cent of the popular vote or three directly elected seats before a political party can win seats in the Bundestag.⁸ German MMP, which was the model for New Zealand's electoral system, is part of a suite of constitutional arrangements, procedural rules, norms, and societal relations that the British political scientist Gordon Smith identified as Germany's 'efficient secret'. This efficient secret drove a 'politics of centrality' that encouraged ideological moderation and political consensus, shutting-out flanking parties of the left or right and cultivating long term policy making. For Smith, these institutional features and policy outcomes contrasted with those found in more adversarial political systems based on the Westminster model⁹. Coming after the AfD narrowly failed to enter the Bundestag in 2013, the party's unexpectedly strong performance in the 2017 Federal Election signaled at least a weakening of this politics of centrality and the emergence of a more confrontational style of politics in Germany.

Since German unification in 1990, a number of challenger parties from the populist or extreme right of politics,¹⁰ including the Republicans¹¹ and the Party for a Rule of Law Offensive (the so-called 'Schill Party'),¹² have tried to open up a viable political space to the right of the CDU/CSU. Some of these parties enjoyed limited success at the level of state politics but only the AfD has succeeded in breaking through at the Federal level. In addition, the AfD is a force in state politics—particularly in the states of the former East Germany—and enjoyed success in elections to the European

⁸ Germany's system of MMP was established in 1956 and, under it, the Bundestag is composed of roughly 50 per cent directly elected seats from single-seat districts and 50 per cent seats allocated proportionally through state-level lists. Each voter has two votes. The first is the primary vote for the constituency candidate and is regarded as the main vote. The second vote is cast for party lists. As noted, only parties with three or more directly elected seats or five per cent or more of second votes are eligible for Bundestag seats. The Federal Election Commission determines the number of seats received by each party using the second votes, currently distributed using the Sainte Laguë method in proportion to the total number of second votes polled nationally. This yielded 709 seats after the 2017 election, including 111 'overhang' seats.

⁹ G. Smith, *Democracy in Western Germany* (3rd edition), Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1986.

¹⁰ W.D. Chapin, 'Explaining the Electoral Success of the New Right: The German Case', *West European Politics*, 20:2 1997: 53-72.

¹¹ Thomas Saalfeld, 'The Politics of National-Populism: Ideology and Policies of the German Republikaner Party', *German Politics* 2(2) 2007: 177-199.

¹² F. Decker and F. Hartleb, 'Populismus auf schwierigem Terrain. Die rechten und linken Herausfordererparteien in der Bundesrepublik', in F. Decker F. (ed.) *Populismus*. Berlin, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006.

Parliament. The AfD has advanced at all levels of German politics since its inception in 2012. This progress has generated interest from academic researchers.¹³ Scholars have noted the party's steady radicalization, from an eccentric mix of neo-liberal, ordo-liberal, and populist critiques of Chancellor Angela Merkel's centrist politics and Germany's role in the Eurozone, towards an ideological profile consistent with that of a typical European right wing populist party.¹⁴ This harder edge, with its sustained emphasis on opposition to immigration and hostility to Islam, allowed the AfD to communicate a clear political message¹⁵ to a distinct set of German voters and erstwhile non-voters. In the language of Müller and Strøm's typology, this was a highly effective vote-seeking strategy and the AfD became the third force in the Bundestag because—and not despite of—the party's increased radicalism.¹⁶

GOVERNMENT FORMATION

What worked as a vote-winning strategy was not conducive to office seeking, as none of the established political parties were willing to co-operate with they considered to be an openly racist and anti-European party. However, to state an argument that runs throughout this article, at present the AfD is not an office seeking party. It has no intention of being co-opted into the establishment consensus and attempts to isolate the party only play into its narrative of being the persecuted outsiders speaking truth to power.

¹³ See A. Baluch, 'The Dynamics of Euroscepticism in Germany', in B. Leruth, N. Startin and S. Usherwood (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2018; R. Schmitt-Beck, 'The Alternative für Deutschland in the Electorate: Between Single-Issue and Right-Wing Populist Party', *German Politics*, 26(1) 2017: 124-148; F. Decker, 'The Alternative for Germany: Factors Behind its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party', *German Politics and Society* 34(2) 2016: 1–16.

¹⁴ J. Kette, 'Populism, Euro-Scepticism, and Euro-Populism in the Party Systems of Germany, the United Kingdom and France: First Results on the Basis of the Analysis of the AfD-Basic-Program'. Paper given to the 6th ECPR Graduate Student Conference, Tartu, Estonia, 10-13 July 2016.

¹⁵ The AfD used the Texas-based Harris Media agency, known for earlier work with UKIP in Britain and the Trump campaign in the USA, in its hard-hitting electoral campaign.

¹⁶ Lees, 'The Alternative for Germany'.

Table 1. Percentage Vote Shares/Number of Seats in the German Bundestag Since 1990

	PDS/ Left	A'90/ Grns	(SPD)	CDU/ CSU	FDP	AfD	(Other)	Total
1990	2.4/17	5.0/8	33.5/239	43.8/319	11.0/79	---	(4.3/00)	100/662
1994	4.4/30	7.3/49	36.4/252	41.4/294	6.9/47	---	(3.6/00)	100/672
1998	5.1/36	6.7/47	40.9/298	35.1/245	6.2/43	---	(6.0/00)	100/669
2002	4.0/2	8.6/55	38.5/251	38.5/248	7.4/47	---	(3.0/00)	100/603
2005	8.7/54	8.1/51	34.2/222	35.2/226	9.8/61	---	(4.0/00)	100/614
2009	11.9/76	10.7/68	23.0/146	33.8/239	14.6/93	---	(6.0/00)	100/622
2013	8.6/64	8.4/63	25.7/193	41.5/311	4.8/00	4.7/00	(6.3/00)	100/631
2017	9.2/69	8.9/67	20.5/153	32.9/246	10.7/80	12.6/94	(5.0/00)	100/709

