Is the Alternative for Germany Really Right-Wing Populist?*

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Abstract

Although the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is one of the most discussed parties in Germany at the moment, neither journalists nor politicians are sure whether it should be classified as conservative, right-wing extremist or right-wing populist. The existing attempts at a scientific classification, all varying in approach and results, share a lack of methodological basis. Therefore, this paper classifies the AfD according to four different definitions by analyzing both primary and secondary sources in a qualitative way. While three of these approaches are rather common models of the right-wing spectrum, one is a new approach, covering only the (right-wing) populist spectrum. Therefore, the criteria of these four different attempts at structuring the right-wing party spectrum are operationalized and both party platforms and scientific papers on the AfD are dissected.

1. Introduction and inquiry

The Alternative for Germany[1] (AfD) is the latest and, over the last year, most discussed party in Germany. The attention it is given by the media and the established parties is not only due to its quite successful rise but also to the fact that so far, Germany has never had a successful right-wing populist party. While right-wing parties have been emerging all over Europe over the past 30 years, the National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD), the Republicans (*Republikaner*, REP) or the German People's Union (*Deutsche Volksunion*, DVU) have neither been successful in the long run nor been a real threat to German democracy. Thus, the rise of the AfD proves that Germany is not immune to right-wing ideas.

So far it remains unclear as to what the AfD really is. Some of its claims are right-wing populist, others are rather neoliberal. Its founding members and party staff – mostly professors

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(Arzheimer 2015: 8; Häusler 2013: 27) – speak out against the classical right-wing populist image. So is it conservative, right-wing populist, right-wing extremist or something totally different? During the 2014 European Parliament elections, German newspapers and television news channels used at least nine different labels[2] to describe the AfD. Due to this confusion and insecurity, some journalists even avoided using a descriptive adjective while talking about the AfD, which is rather uncommon for journalists dealing with political parties.

Quite a few political scientists have therefore examined the AfD to find out how right-wing this party really is. However, almost none of them first define the criteria necessary to classify a phenomenon as right-wing populist, and then apply the criteria to the subject. Due to this quite common lack of methodological examination, the AfD as a party was previously, for example, analyzed mostly by means of its members' connections to the far right (Häusler 2013). Additionally, most studies on right-wing parties, and especially the AfD, examine a party's position in contrast to the right-wing extremist sphere but almost never in contrast to the left. However, such a clear distinction is quite desirable, especially since right-wing populist parties often claim that they are definitely not right-wing and that supporting freedom of speech and fighting political 'over correctness' does not make them right-wing populist/right-wing extremist. Therefore, by distinguishing right-wing populism from conservatism, this argument can be refuted. For this reason, this paper will analyze whether the AfD is really right-wing populist by distinguishing it not only from the far right, but also from conservatism.

First, the new German party Alternative for Germany will be introduced by giving a short overview of the party's origin, its party platform, its connections to the far right and some of the problems the party is currently facing. The following section will focus on the methodology and the operationalization of the criteria. In the next section, Rensmann's dichotomous model of right-wing parties shall help to rule out right-wing extremism and at the same time offer a rapprochement of the AfD's position within the right-wing spectrum. Furthermore, Stöss' model of three types of right-wing parties will be applied to the AfD to narrow down its position. However, to find out whether the AfD really is a right-wing populist party, it must be ensured that the AfD is neither more right than right-wing populism nor more left. Therefore, Thieme's model of distinguishing right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties will be applied as well as a model to distinguish right-wing populist and conservative parties. In the last section, an extensive three-level definition of right-wing populism will be applied to ensure that the AfD is not a totally different – i.e. neoliberal – phenomenon.

2. Introducing the case of the AfD: history and party program

The Alternative for Germany originated from the *Wahlalternative 2013*, which was a political action group founded in 2012 by three rather frustrated former members of the CDU, namely Konrad Adam, Alexander Gauland and Bernd Lucke[3] (Arzheimer 2015: 8; Häusler 2013: 23, 39; Niedermayer 2015: 178). The concrete reason for their frustration was Angela Merkel's announcement on the morning of March 25, 2010 stating that she would never

agree to direct financial aid for Greece, and then agreeing to the first rescue package in the afternoon of the very same day (Häusler 2013: 27; Niedermayer 2015: 177f.). Originally, the *Wahlalternative* supported the Federation of Independent Voters (*Freie Wähler*), and together they drew up a candidate list for the 2013 Lower Saxony state election. Since this list only polled 1.1 percent of the vote, the *Wahlalternative* and the Independent Voters decided to go their separate ways and subsequently, the leaders of the *Wahlalternative* founded Germany's Alternative Party (Arzheimer 2015: 2, 9f.; Häusler 2013: 7, 27; Niedermayer 2015: 180f.). Although the new party was not officially founded until April 14, 2013, an unofficial founding assembly was held on February 6, 2013 (Häusler 2013: 9, 45; Niedermayer 2015: 181f.). Lucke said that it was his ambition for the party to be neither right-wing nor left-wing, but a party of a new type (Häusler 2013: 9). And indeed, it was a new type of party – at least when it came to the unique success during the first months of its existence. Even before the official founding, the party had more than 7,500 members, and by June it had attracted more than 10,000 members and had founded branches in all 16 federal states (Arzheimer 2015: 9; Häusler 2013: 7, 47; Niedermayer 2015: 184). However, this fast development was not only due to the AfD's extraordinary strategy, but also due to the huge media response that the new party had already received even before it was formally established (Häusler 2013: 7). During the official founding assembly, Bernd Lucke, Konrad Adam und Frauke Petry were elected spokespersons. However, Lucke is the best known representative of the AfD (Arzheimer 2015: 9; Häusler 2013: 9, 39). In September 2013, only five months after its official founding, the party gained 4.7 percent of the vote in the elections to the German Bundestag (Arzheimer 2015: 9; Häusler 2013: 82). In the 2014 European Elections, the AfD polled 7 percent of the vote (Elmer, Hebel 2014).

Although the first few months of the AfD seemed to be a success story, it soon became obvious that 'there was considerable potential for conflict within the party. In some state-level branches, the leadership resigned or was ousted over allegations of financial, political, or personal misconduct.' (Arzheimer 2015: 9). In the Bavarian state branch, for example, the founder Joachim Schünemann sent out invitations for the founding assembly only five days before the event and furthermore, the day of the assembly was Easter Sunday. This must be seen as an attempt to keep possible rivals away[4] (Häusler 2013: 51). Moreover, due to some irregularities, the Federal Election Commissioner declared the election illegitimate (Häusler 2013: 52). However, irregularities could be found in most of the state branches: either there were personal continuities with the far right, for example Martin Sichert of the Bavarian state branch, who is an admirer of famous Nazi Erwin Rommel[5], also known as the Desert Fox, (Häusler 2013: 51) or that the party is too closely tied to certain companies[6] (Häusler 2013: 52). Since the personal ties to the right-wing party German Freedom Party (*Die Freiheit)* are especially close, Bernd Lucke felt compelled to explain that most of those who came from *Die Freiheit* left this party because it had become too anti-Islamic. However, anti-Islamism was one of the central ideological elements of *Die Freiheit* (Häusler 2013: 57). Furthermore, there are multiple factions in the party seeking influence and the lead role (Arzheimer 2015: 9). Since the end of 2014, the AfD has suffered from a leadership dispute: Bernd Lucke suggested to have only one party leader in the future, and if the members did not agree to this, he would not run for office again. Lucke's strategic move was strongly criticized by the two other former heads of the party. Both Petry and Adam have always been

clearly more right-wing than Lucke and have preferred to seek voters within *PEGIDA*[7] and the right-wing spectrum rather than the bourgeois camp (Frankfurter Rundschau 2015). At the moment,[8] the dispute between Lucke and Petry is dividing the party, potentially even leading to a split-off of Lucke and his newly founded *Weckruf 2015*[9] (Die Welt 2015; Spiegel Online 2015).[10]

The central political subject of the AfD is Euroscepticism and, above all, rejecting the euro rescue policy (AfD 2014b: 1f.; Häusler 2013: 7, 40). This rejection is what actually makes them 'the alternative' to the established parties[11] (Häusler 2013: 40). In this context, they also demand a strict austerity policy and the dissolution of the Euro-zone[12] (AfD 2013: 1; Häusler 2013: 40). Another rather big subject is the party's demand for more direct democracy and referendums following the Swiss model (AfD 2013: 1; AfD 2014a: 9; AfD 2014b: 3; Häusler 2013: 10). However, this claim is again connected to Euroscepticism, further arguing that 'If one had asked German voters to decide on the introduction of the euro at the time, Europe would now be in a sounder position' (AfD 2014a: 9). In addition, they demand a reorganization of immigration policy, meaning that, almost exclusively, only educated people who are able to contribute to Germany's political and economic well-being should be allowed to immigrate (AfD 2013: 2; Häusler 2013: 41). Another thing that stands out immediately is how much the party stands up for the freedom of speech. In the 2013 party manifesto, they explicitly talk about unconventional opinions[13] (AfD 2013: 1; Häusler 2013: 23). However, in its manifesto for the 2013 elections for the Bundestag, the AfD had rather few and general demands in terms of other policy fields, like education and family[14] (AfD 2013: 2; Häusler 2013: 41). Afterwards, they tried to broaden their programmatic profile (Arzheimer 2015: 9).