Source: Wahlen, Wahlrecht und Wahlsysteme. Accessed at: <http://www.wahlrecht.de>

PDS/Left: Party of Democratic Socialism/The Left Party

A'90/Grns: Alliance '90/The Greens

SPD: Social Democratic Party of Germany

CDU/CSU: Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union

FDP: Free Democratic Party

AfD: Alternative for Germany

The isolation of the AfD also served further to complicate a government formation process that for many years had been made difficult by ongoing party system change and fragmentation. Table 1 sets out the percentage vote shares and numbers of seats won by political parties in the eight Bundestag elections since German Unification in 1990. As we can see from the data, the two big German catch-all parties, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, both did badly in the 2017 Federal Election. This was consistent with a longer-term trend of steady electoral decline that – with one or two peaks and troughs over the period--goes back to the 1980s.¹⁷ Nevertheless, as is the

¹⁷ C. Lees, 'The German Party System(s) in 2005 – a return to *Volkspartei* dominance', in C. Clemens and T. Saalfeld (eds.), special issue of *German Politics* on 2005 German Federal Elections, 15(4) 2006: 361-375.

norm in the Federal Republic, the larger of the two big catch-all parties is considered the *formateur* at the start of coalition negotiations, with a right to try to form a majority coalition capable of governing. After the 2017 Federal Election, this was Angela Merkel's CDU/CSU, with 32.9 percent of the vote and 246 Bundestag seats.

The CDU/CSU needed to build a working majority of at least 355 of the 309 seats in the Bundestag¹⁸ but the AfD's 94 parliamentary seats, combined with its pariah status, had fundamentally changed the distribution of voting power within the Bundestag and the subsequent dynamics of coalition building.

In Tables 2 and 3, I present data on party system fragmentation, party strength and possible coalitions in the Bundestag since 1990. Table 2 uses the Laakso Taagepera Index of the 'effective number' of parties¹⁹ and the alternative Herfindal-Hirschman Index to show the number of effective parties in the Bundestag over time. Broadly speaking, the effective number of parties is the number of parties in a legislature that are actually relevant to the process of government formation.

Table 3 shows the 'voting power' (VP) of each party in the Bundestag, using adjusted Banzhaf scores²⁰, as well as the number of 'coalitions with swing'. Voting power measures the extent of each party's relevance for forming a majority in the Bundestag (the higher the number, the more power). The number of 'coalitions with swing' denotes the total number of potential coalitions with a bare majority that could be formed or dissolved by the joining or defection of just one or more parties²¹.

¹⁸ German MMP was the model for New Zealand's MMP system but the underlying norms and procedures of government formation are very different in the two countries. For instance, New Zealand went to the polls the day before the 2017 German Federal Election. Following the New Zealand election, National was the largest party and had effectively 'won' the election by achieving a strong plurality of votes. However, Labour and New Zealand First worked together with the Greens to exclude the largest party from power. In Germany, where the norm of majority government led by the largest party is relatively strong, such an outcome would have been hard to defend politically. In New Zealand, where MMP was introduced in part as an antidote to the perceived excesses of strong 'responsible' government under the previous First Past The Post electoral system, excluding the largest party from government was controversial but defensible.

¹⁹ M. Laakso and R. Taagepera, "Effective" Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe', *Comparative Political Studies* 12(1) 1979: 3-27. In this index, the higher the number, the more fragmentation exists.

²⁰ See I. McLean, A. McMillan and D. Leech, 'Duverger's Law, Penrose's Power Index and the Unity of the UK', *Political Studies* 53(2) 2005: 457-76.

²¹ O.C. Herfindahl, 'Concentration in the US Steel Industry'. Unpublished doctoral thesis. (Columbia University, 1950); A.O. Hirschman, 'The Paternity of an Index', *American Economic Review* 54(5) 1960: 761-2. This index was

As a rule of thumb, the greater the number of possible coalitions with swing in a legislature, the higher the degree of party system fragmentation as well and, with it, an increased potential for government instability.

Table 2. Table 2. Party System Fragmentation in the German Bundestag, 1990-2017

Election	N of Parties/Party		
	Groups	Laakso-Taagepera	Herfindal-Hirschman
1990	5	2.6484	0.3776
1994	5	2.9050	0.3442
1998	5	2.9028	0.3445
2002	5	2.8025	0.3568
2005	5	3.4398	0.2907
2009	5	3.9686	0.2520
2013	4	2.8033	0.3567
2017	6	4.6368	0.2157
Mean	5	3.2634	0.3608

Source: data from <http://www.wahlrecht.de>

originally set up to measure the degree of monopoly existing in commodity markets, where 1.000 is a complete monopoly. Therefore, the lower the number, the more fragmentation exists.

Table 3. Voting Power (VP) and Coalitions with Swing in the German Bundestag, 1990-2017

Election	Party of Democratic Socialism/The Left Party	Alliance '90/The Greens	Social Democratic Party	Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union	Free Democratic Party	Alternative for Germany	Coalitions with Swing
1990	0.1667	0	0.1667	0.5	0.1667	0	14
1994	0	0.1667	0.1667	0.5	0.1667	0	14
1998	0	0.1667	0.5	0.1667	0.1667	0	14
2002	0	0.3333	0.3333	0.3333	0	0	12
2005	0.25	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.25	0	12
2009	0.1667	0	0.1667	0.5	0.1667	0	14
2013	0.1667	0.1667	0.1667	0.5	0	0	7
2017	0.1071	0.1071	0.1786	0.3929	0.1071	0.1071	27

Source: data from <http://www.wahlrecht.de>; coalitions calculated using the Voting Power and Power Index Website, Antti Pajala, University of Turku, Finland: <http://powerslave.val.utu.fi/>