As has already been said in segments, there are a couple of connections and linkages between the AfD and the far-right spectrum. Many current party activists or even candidates of the AfD are former members of other clearly right-wing parties. *Die Freiheit* has already been mentioned; however, there are former activists of the *Republikaner*, like Ulrich Wlecke (Häusler 2013: 48–50). Furthermore, a couple of new right newspapers are supporting the AfD or are at least reporting on the new party quite positively. Among them are *Preußische Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Sezession* and *Junge Freiheit* (Häusler 2013: 75, 79f.). Moreover, there are quite a few second degree connections to the far right, meaning that party activists or members are or were members of openly right-wing organizations and institutions, like *Konservativ-Freiheitlicher Kreis Hamburg* or *Institut für Staatspolitik* (Häusler 2013: 35–58, 76).

3. Methodology

In a methodological way, this is a deductive proceeding using primary analysis as well as secondary analysis. In such a critical case, it is not expedient to just analyze the official publications of a certain party, since many right wing parties try to present themselves as being more moderate than they actually are, because they are afraid of a party ban or societal stigmatization (Ignazi 1992: 10; 2003: 31). So therefore, party programs[15] as well as analysis by other (political) scientists will be considered. Either way, it remains a qualitative text

analysis, making it a lot more arguable than a quantitative analysis. However, in cases where you cannot 'measure' indicators with numeric scales, creating somehow flexible indicators is the most sensible way to represent reality and to abstract the most relevant information. The period for this study is from the founding of the AfD 2013 until April 2015.

Before the presentation of the selected concepts, I consider it necessary to point out what exactly it is that we need to look for in the AfD. Therefore, the criteria and its indicators, i.e. the way these criteria will be operationalized, will be presented first. All in all, the authors of the four presented concepts work with six to seven different criteria. The following part will shortly present these criteria and operationalize them, starting with those criteria that are rather easy to operationalize through an analysis of the party platforms.

The first criterion is *consistency of ideology*. An ideology is rigid and consistent if it has an opinion on every part of political (and private) life and furthermore, these opinions are fixed and can hardly change over time. So if we find a) a family model in the party platform b) opinions on at least 12 out of the 14 policy fields[16] and c) that the 2013 and 2014 platforms do not contradict each other, then we consider it a rigid or consistent ideology. If we do not find a specific family model but at least the emphasis of the differences between men and women, opinions on more than six but less than twelve policy fields and some minor contradictions within the two platforms, the consistency of the ideology is flexible. If none of these criteria are fulfilled it is non-existent.[17]

The *populist rhetorical style* as the second criterion refers to a reduction in complexity, simplification and focusing on things the audience wants to hear. During the analyzed time period, the most important political and public topics were the EU, the Euro-Crisis and Greece/ the Greek crisis. This rhetoric style will be considered present if the party platform connects at least half of the mentioned policy fields to one of the aforementioned topics.

Thin populist ideology means the confrontation of the elite and the people showing the people in a good light and the elite from a rather negative perspective. For this criteria to be fulfilled, the usage of words like 'people' and 'elite/politicians' within the party platforms must be connected to judging ascriptions[18] in the sense that the people are 'good' and the politicians are 'bad'. In addition, these statements must be generalized. Furthermore, in this case, the thin populist ideology and the attitude towards the elite, which is an element of the conservatism/right-wing populist concept, are the same: if a party always distinguishes between the 'good people' and the 'elite', then it is clearly anti-elitist and therefore, right-wing populist in the sense of this criterion.

Right-wing populist ideology means the permanent confrontation between "us" and foreigners/refugees. Corresponding to the last criterion, for this criterion to be fulfilled the words 'people' and 'foreigners/asylum seekers/refugees' must be connected to judging adjectives, similar to the thin populist ideology.

So, while for the last four criteria analyzing the party platforms is sufficient, the operationalization of the last criterion is a bit more difficult. Therefore, studies of other scientists will be analyzed.

The *institutional goal* of a party means whether they are in favor of (more direct) democracy or a rather authoritarian regime. If none of the analyzed studies has so far found a statement by the AfD stating that their ultimate goal is more authoritarism, then the AfD will not be considered right-wing extremist in the sense of this criterion.

The *attitude towards the system* i.e. democracy, as the last criterion, is heading in the very same direction: right-wing extremist parties criticize the system and democracy per se, while right-wing populist parties instead criticize the establishment and its institutions. If anti-democratic or pro-authoritarian statements can be found, then the attitude is hostile; if only certain central aspects of the democratic system are criticized, then it is critical of the system; and if such statements cannot be found at all, it is conformal.

In the case of Richard Stöss' classification a third criterion, one which he does not consider an official criterion, is necessary: the *intensity of nationalism*. This criterion will be operationalized according to a party's point of view on 'the people'. If a party considers persons as belonging to a certain 'people' according to citizenship, then they are slightly nationalistic and immigration-skeptical. If the affiliation is defined according to ancestry and this is a main topic for a party, i.e. they mention it at least five times in their party platform, then they are strongly folk-nationalistic. If a party neither defines its 'own people' by citizenship nor mentions ancestry so much either, then it is a case of weak folk-nationalistic attitude.

4. Trying to define, delimit and narrow down the subject

After having introduced the German AfD and having pointed out its political positions, the following section shall narrow down its character. Having asked how right-wing populist the AfD actually is and whether it is right-wing populist at all, the following step is trying to limit the label 'populist' by introducing three theoretical concepts which structure the right spectrum. Lars Rensmann (Fröhlich-Steffen, Rensmann 2005; Rensmann 2006; Rensmann et al. 2011) uses two categories while Richard Stöss (Stöss 2005; 2013) divides the right-wing spectrum into three groups. The differentiation between right-wing populism and conservatism, on the other hand, only analyses a small sector of this spectrum. Since all three concepts will be applied to the AfD, its position on the political right-wing/left-wing scale can be narrowed down. In the next step a rather extensive definition of right-wing populism will be introduced and applied to make sure that the AfD is not only right-wing populist when compared to other concepts, but that it is right-wing populist by definition.

4.1 Lars Rensmann and his collegues

Lars Rensmann's concept of right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties will first be introduced and applied. This concept will be described first because it does not only distinguish right-wing populism from the far-right, i.e. right-wing extremism, but also because the dichotomy of right-wing extremism/populism is the most common in this field of research.

4.1.1 The concept

Lars Rensmann divides the right-wing party spectrum in Western Europe into two categories: right-wing populist and right-wing extremist. In his understanding, right-wing populism is the gray area between right-wing extremism and conservatism (Rensmann et al. 2011: 204). According to Rensmann, right-wing extremism and right-wing populism have a few commonalities such as a dualistic friend-foe mindset, a Manichean world view, rigid delimitation, conspiracy theories, ethnocentrism, nationalism, anti-egalitarianism, a distorted idea of Rousseau's *volonté générale*, and an understanding of the people as having been betrayed and exploited (Fröhlich-Steffen, Rensmann 2005: 9; Rensmann 2006: 68; Rensmann et al. 2011: 201–206). Furthermore, the two categories do not always exclude each other but sometimes even overlap (Rensmann 2006: 68).

However, for right-wing extremists these elements are nothing more than strategic and stylistic devices, useful for their underlying ideology. These commonalities are nonetheless the reason why right-wing populism is sometimes called 'diet right-wing extremism'[19] (Rensmann 2006: 68). Rensmann uses three categories for the classification: consistency of the ideology, the attitude towards the system and the institutional goal (Rensmann 2006: 69; Rensmann et al. 2011: 203). In a further step, he even distinguishes different types of populist parties from one another[20] (Rensmann 2006: 69ff.).

In contrast to (right-wing) extremist parties, (right-wing) populist parties are neither anti-constitutional nor subversive, they are merely anti-party parties with an anti-establishment attitude instead of an anti-system attitude (Fröhlich-Steffen, Rensmann 2005: 9; Rensmann 2003: 104; 2006: 60–67; Rensmann et al. 2011: 202). In terms of ideology, right-wing populist parties do not have a cohesive concept of the world. They are more moderate and adaptable than right-wing extremist parties, which have a strictly closed worldview (Fröhlich-Steffen, Rensmann 2005: 9; Rensmann 2003: 105; 2006: 67f.). The third category has to do with institutional goals: right-wing extremist parties want to establish an autocratic regime, since their ultimate goal is to spread their values and their ideology, whereas right-wing populist parties do not aim to establish an autocratic regime but demand more forms of direct democracy and a weakening of the separation of power (Rensmann 2003: 105; 2006: 68f.).