Tables 2 and 3 show a relatively stable level of system fragmentation from 1990 until the 2013 Federal Election, when the failure of the FDP to scale the 5 per cent hurdle reduced the number of party groups to 4, the effective number of parties to 2.8 and halved the number of coalitions with swing to 7. Behind this period of apparent stability, however, post-Unification Germany saw the emergence of a much more fluid party system in which, as already noted, the combined vote share for the two big catch-all parties—and the SPD's vote in particular—declined steadily. However, for a period this decline created a paradox, in which we saw a greater concentration of voting power around the catch-all parties, despite their reduced vote share. The data show that one of the two catch-all parties enjoyed a VP score of 0.5 (effectively a

veto-playing position, meaning it was needed for any possible successful coalition) in six out of eight elections. This meant that none of the smaller parties was strong enough to act as the ‘kingmaker’ in the government formation process.²²

The AfD’s emergence as the third force in the Bundestag in 2017—along with the FDP’s return to the Federal parliament after four years—revealed the extent of the fluidity underpinning German party politics. The number of party groups rose to 6, the effective number of parties almost doubled to 4.6 and the number of coalitions with swing nearly quadrupled from 7 to 27. At the same time, neither of the two catch-all parties enjoyed the effective veto power that had been the case following the majority of the previous elections since Unification. In short, the disruption that the AfD and to a lesser extent a resurgent FDP had generated within the Bundestag impacted at first on the degree of effectiveness of other parties within the coalition game. Even if it had been an acceptable coalition partner, the AfD did not enjoy enough voting power to assume the kingmaker role. What the AfD’s presence in the Bundestag did do, however, was make it even more unlikely that any other smaller party could become kingmaker.

Obviously, although the number of mathematically possible coalitions following the 2017 Federal Election had risen to 27, far fewer coalition options than that were *politically* feasible. We have touched upon the exclusion of the AfD, but there other possible options that were ideologically problematic: not least for Angela Merkel’s CDU/CSU as *formateur*. Table 4 sets out the main coalition options available. The table is based on a ‘median legislator’²³ analysis of the Bundestag, which assumes that parties’ coalition preferences are limited to coalitions that are ideologically connected, in this case along the Left-Right ideological dimension, and that ideally they will be limited in their ideological range.²⁴

²² The ‘kingmaker’ function was played by the FDP in the 1960s and 1970s as it held the balance of power between the CDU/CSU and SPD in what was known as a ‘triangular’ party system. This triangular system broke down in the 1980s and 1990s with the entry of the Greens and later the PDS (subsequently the Left party) into Federal politics. See F. Pappi, ‘The West German Party System’, *West European Politics* 7 1984: 7-26; also C. Lees, *Party Politics in Germany - A Comparative Politics Approach*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2005.

²³ R. Axelrod, *Conflict of interest*, Chicago, Markham, 1970.

²⁴ de Swaan, A. (1973) *Coalition Theories And Cabinet Formation*. Amsterdam; Oxford: Elsevier.

Table 4. Structural Attributes and Coalition Options: A Left-Right Median Legislator Analysis of the 2017 German Bundestag Election*

Structural attribute	The Left Party	Alliance '90/ Greens	Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)	Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/ Christian Social Union (CSU)	Free Democratic Party (FDP)	Alternative for Germany (AfD)
% Vote	9.2	8.9	20.5	32.9	10.7	12.6
Seats	69	67	153	246	80	94
Total Seats	(709)					
Decision Rule	(355)					
Minimal Winner	(369)					
Minimal Connected Winner	(399)					
Mparty						
MPartyK						

* Parties presented from Left to Right on an ideological spectrum. Shaded areas represent possible coalitions based on ideological congruence.

Table 4 demonstrates that the 'decision rule' in the 709 seat Bundestag, at which point a coalition can command a legislative majority of 50 percent plus 1 votes, is 355. The smallest mathematically possible coalition with a majority—or 'minimal winning' coalition²⁵—would have been made up of the SPD, Left Party, Alliance '90/Greens and the FDP. This minimal winner would have commanded 369 votes but it would not have been completely ideologically connected (the FDP is significantly to the right of the other parties listed and sits to the right of the CDU/CSU) and it would have had a large ideological range. If it were ever to have formed, such an arrangement would have presented considerable problems in terms of policy

²⁵ Riker, W. H. (1962) *The Theory of Political Coalitions*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

formulation and agreement, ministerial portfolio allocation, and day-to-day political management. By contrast, the ‘minimal connected winner’ is the smallest possible coalition that is adjacent along the Left-Right axis and, in this case, that would have been a Grand Coalition between the two big catch-all parties (CDU/CSU and SPD), commanding 399 votes.

Median legislator analysis gets its name because one of its core assumptions is that the party that controls the median legislator (the ‘Mparty’) in any potential coalition is decisive because it blocks the ideological axis along which any connected winner forms. If a party is Mparty and, crucially as in Germany, a majority coalition is required, then we can predict that it will be included in the winning coalition. If a party controls the median legislator within the winning coalition then it is ‘MpartyK’ and is decisive in determining the coalition’s potential composition, program, and stability. As Table 4 demonstrates, in a Grand Coalition arrangement, Angela Merkel’s CDU/CSU would be both Mparty and MpartyK. In theory, therefore, it would have held all of the cards.

There was just one problem with this analysis: the Grand Coalition option appeared to be unavailable following the SPD leadership’s decision, in the immediate hours after the election, to go into opposition in order to rebuild its support and refresh its political offer to voters. This meant that, for the first months following the Federal Election, Germany’s second largest party was not available for coalition building. In practical terms, this left the option of the so-called ‘Jamaica’ coalition between the CDU/CSU, FDP and Greens (so named because of the three parties’ respective colours of black, yellow, and green). As in the Grand Coalition, the CDU/CSU would have been both Mparty--and therefore *formateur* – and also MpartyK. In terms of our theoretical assumptions, therefore, we would have expected this option to be reasonably attractive to the CDU/CSU.

Not surprisingly, then, the first two months following the 2017 Federal Election were dominated by talks between the CDU/CSU, Greens, and FDP. Interestingly, though, it was only towards the end of the process when the talks were in some difficulty that Angela Merkel and other senior figures became fully engaged. This raises the possibility that Merkel was playing a long game and waiting for pressure to build on the SPD to re-consider its decision to sit out coalition negotiations. Eventually, the FDP’s leader Christian Lindner announced that his party was withdrawing from coalition talks and, in January 2018, the SPD announced that it was willing to re-enter coalition negotiations. In March 2018, the SPD agreed to enter another Grand Coalition as junior partner to the CDU/CSU. This made the AfD – as the third largest party--the official opposition in the Bundestag.

THE AFD IN THE BUNDESTAG

There are 778 members of the Germany's bicameral parliament, made up of the 709 members of the Bundestag and 69 delegates to the Bundesrat. The Bundesrat is made up of State Premiers and Cabinet Ministers from Germany's 16 Federal states, which means the Bundestag is the only directly elected Federal organ. Thus, whilst the Bundesrat has considerable power, including the right to introduce, deliberate, pass, and even veto legislation, in the eyes of the public at least the Bundestag has the greater democratic legitimacy.

This combined total of 778 members is much larger than the recognised international average size of parliament (250.63), even if we take into account the greater size of Germany's population (just under 83 million) compared with the international average population size for democracies (around 44 million).²⁶ In particular, the Bundestag is much bigger than the average size for a first or lower chamber of 209.88.²⁷ It will be recalled from Table 2 that the average level of fragmentation in the Bundestag since 1990 as measured by the Herfindal-Hirschman Index²⁸ is 0.3608, which is around the international average of 0.37.²⁹ However, fragmentation in the current Bundestag has increased to 0.2157, which is significantly higher than the international average.³⁰ In comparative politics terms, the current Bundestag remains larger than most parliaments and has also become more fragmented.

These two observations about size and fragmentation have important analytical implications. In terms of size, rational choice modelling of parliamentary rules predicts that greater problems of uncertainty mean that larger parliamentary chambers require more restrictive rules of procedure, under which individual members will enjoy far less autonomy, than is the case with smaller chambers³¹. To a certain extent, these predictions are supported by comparative analysis of real-world

²⁶ UNDP Global Parliamentary Report 2012. Accessed at: <http://archive.ipu.org/gpr-e/media/index.htm>

²⁷ UNDP Global Parliamentary Report 2012.

²⁸ Herfindahl, 'Concentration'; Hirschman, 'Paternity of an index'.

²⁹ UNDP Global Parliamentary Report 2012.

³⁰ Remembering that the Herfindahl-Hirschman index goes down as fragmentation increases.

³¹ R. Carroll, G.W. Cox and M. Pachón, 'How Parties Create Electoral Democracy, Chapter 2', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 31(2) 2006: 153-74.; C.J. Carruba and C. Volden, 'Coalition Politics and Logrolling in Legislative Institutions', *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2) 2000: 261-77.

legislatures,³² although more research is required to determine how and to what extent these assumptions apply across cases.³³ In terms of increased legislative fragmentation, rational choice analyses provide the theoretical insight that as the number of players in a majority-based voting game increases, the potential for ‘cycling’—the phenomenon in which any ‘winning’ majority solution can be voted down by an alternative—increases exponentially and with it the need to impose an arbitrary solution to the voting game.³⁴ In addition, empirical study demonstrates that the imperative for arbitrary solutions is amplified when there are increased levels of ideological conflict within the chamber. Such arbitrary solutions include changes to decision rules about the openness of plenary sessions and roll call votes, as well as the increased use of the parliamentary committee system as means of agenda setting³⁵ and uncertainty reduction.³⁶

As the title of this article suggests, this is an initial analysis. It is too soon to observe changes to formal procedures in the Bundestag as a result of the greater degree of ideological conflict introduced into the chamber by the AfD, although, as is discussed below, the mainstream political parties have pushed the limits of existing practices in order to restrict the AfD’s impact on parliamentary business. However, we do find a degree of restriction in terms of rules of procedure and individual autonomy in the Bundestag, as might be expected in a relatively large parliamentary chamber. Thus, the Bundestag’s key organising unit is not the individual Member of Parliament, but rather the parliamentary group or *Fraktion*, made up of at least five per cent of legislators.

³² See A. Taylor, ‘Size, Power, and Electoral Systems: Exogenous Determinants of Legislative Procedural Choice’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 31(3) 2006: 323-45.

³³ S. Hug, S. Wegmann and R. Wüest, ‘Parliamentary Voting Procedures in Comparison’, *West European Politics* 38(5) 2015: 940-68.

³⁴ K.J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, New York, Wiley, 1951; K. May, ‘A Set of Independent, Necessary, and Sufficient Conditions for Simple Majority Decisions’, *Econometrica* 20 1952: 680–684; L. Ubeda, ‘Neutrality in Arrow and Other Impossibility Theorems’, *Economic Theory* 23(1) 2003: 195–204.

³⁵ M. Koß, ‘The Origins of Parliamentary Agenda Control: A Comparative Process Tracing Analysis’, *West European Politics* 38(5) 2015: 1062-85.

³⁶ L. Curini and F. Zucchini, ‘Legislative Committees as Uncertainty Reduction Devices in Multiparty Parliamentary Democracies’, *West European Politics* 38(5) 2015: 1042-61; for a theoretical explanation, see B.R. Weingast, ‘A Rational Choice Perspective on Congressional Norms’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 23(2) 1979: 245-62.