4.1.2 Applying the concept

After having introduced Rensmann's concept for distinguishing right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties, this model will be applied to the AfD in the following section. As for the first category, the consistency of ideology, the AfD does not have a rigid ideology. That its extensive worldview is rather non-existent than flexible can be seen in the fact that they do not have a concrete family model[21] in the policy fields covered in its party manifestos.[22] Furthermore, there are certain contradictions within the platforms.[23] In terms of the attitude towards the system, the AfD is clearly not an anti-system party; on the contrary, they are strongly in favor of more democracy. They even dedicate the whole third chapter in the 2014 platform to 'more democracy' (AfD 2014a: 8). Instead, they criticize certain EU institutions, like the European Central Bank and the European Stability Mechanism (AfD 2014a: 3) and their excessive bureaucracy (AfD 2014a: 3). This makes them right-wing

populist in the sense of this criterion. The next criterion, the institutional goal, is strongly connected to the previous one: the AfD is certainly not in favor of more authoritarianism[24], contrarily, 'The AfD calls for more direct democracy and more participation of the citizenry in important decisions. If one had asked German voters to decide on the introduction of the euro at the time, Europe would now be in a sounder position' (AfD 2014a: 9).

So according to this concept, the AfD is rather an anti-party party with an anti-establishment attitude than an anti-system party. As a consequence of its attitude towards the system, its central institutional goal is to establish more elements of direct democracy (AfD 2014a: 9) since in their opinion, the established parties and the government often do not decide in the best interests of its citizens. Hence, the AfD has to be considered as right-wing populist in all three categories of Rensmanns's concept.

4.2 Three types of right-wing parties

According to Rensmann's right-wing populism/right-wing extremism dichotomy, the AfD is definitely not right-wing extremist. However, dividing the rather heterogeneous right-wing spectrum into only two parts might make it very difficult to categorize different phenomena precisely. For that reason, in the next step, a concept with three categories will be introduced in order to locate the AfD's position in the right-wing spectrum more accurately.

4.2.1 The concept

Richard Stöss examines western European parties in the right-wing spectrum of the left-right-continuum and constructs three types of right-wing parties: right-wing conservative[25], right-wing radical and right-wing extremist. According to Stöss, the common ground of all three of these party types is nationalism and a xenophobic or even neo-racist attitude. Due to this nationalism all three types of parties demand the restriction of immigration, the dismantling of the EU, and more law-and-order policy. Moreover, they have at least a skeptical opinion of the Euro as a common currency and EU integration since this would lead to a serious degradation of the nation-state. Finally, all three types are anti-establishment since – according to their opinion – the established parties do not pay enough attention to the impending threats that exist in the right-wing extremist parties world view (Stöss 2005: 174; 2013: 579).

Two basic criteria were adopted in establishing Stöss' typology: the consistency of the ideology and the attitude towards the democratic system[26] (Stöss 2005: 178). The attitude towards the political system can either be accepting, critical or hostile (Stöss 2005: 178). The other criterion, the consistency of ideology or the intensity of nationalism, can either be rigid, flexible or non-existent[27] (Stöss 2005: 178; 2013: 579). The combination of these two criteria creates three types[28] of parties: the right-wing conservative type is moderately nationalist and immigration-skeptical and conforms to the system. These parties often make efforts to achieve the image of an anti-party party or a voter's union. The right-wing radical type is system-critical and has a relatively weak and flexible folk-nationalistic ideology. The right-wing extremist third type is (neo-) fascist or (neo-) racist, hostile towards the political system and has a rigid and fixed hardly changeable ideology[29] (Stöss 2005: 18, 179; 2013: 573–579).

4.2.2 Applying the concept

As has already been proven with Rensmann's concept, the AfD is definitely neither hostile nor critical to the German democratic system. Furthermore, the weak – almost none existent – consistency of the ideology of the AfD has also already been shown. So the only criterion left to be tested is the intensity of nationalism. In the 2013 platform, they say that 'Germany needs qualified immigration, willing to integrate'[30] (AfD 2013: 2). The fact that the integration of immigrants is accepted and the assumption that immigration is needed clearly shows that the AfD does not define 'the people' by ancestry. Furthermore, in chapter 3 of the 2014 platform they repeatedly talk about the 'citizenry' and the 'German voters' (AfD 2014a: 9f.). So the AfD is clearly not folk-nationalistic but defines the 'people' by citizenship. So in the sense of Stöss's concept, the AfD is more right-wing conservative than right-wing radical and certainly not right-wing extremist.

4.3 Distinguishing right-wing populism from conservatism

After having proved that the AfD is definitely not right-wing extremist, it is necessary to clarify whether the AfD is potentially 'less then right-wing populist', i.e. conservative. Thus, it is not only necessary to eliminate right-wing populism from the right side but also from the left side.