Parliamentary groups – rather than individual legislators – are the main recipients of Federal funding for legislative and administrative business and possess a common and formally codified organisational structure. In addition, the size of each parliamentary group determines the amount of time allocated to its members in parliamentary sessions, the size of its representation on legislative committees and the number of committee chairs and deputy chairs it holds, as well as the extent of its representation on the Bundestag’s executive bodies. Let us look at each of these features in turn.

Parliamentary sessions

The AfD’s 94 seats make it the third largest *Fraktion* in the Bundestag. It has two parliamentary party leaders, Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland, five deputy leaders, and four parliamentary managers (*Parlamentarische Geschäftsführer*). The organisation of the *Fraktion* is centred around a number of working groups that shadow the Bundestag’s Parliamentary Committee structure (see Table 5 below). The working groups provide an opportunity for AfD legislators to caucus their positions on key issues of current legislation and refer back to the main *Fraktion* before the start of the week’s parliamentary business. Parliamentary funding ensures that the parliamentary groups and their working groups enjoy a degree of policy-relevant capacity that is superior to, say, a typical party room in the Australian Parliament. The resources endowed in and delegated to the parliamentary groups mean that, even for a relatively new and explicitly anti-system party like the AfD, the party’s policy positions are quite developed and relatively stable compared with an equivalent Australian party such as One Nation.

The AfD becoming the official opposition party in the Bundestag was another shock to the political establishment, not least because both the content and tone of the AfD’s *Fraktion* was antithetical to established parliamentary practice. In terms of content, I have described elsewhere what I call the ‘levers’ by which the AfD tries to prise apart the scaffolding of the German political settlement. The first is a ‘narrative lever’, through which potentially disruptive propositions are smuggled into the mainstream political discourse. The second is a ‘procedural lever’, which casts doubt upon the

efficacy of existing political institutions and pushes for political alternatives that empower populist discourses.³⁷

The AfD's preparedness to use these two levers was clearly apparent when, just days after the 2017 Federal Election, the new parliamentary group published its key priorities for the coming legislative period. Members of the AfD *Fraktion* had three priorities. First, they wished to stop what they called Germany's 'migration chaos', a reference to Merkel's 'open door' policy during the 2015 migration crisis (which was subsequently tightened up as voter unease became apparent). Second, they intended to campaign to prevent any German support for French President Emmanuel Macron's plans to further integrate the EU, which they labelled a 'Declaration of World Government' (*Weltregierungserklärung*). Finally, they argued for the introduction of more direct democracy in Germany with regular referendums to consult with 'the people'.³⁸ The first two of these proposals were part of the narrative lever: clear objections to key planks of German statecraft as it has evolved over time, in particular the cross-party commitment to European integration and the strategic alliance with France that dates back to the late 1950s. The third proposition, on the other hand, constituted the AfD's procedural lever: intended to de-legitimise the 'politics of centrality'³⁹ discussed earlier. For the AfD, an article of faith in their populist political offer is the belief that this politics of centrality is not Germany's 'efficient secret' but rather a brake on popular sovereignty and a negative resource in the ongoing and antagonistic relationship between the people and the elites.⁴⁰ As such, it had to be undermined and maligned at every opportunity. This strategy of delegitimation included a proposition to change the statutory basis of Germany's international broadcaster (and alleged mouthpiece of the German elite) the *Deutsche Welle*.⁴¹

³⁷ C. Lees, 'The Alternative for Germany: The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in the Heart of Europe', *Politics* (forthcoming, 2018). DOI: <http://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/NkXgkYYR5SvZaVAFAGda/full>

³⁸https://www.afdbundestag.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/156/2018/04/AfD_BTF_Flyer_Resolutionen_RL.pdf

³⁹ Smith, *Democracy in Western Germany*.

⁴⁰ For more on the (still contested) definitions of populism, see *inter alia* C. Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39(4) 2004: 541-63; B. Stanley, 'The Thin Ideology of Populism', in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1) 2008: 95-110.

⁴¹ 'Populist AfD slammed in Bundestag debate on Deutsche Welle's future'. *Deutsche Welle* online. Accessed at: <http://www.dw.com/en/populist-afd-slammed-in-bundestag-debate-on-deutsche-welles-future/a-43476586>

For many German politicians, it appears that the AfD's strategy extends beyond undermining the German political settlement to encompass attacking parliamentary democracy itself. In April 2018, the *Financial Times* reported that Alliance '90/Greens MP Franziska Brantner had described the AfD as a 'Trojan Horse ... trying to dismantle our democracy'. She went on to claim that the Bundestag's 'atmosphere has become more tense, more aggressive, more menacing'.⁴² This aggressive tone was established by joint parliamentary leader Alexander Gauland on election night, when he declared that the AfD would 'hunt (Merkel) down' ('wir werden sie jagen'). Months later, the first general debate of the new legislative period, which by custom is on the national budget and opened by the main opposition party, saw his co-leader Alice Weidel tear into the re-formed Grand Coalition's financial plans. Weidel accused the Federal Government of hiding 30 billion Euros of EU payments in the national accounts and in effect 'throwing money out of the window with both hands'. Weidel then went on to voice a number of racial and anti-immigrant sentiments before concluding 'this country is being governed by idiots'.⁴³

Such language is rarely heard in the Bundestag and is part of a wider strategy of procedural disruption and open contempt for other parliamentarians, often using sustained interruptions, laughter, and co-ordinated applause.⁴⁴ This behaviour has been interpreted by some observers, such as the historian Volker Weiss, as a deliberate attempt to provoke and, in doing so, to widen the range of acceptable discourse towards the right wing of German politics.⁴⁵ One does not have to subscribe to the 'Overton window' theory of political discourse to accept that this is quite an intuitive explanation; however, the AfD's abrasive tone has also provoked a degree of push back from mainstream politicians across the partisan divide. On the one hand, this pushback also plays into the hands of the AfD, in that it allows the party to portray itself as the victim of the Bundestag elite, articulating the populist 'us and

⁴² 'AfD turns up the heat in the Bundestag'. *Financial Times* online. <https://www.ft.com/content/5a9d5fc0-2d17-11e8-9b4b-bc4b9f08f381>

⁴³ 'Germany's Angela Merkel ignores xenophobic attack in Bundestag debate'. *Deutsche Welle*, 1 June 2018. Accessed at: <http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-angela-merkel-ignores-xenophobic-attack-in-bundestag-debate/a-43801414>

⁴⁴ 'Die AfD in Bundestag. Das gespaltene Parlament'. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* online. Accessed at: <https://projekte.sueddeutsche.de/artikel/politik/die-afd-im-bundestag-e362724/>

⁴⁵ 'AfD in Bundestag: die method Provokation', *Der Tagesschau* online. Accessed at: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/afd-bilanz-sechs-monate-101.html>

them' dynamic discussed earlier. Bernd Baumann, the AfD's chief whip, has complained of 'defamation and demonisation' by other parties.⁴⁶ At the same time, however, the newly abrasive tone in the current Bundestag has injected life into what had become a moribund chamber in recent years. As Ulf Poschardt, Political Editor of the heavyweight *Die Zeit*, observed, 'the AfD has shaken the Bundestag awake'.⁴⁷

Legislative committees, chairs and deputy chairs

We now move on to distribution of membership of legislative committees, as well as the chairs and deputy chairs of committees. As already noted, a parliament's legislative committee system is a key means of agenda setting and uncertainty reduction.⁴⁸ In order to achieve this, legislative committees often work to a 'norm of universalism'⁴⁹ in which committee members seek unanimity, or at least a broad consensus that commands a super-majority. In addition, there is also often a strong norm that committee members in their main role as members of parliament will do little to interfere with or overturn the legislative proposals of other committees when they come to the floor of the chamber.⁵⁰

All of this is intended to facilitate the efficient and credible development of legislation but, as already discussed, the AfD is an explicitly vote seeking party that mobilises around a populist anti-system narrative. It is not an office-seeking party—at least not yet—and in as far as it is policy seeking, its interest in the legislative process is primarily performative. This does not mean that the AfD has no influence over the policy making process. Indeed, its appeal to significant sections of the electorate—including erstwhile non-voters⁵¹—has compelled competitors on the right and left of German politics to shift their positions in an attempt to reposition themselves in

⁴⁶ 'AfD turns up the heat in the Bundestag'.

⁴⁷ 'Die AfD hat den Bundestag wachgerüttelt'. Die Welt online. Accessed at: <https://www.welt.de/debatte/article173912272/Debattenkultur-Die-AfD-hat-den-Bundestag-wachgeruettert.html>

⁴⁸ Koß, 'The Origins of Parliamentary Agenda Control'; Curini and Zucchini, 'Legislative Committees as Uncertainty Reduction Devices'.

⁴⁹ Weingast, 'A Rational Choice Perspective on Congressional Norms'.

⁵⁰ M. Fiorina, 'Universalism, Reciprocity, and Distributive Policy Making in Majority Rule Institutions', in J.P. Crecine (ed.) *Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management*, Greenwood, JAI, 1981: 197-221.

⁵¹ Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 'Wahlbarometer' datasets, 2017. Accessed at: [http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Wahlen/Grafiken zu aktuellen Wahlen/Wahlen 2017/Bundestagswahl 2017/](http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Wahlen/Grafiken%20zu%20aktuellen%20Wahlen/Wahlen%202017/Bundestagswahl%202017/)

response. For instance, the conservative CSU has responded to the electoral threat from the AfD in Bavaria by distancing itself from Merkel's relatively liberal policies on immigration and open borders.⁵² At the same time, the socialist faction within the Left Party, which competes with the AfD amongst blue-collar voters in the states of the former East Germany, has also reacted to the AfD threat by arguing that the Left Party should toughen its stance on immigration.⁵³ Nevertheless, despite this real but indirect impact on the policy agenda in Germany, the AfD has little interest in the efficiency or credibility of the legislative process. For the time being, it uses its position as the official opposition to highlight inefficiency and undermine the credibility of 'politics as usual'. In so far as the AfD intends to hold the Executive to account, it is in order to further expose and accentuate the antagonistic relationship between the elites and the people. That this might also contribute to the good governance of German democracy is a secondary consideration.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the mainstream parties sought to limit the AfD's impact on the Bundestag's legislative committee system. Table 5 sets out the AfD's current participation in the Bundestag legislative committee structure, including its membership—or otherwise—of the Main Committee and the other scrutinizing bodies and oversight panels. As the Table demonstrates, all of the political parties in the Bundestag are represented on the committees but the lion's share of chairs and deputy chairs are allocated to the CDU/CSU and SPD, particularly in key policy areas such as European Union Affairs, Defence, and Foreign Affairs. This is consistent with what we know about the use of committee chairs in the management of coalition government, where committee chairs are deployed in order to either constrain ministerial autonomy and/or mitigate agency loss to delegated ministerial portfolios.⁵⁴

⁵² <https://www.politico.eu/article/horst-seehofer-takes-germany-to-the-brink-angela-merkel-migration-fight/>

⁵³ <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/08/11/what-the-far-left-and-right-have-in-common-in-germany-and-elsewhere>

⁵⁴ L.W. Martin and G. Vanberg, *Parliaments and Coalitions: The Role of Legislative Institutions in Multiparty Governance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Table 5. AfD Participation in Bundestag Legislative Committee Structure (Including Main Committee and Further Bodies)