4.3.1 The concept

Right-wing populism, therefore, needs to be distinguished from conservatism. The theoretical basis for this distinction is the work of Florian Hartleb, which, in this paper, will be supported by Kurt Lenk's work on conservatism. Both political trends share common ground: they want to keep old and proven traditions and romanticize them. Furthermore, both reject innovation and modernization efforts (Hartleb 2011: 22; Lenk 1994: 122).

However, there are some distinct differences between right-wing populism and conservatism as well. Firstly, right-wing populism is rather unstable and flexible, while conservatism has a quite stable ideology/value basis. Secondly, right-wing populism is clearly anti-elite, while conservatism is fairly elitist due to its fixation on traditions (Hartleb 2011: 22f.; Lenk 1994: 122). Furthermore, conservatives hold a weaker view of their fellow human beings than right-wing populists do; therefore, conservatism prefers a certain amount of authoritarianism, which is contrary to the right-wing populist support of direct democracy (Hartleb 2011: 23; Lenk 1994: 141).

4.3.2 Applying the concept

After having applied two other concepts to the AfD already, it is certain that the AfD is not in favor of more authoritarianism, instead, they call for more direct democracy. This is a clear hint of their very positive view of their fellow human beings. Furthermore, it was already shown that, in regard to the amount of policy fields in the party platforms, the AfD

has a more flexible than stable ideology. So the only criterion left is the attitude towards the elites. Finding statements on the elites in the party platforms is not as easy as some of the aforementioned criteria. However, there are some claims that show some criticism of the political elite. This criticism becomes most clear in the preamble of the 2014 platform: 'In this way an artificial state arises remote from its citizens and without their endorsement, a state based on breaches of contract and infringement of law' (AfD 2014a: 2). This quote shows, that in the AfD's opinion, the construct of the European Union has nothing to do with the people's will anymore. In addition, saying that the EU is 'based on' (AfD 2014a: 2) breaching contracts is a clear – and very negative – generalization. Furthermore, the 'health public finances (…) have been badly injured by irresponsible politicians' (AfD 2014a: 10). On the other hand, 'If one had asked German voters to decide on the introduction of the euro at the time, Europe would now be in a sounder position' (AfD 2014a: 9). So according to the AfD – at least – the German voters are much more reasonable than the politicians. The party platform therefore clearly shows a confrontation of the 'good' people and the 'bad' political elite.[31] Hence, in regard to all three criteria, the AfD has to be classified as right-wing populist instead of conservative.

4.4 Three level definition of right-wing populism

After having delimited the phenomenon on both sides on the left-right-spectrum, making sure that the AfD is neither right-wing extremist nor conservative, in the next step the author's own innovative – yet rather extensive – definition of right-wing populism will be applied to ensure that the AfD is not something completely different.

4.4.1 The concept

In political science, it is still unclear what (right-wing) populism actually is: is it just a rhetorical device used by almost every politician? Is it a 'thin' ideology that can attach itself to almost every ideology, like a parasite? Or is it a proper ideology, equal to liberalism and conservatism? (Decker 2006: 11; Stöss 2005: 174; Pfahl-Traughber 1994: 20). The answer to these questions is: yes. When we talk about populism, all three of them might be the case. So while most studies on (right-wing) populism first discuss what right-wing populism really is and then apply it to the phenomenon, this section shortly defines the three levels of right-wing populism and then tries to determine to which of these levels the AfD belongs.

   In its most simple form, populism is nothing more than a rhetorical device. The criteria for classifying a party's or a person's rhetorical skills as populist are: reduction in complexity, simplification and focusing on the things the audience wants to hear. By using these elements, a party not only tries to earn/gain more votes, but these elements are the central elements of rhetorical populist style. The thin populist ideology is a combination of populist elocution, a provocative confrontation of the elite and the simple people, and, hence, criticism of the 'Establishment'. Correspondingly, right-wing populism is an ideology that uses populist elocution and not only exploits the vertical confrontation of the elite and the simple people, but also the horizontal confrontation between the "us" and foreigners as its central topics.[32]

4.4.2 Applying the concept

In regard to the last concept, the anti-elitist attitude, i.e. the thin populist ideology has already been proven. Hence, in the next step, the platforms need to be analyzed for the populist rhetorical style. To consider this style as given, at least half of the policy fields mentioned in the party platforms need to be connected to the main topics, which are the EU, the Euro (crisis), Greece, and so on. The 2014 platform of course discusses financial and economical topics as well as aspects of foreign affairs in regard to the EU and the Euro crisis. Interestingly, all mentioned policy fields are connected to those topics, regardless if it is agriculture[33], gender equality[34] or education.[35] So by connecting every topic to the EU or the current crisis, the complexity of reality shall be reduced by giving the impression that every problem is somehow connected to the aforementioned topics. The last criterion that needs to be checked is the right-wing populist ideology. So this time, the confrontation of the "us" and the others/foreigners/immigrants will be analyzed and two examples given: 'German taxpayers now have to bear the financial burdens of the southern euro zone' (AfD 2014a: 4). In regard to welfare policy the AfD demands that 'The provision of unearned income should not function as an encouragement for increased immigration' (AfD 2014a: 15). These quotes show that the AfD indeed strictly differentiates between "us" and foreigners.