Committee	Size	Number of AfD members on Committee	AfD members as % of Committee	Chair affiliation	Deputy-Chair affiliation
European Union Affairs	39	5	12.8	CDU/CSU	SPD
Budget	44	6	13.6	AfD	SPD
Building, Housing, Urban Development and Local Government	24	3	12.5	CDU/CSU	---
Culture and Media Affairs	18	2	11.1	SPD	CDU/CSU
Defence	36	5	13.8	SPD	CDU/CSU
Digital Agenda	21	3	14.3	FDP	CDU/CSU
Economic Affairs and Energy	49	6	12.2	Left party	CDU/CSU
Economic Co-operation and Development	24	3	12.5	CDU/CSU	Alliance'90/Greens
Education, Research and Technology Assessment	43	5	11.6	SPD	CDU/CSU
Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety	39	5	12.8	Alliance'90/Greens	SPD
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth	40	5	12.5	Left party	Alliance'90/Greens
Finance	41	5	12.2	FDP	AfD
Food and Agriculture	38	5	13.2	CDU/CSU	FDP
Foreign Affairs	45	6	13.3	CDU/CSU	SPD
Health	41	5	12.2	CDU/CSU	Left party
Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid	17	2	11.9	FDP	AfD
Internal Affairs and Community	46	6	13.0	CDU/CSU	AfD
Labour and Social Affairs	46	6	13.0	SPD	Left party
Legal Affairs and Consumer Protection	43	6	13.9	AfD	CDU/CSU

Table 5 (contd.)

Committee	Size	Number of AfD members on Committee	AfD members as % of Committee	Chair affiliation	Deputy-Chair affiliation
Petitions	28	4	14.3	CDU/CSU	SPD
Scrutiny of Elections, Immunity and Rules of Procedure	14	2	14.3	CDU/CSU	FDP
Sports	18	2	11.1	SPD	CDU/CSU
Tourism	18	2	11.1	AfD	CDU/CSU
Transport and Digital Infrastructure	43	6	13.9		
<i>Plus</i>					
Main Committee	47	6	12.8	CDU/CSU	CDU/CSU' SPD; FDP; Left party; Alliance'90/Greens
<i>Further bodies</i>					
Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development	17	2	11.8	CDU/CSU	SPD
Parliamentary Oversight Panel on Intelligence Services	9	0	0	CDU/CSU	Left party
G 10 Commission on Restrictions on Privacy	4	0	0	---	---
Panel set up under the Customs Investigation Service Act	9	0	0	CDU/CSU	---
Committee for the Scrutiny of Acoustic Surveillance of the Private Home	9	0	0	CDU/CSU	---

Source: Data from <https://www.bundestag.de/en/committees>

The AfD's allocation across all committees as a percentage of overall committee membership is roughly equivalent to its vote and seat share and broadly speaking reflects its status as the third force in the Bundestag. The AfD's allocation of committee chairs and deputy chairs has been more problematic, however, as has its potential role on some of the more sensitive oversight panels mentioned towards the bottom of Table 5. At present, the AfD provides the chair for three committees (Budget; Legal Affairs and Consumer Protection; and Tourism) as well the deputy

chair for another three (Finance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid; and Internal Affairs and Community). Of the former, the CDU/CSU provides the deputy chair on two committees and the SPD on one, whereas on the latter FDP chairs two committees and the CDU/CSU chairs one.

Of these committee roles, the chair of the Budget committee is by far the most powerful. The committee has oversight of the finance ministry, including its activities in leading the bailout of Eurozone countries,⁵⁵ and represents a powerful platform for the AfD's critique of the Eurozone and Germany's role as paymaster. Traditionally, the committee chair goes to the main opposition party so the AfD could claim a 'right' to it. However, this did not stop other parliamentarians lobbying against it, including the outgoing chair of the Budget committee, the left party's Gezine Löttsch. In particular, there was much unease about the AfD's proposed chair Peter Böhlinger.⁵⁶

Böhlinger was eventually able to take up his position⁵⁷ but the AfD was blocked from nominating the chair of the culture committee because of the committee's involvement with sensitive issues such as Holocaust remembrance. Concerns about the AfD's commitment to the Federal Republic's constitutional security meant that it was also blocked from joining the Parliamentary Oversight Panel on the Intelligence Services. We can discern a consistent rationale behind such moves to contain the AfD but they also play into the party's wider narrative about an elite plot against the German people. It was predictable, therefore, and not without some justification that a senior AfD member complained that the party could 'nominate Mother Teresa or the Dalai Lama and they wouldn't be elected'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ In 2011, in what was seen by many as evidence of Germany's growing hegemony in Europe, the Bundestag Finance Committee insisted on being given sight of the Republic of Ireland's budget before the Republic's Parliament, the Dáil Éireann, got to see it.

⁵⁶ In leaked emails, Böhlinger appeared to call Chancellor Merkel a 'whore' and refer to 'criminal, Koran-enslaved Muslims'. He has only partially denied these accusations. See 'AfD settles into Bundestag opposition leader role' in *The Irish Times* online. Accessed at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/afd-settles-into-bundestag-opposition-leader-role-1.3367310>

⁵⁷ In the vote on Böhlinger's appointment, the AfD and FDP voted for him; the CDU/CSU, SPD, and Alliance '90/Greens abstained; and the Left party voted against.

⁵⁸ 'AfD settles into Bundestag opposition leader role'.

Representation on the Bundestag's Executive Bodies

The Bundestag's executive is made up of the Presidium and the Council of Elders. The Presidium is responsible for the administration, public relations, and research activities of the Bundestag and is made up of the President of the Bundestag, who usually comes from the largest parliamentary group, and Vice Presidents from the other groups. However, the AfD's candidate for Vice President, Albrecht Glaser, was blocked from taking up his position over three rounds of voting. The Council of Elders is the co-ordination hub for the Bundestag and assists the Presidium in its duties, as well as providing a forum for the discussion and mediation of procedural and other disputes. It is made up of the Presidium, plus 23 other members of parliament. The AfD should have four members on this body but the blocking of their candidate for Vice President means that they currently only have three.

The willingness of the mainstream parties to block the AfD's candidate for Vice President over three rounds of voting indicates the importance of the Bundestag executive in symbolic terms but also as a potential forum for further containing the impact of the AfD. We have already touched upon the potential impact of fragmentation and ideological conflict on the degree to which parliamentary procedures are tightened up and the discretion of individual members is constrained.⁵⁹ If this were to happen in the Bundestag as a result of the AfD's apparent provocations, the proposed rule changes would have to be deliberated and approved by the Presidium and Council of Elders. The absence of an AfD-nominated Vice president does not just demonstrate the extent of the party's isolation vis-à-vis the other political parties; it also potentially weakens the AfD's ability to block or at least shape future moves to centralise parliamentary procedure.

But can we imagine such a move actually taking place? Empirical evidence from Western Europe indicates that such changes have taken place under circumstances where they have offered partisan advantage to a majority in parliament or where they might achieve efficiency gains.⁶⁰ Moreover, the German political scientist

⁵⁹ Curini and Zucchini 'Legislative Committees as Uncertainty Reduction Devices; Weingast, 'A Rational Choice Perspective on Congressional norms'; Koß, 'Origins of Parliamentary Agenda Control'.

⁶⁰ U. Sieberer, W. Müller and M-I. Heller, 'Reforming the Rules of the Parliamentary Game: Measuring and Explaining Changes in Parliamentary Rules in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, 1945-2010', *West European Politics* 34(5) 2011: 948-75.

Michael Koß argues that the very attributes—such as strategic patience and risk taking—that make anti-system parties like the AfD formidable disruptors of the legislative process can play into the hands of their political adversaries. As Koß observes, “‘anti’ parties engaging in extended obstruction eventually strengthen the procedural bargaining power of establishment parties and provide them with a justification for the centralisation of agenda control’.”⁶¹

CONCLUSIONS

In the context that Koß sets out, one wonders if it may just be a matter of time before the AfD overplays the parliamentary cards the electorate has dealt it. At the same time, however, the mainstream political parties still struggle to formulate a coherent strategy to contain the AfD. It is clear that the AfD’s strategy of provocation is designed to send clear signals to their supporters and provoke a reaction from their opponents. This is an explicitly vote seeking strategy based on the notion of being the political ‘outsider’ that is now familiar from political campaigning elsewhere.⁶² The AfD’s strategy presents the other political parties with a conundrum to solve. If they do not react to provocation, they appear to be the weak, effete, elites the AfD portray them to be. If they over-react, they buttress the populist ‘us and them’ narrative on which the AfD thrives. If, however, the other parties can demonstrate that the AfD is actually obstructing the government of the Federal Republic then they might be able to construct the political space to move against the AfD through a process of procedural reform. Getting to that position will require a great deal of careful political management.

One key question that remains to be answered is whether the AfD can, or even wants to, make the transition to becoming a policy seeking or even an office seeking party. A recent study by the Otto Brenner Foundation, drawing on data from state parliaments where the AfD has seats, indicates that the party’s legislators at the level of state politics have made little substantive policy impact to date and lack the

⁶¹ Koß, ‘Origins of Parliamentary Agenda Control’: 1063.

⁶² G. Enli, ‘Twitter as Arena for the Authentic Outsider: Exploring the Social Media Campaigns of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US Presidential Election’, *European Journal of Communication* 32(1) 2017: 50-61.

expertise to do so.⁶³ In addition, as the first anniversary of the AfD's entry into the Bundestag approached, co-leader Alexander Gauland attracted criticism and some ridicule when he appeared to be unable to articulate the party's broader socio-economic policies in a major interview on Germany's second TV channel, ZDF.⁶⁴

This might indicate that, over time, the party's single-minded vote seeking strategy might not be enough to sustain the party's appeal with voters. Certainly, comparative analysis from across Europe indicates that the *repeated* re-election of emergent parties depends on those parties' ability to demonstrate that they have adapted to the demands of parliament and have legislative achievements to demonstrate to their voters.⁶⁵ This would indicate that the AfD will eventually feel compelled to modify its parliamentary behaviour and its wider strategy. Here it is worth noting that Germany's generous funding for political parties that break through at the Federal level means that the AfD will receive an estimated 200 million Euros of state support over the current legislative period.⁶⁶ Such funds can buy a great deal of policy expertise and will inevitably lead to a professionalization of the AfD's approach to politics. One legislative arena where we might see early evidence of a shift toward a more policy or even office-seeking strategy will be in the Bundestag's committee system where, as already discussed, the AfD has a contested but potentially influential presence, including chairs and deputy chairs. Nevertheless, from the perspective of this initial analysis, the question remains open as to whether AfD politicians will eventually grow tired of provocation and decide to make a substantive contribution to public life in Germany.

⁶³ Otto Brenner Stiftung (2017) 'Wie die AfD den Protest in die Parlamente trägt!'. Accessed at: https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/05_Presse/02_Pressemitteilungen/2017_07_17_PM_AH91.pdf

⁶⁴ 'ZDF-Sommerinterview mit Alexander Gauland'. 12 August 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.zdf.de/politik/berlin-direkt/berlin-direkt---sommerinterview-vom-12-august-2018-100.html>. In the now familiar pattern across Europe and beyond, the ZDF's interviewer Thomas Walde was subjected to sustained abuse on social media after the interview.

⁶⁵ N. Bolleyer and E. Bytcek, 'Origins of Party Formation and New Party Success in Advanced Democracies'. *European Journal of Political Research* 52 2013: 773-96.

⁶⁶ Otto Brenner Stiftung, 'Wie die AfD ein Netzwerk knüpft und neue Allianzen im Bundestag schmiedet'. 15 June 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/sie-moechten/presseinfos-abrufen/detail/news/wie-die-afd-ein-netzwerk-knuepft-und-neue-allianzen-im-bundestag-schmiedet/news-a/show/news-c/NewsItem/news-from/112/>