In conclusion, the Alternative for Germany is not only populist in terms of the first two levels but also right-wing populist in terms of the third level.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed at answering the question of whether the AfD is really a right-wing populist party. To provide the necessary background information, the party history, its positions and problems were described in the first part. The next part tried to delimit right-wing populist phenomenon to the right, as well as to the left side on the ideological left-right-spectrum. Furthermore, an extensive definition of populism was applied to the AfD to ensure that it was not only in the right spot on the continuum but that it actually was right-wing populist. This was done by applying four different models: first, Lars Rensmann's dichotomous model, second, Richard Stöss' three types of right-wing parties, third, a model to distinguish right-wing populism from conservatism, and finally, an extensive three-leveled definition of right-wing populism.

According to Rensmann's concept, the AfD is certainly right-wing populist. In terms of Stöss' model, the AfD is a right-wing conservative party with minor tendencies towards right-wing radicalism. Following the distinction of right-wing populism and conservatism, the AfD is definitely not conservative. On the left-right continuum the AfD therefore falls somewhere between conservatism and right-wing extremism. Thus, in the last step, the extensive definition proved that the AfD not only uses the rhetorical populist style but that it is right-wing populist in its ideology as well. The AfD is thus right-wing populist on all three levels of this definition.

With the definitions providing only a snapshot, this classification is not set in stone. Due to internal or external circumstances, such as change of leadership or new events that dominate the German political agenda, a party might change its programmatic-strategic orientation either intentionally or unintentionally.[36] Especially as the AfD is a rather young party, its orientation can change even faster. Therefore, it is necessary to reanalyze the classification of the AfD from time to time to maintain a current impression as well as an overview of the party's development.

However, it is rather difficult to say that a certain phenomenon is definitely right-wing populist, since almost each author has his or her own definition of the subject and, thus, subsumes different parties under this heading. Furthermore, hardly any other author operationalizes his concept properly which leads to a strong demand for optimization. It is therefore sometimes rather difficult to decide whether the presence of certain criteria is sufficiently obvious in the subject of investigation. Although the three-level definition is aimed at providing a broad, yet explicit definition of right-wing populism, the only answer to the title question that cannot be falsified is that the AfD is definitely neither right-wing extremist nor conservative but right-wing populist in terms of the extensive definition.

Footnotes:

1. German: Alternative für Deutschland.
2. Two public-service TV channels and five newspapers were analyzed in the period of May 12 to June 1, 2014 (Mohamad-Klotzbach/Wolf 2015).
3. There were, in fact, more founding members. However, they can be subsumed under a group of economy professors with a neoliberal political position, a group of representatives of medium-sized enterprises and a rather small third group, consisting of economists, who had always warned of the common currency (Arzheimer 2015: 8; Häusler 2013: 27).
4. This is especially interesting since the AfD's manifesto for the Bundestag elections demands more direct democracy within the political parties, 'Das Volk soll den Willen der Parteien bestimmen, nicht umgekehrt' (AfD 2013:1).
5. To give two more examples: At the founding assembly of the Brandenburg state association two men were elected for the executive board that had formerly been active in the anti-Islamic party Die Freiheit. One of them was even on the executive board of said party. Both kept their positions throughout 2013 (Häusler 2013: 53). One of the members of the Hessian AfD's executive board, Heinrich Hofsommer, is a former teacher who left his last school because of parent complaints about him making students repeat the sentence: 'In Germany, there are too many immigrants.' Furthermore, during the 1980s, he made his students sing 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles', the forbidden stanza of the German anthem (Häusler 2013: 56).
6. This was, for example, the case with the Berlin branch: the husband of the first spokesperson, Anette Goldstein, was made federal manager of the AfD and the party's head office was established in the building of Anette Goldstein's auditing firm. So on May 11, she had to resign from her position (Häusler 2013: 52).
7. In full: **P**atriotische **E**uropäer **g**egen die **I**slamisierung **d**es **A**bendlandes (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident).
8. As will be explained in the methodologic section, the time frame of this analysis ended in April 2015.
9. In English: 'Wake-up Call 2015'.

10. The final decisions on the future leadership of the AfD will be made at the federal party convention on June 13, 2015 (Spiegel Online 2015).

11. However, a couple of other non-established parties have the same position, for example the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) and *Republikaner* (REP) (Häusler 2013: 62–65).

12. On the other hand, they never make clear whether they want Germany to leave the Euro zone ('Die Wiedereinführung der DM darf kein Tabu sein' (AfD 2013: 1).

13. 'Wir setzen uns dafür ein, dass auch unkonventionelle Meinungen im öffentlichen Diskurs ergebnisoffen diskutiert werden' (AfD 2013: 1).

14. The whole Party Manifesto 2013 consisted of only two pages and rather confirms that the AfD – at least back in 2013 – was rather a single-issue party.

15. Since the 2013 platform is rather short and was written under time pressure, the 2014 platform will mostly be considered.

16. This number results from the number of German ministries (Bundesregierung 2015).

17. Stöss combines this criterion with the degree of nationalism (Stöss 2005: 178f.); this rather extraordinary combination will be discussed while introducing Stöss' concept.

18. To give an example: 'Inflation must not consume the citizens' savings' (AfD 2013: 1; Original: 'Inflation darf nicht die Ersparnisse der Bürger aufzehren'). This is already considered judging in the sense of this criteria, since it shows the assumption that citizens always try to save money, which is considered a positive thing to do.

19. Original: 'Rechtsextremismus light'.

20. Since this sub-classification is not necessary for answering the title question, it won't be discussed further in the following.

21. However, in the 2014 party manifesto they speak about recognizing 'the sexes [...] different identities, social roles [...]' (AfD 2014a: 17f), which at least shows that there are some quite traditional aspects to their opinion on men and women.

22. The 2013 manifesto clearly holds only seven out of 14 policy fields (AfD 2013). The 2014 manifesto includes – at first glance – statements on all 14 policy fields (AfD 2014a). However, closer examination shows, that quite a few of those policy fields are exclusively mentioned on an EU-level, for example: agriculture, justice, consumer protection and economic cooperation and development. Since the AfD is not a party on the EU-level but on German national level, these policy fields are therefore considered not covered.

23. To give an example: In the 2013 platform they demand that Germany enforce the right to leave the Euro (AfD 2013: 1). This rather extreme claim is nowhere to be found in the 2014 platform.

24. Neither Niedermayer (2015), nor Häusler (2013) or Arzheimer (2015) have found statements suggesting that the AfD is in favor of more authoritarianism.

25. Even though this type is called right-wing conservative, it can definitely not be seen as conservative in the original sense of that word. A truly conservative party, for example, would never consider itself to be anti-party. Thus, Stöss' understanding of right-wing conservative is rather similar to a lesser form of right-wing radical, maybe even right-wing populism, than to conservatism.

26. More concretely: the parliamentary-representative system.

27. Stöss always talks about two criteria, however, as soon as he starts explaining his concept, he includes the intensity of nationalism, as a third criterion, within the criterion of ideological consistency (Stöss 2005: 178; 2013: 579). This mixed criterion's three possible dimensions then again refer exclusively to consistency, yet, when describing the three possible types of right-wing parties, the particular shape of nationalism is also mentioned. However, since the intensity of nationalism is certainly different from the consistency, in this paper, the intensity of nationalism will count as a distinguishable third criterion.

28. These criteria and their characteristics do not open up a matrix but rather are closely tied together.

29. The three types of right-wing parties are, however, ideal-typical constructs. The limits and transitions are in reality somewhat more fluid.

30. 'Deutschland braucht qualifizierte und integrationswillige Zuwanderung.'

31. Interestingly, they almost exclusively consider the EU elite bad. The German national political elites, on the contrary are good: 'The AfD calls for the operative right of national parliaments to veto proposals of legislative acts prepared by EU organs' (AfD 2014a: 8). However, they absolutely ignore the fact that it was the national parliaments that decided to give certain powers to the EU organs. So this is also an example for the AfD's contradicting opinions.
32. Most literature on right-wing populism lists more criteria, however, those are just consequences either of the rhetorical style or of one of those two confrontations central to the right-wing populist ideology.
33. 'Regional agriculture in the European market' (AfD 2014a: 20).
34. 'No EU mandated gender equality policy' (AfD 2014a: 18).
35. 'Educational policy for a generation of Europeans' (AfD 2014a: 16).
36. That is, what has already happened after the analyzed time frame has ended: Lucke left the party and founded Alfa (Alliance for Progress and Awakening) after the AfD's federal party convent on June 13th, 2015 (Weiland 2015).

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