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## **The AfD: what kind of alternative for Germany?**

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## **Abstract**

*In the past Germany was considered an outlier in Europe because of the absence of a significant Eurosceptic party. A combination of historical, cultural, and structural factors combined to make Euroscepticism the 'dark matter' (Lees, 2002) of the German party system, despite significant levels of unease about aspects of the European integration process amongst the German electorate. In a little over two years the rise of the 'Alternative for Germany' (Alternative für Deutschland, or AfD) party has changed this perception. This paper charts the rise of the AfD since its inception in late 2012/early 2013 by drawing on electoral data from the 2013 Federal election and subsequent Land elections and judgmental analysis of the party's policy positions. It breaks new ground by doing this in a comparative perspective. The paper considers (1) whether the AfD really has the potential to alter the underlying dynamics of German party politics? (2) how can it be classified in relation to other Eurosceptic and/or right-wing populist parties?, and (3) what is the extent to which the AfD's policy ambitions stretch beyond simple opposition to aspects of the European integration process and to encompass a more profound critique of the elite settlement at the heart of Germany's consensual political system?*

Keywords: Germany, AfD, Party Systems, Euroscepticism, Populism.

## 1. Introduction

Since the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, German political elites from both the centre-right and centre-left have pursued a policy of dogged multilateralism in the world and in Europe in particular. German multilateralism was originally informed by a rejection of the selfish nationalism that had driven Germany to disaster in two world wars and also by a more pragmatic need to rehabilitate and reintegrate the country into the international system. Key to this was a foreign policy stance characterised by subservience to the USA, rapprochement with France, and the wholehearted pursuit of European integration, particularly using the EEC and its successors (henceforth the European Union, or EU) to pursue the pooling of political sovereignty and increased economic interdependence (Rheinhardt, 1997; Peters, 2001). Over 65 years later – and a quarter of a century after the reunification of Germany – subservience to the USA has all but disappeared and Germany has in many ways left France behind. What remains, however, is a strong and vocal commitment to the European project and particularly the Eurozone – albeit driven more by instrumental national self-interest than by the instinctive pro-Europeanism that inspired previous generations of German politicians.

In the past Germany's distinctive approach to foreign policy was buttressed domestically by a number of factors. These included a relatively deferential and compliant media, a set of political institutions and governance norms that provided a good 'fit' with the EU, and a strong manufacturing and banking sector that clearly benefited from the opening up of European markets. In addition, Germany's Basic Law constrained the use of plebiscites and referendums and this, along with reluctance amongst the political class to engage in populist politics, also went a long way to explain why Germany was long considered an outlier in Europe because of the absence of a significant Eurosceptic party. In short, a combination of historical, cultural, and structural factors combined to make Euroscepticism the 'dark matter' (Lees, 2002) of the German party system, despite significant levels of unease about aspects of the European integration process amongst the German electorate.

However, since the foundation of the 'Alternative for Germany' (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or AfD) in 2013 this dark matter has been made visible. Germany now has a political party that explicitly mobilizes around unease about the European project and specifically the nature and composition of the Eurozone and Germany's role as its anchor and paymaster. Moreover, as the paper examines, the party's programmatic profile has developed over time and now addresses wider questions of Germany's political,

economic, and social settlement – prompting us to ask ‘what kind of alternative for Germany does the AfD offer?’

This paper charts the rise of the AfD and asks three research questions. First, does the AfD really have the potential to alter the underlying dynamics of German party politics? Second, how can the AfD be classified in relation to other Eurosceptic and/or right-wing populist parties? Third, to what extent do its policy ambitions stretch beyond opposition to aspects of the European integration process to the extent that they encompass a more profound critique of the elite political-economic settlement at the heart of Germany’s consensual political system? The rest of the paper of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section it charts the rise of the AfD through electoral data from the 2013 Federal election and subsequent *Land* elections and then examines the structural impact of the emergence of the AfD on the German party system in a comparative context. It then goes on to conduct a judgmental analysis of the party’s emerging policy positions and the narratives in which they are framed. Finally, the paper will conclude by addressing the research questions raised above.

## **2. The rise of the AfD and its systemic effects**

Like UKIP in its original incarnation as the Anti-Federalist League a quarter of a century earlier, the AfD originated in an intellectual milieu. In late 2012 Alexander Gauland, Konrad Adam, and Berndt Lucke set up the Electoral Alternative 2013 (*Wahlalternative 2013*), from which emerged the AfD the following year. Gauland was a former Department Head of the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Adam was a former editor of the influential *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper, and Lucke was a tenured Professor of Macroeconomics at the University of Hamburg. They were well informed and well networked and their joint manifesto for the Electoral Alternative was soon publically endorsed by an impressive array of economists, journalists, business leaders and political activists, many of whom were former members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). By the spring of 2013 what had now become the AfD held its first party congress in Berlin, in which the leadership board was formally elected and a party program - including a clear commitment to work for the abolition of the Euro – was approved. In May 2013 the AfD launched *Land* parties in all 16 German states as a platform to fight the Federal Election in September of that year.

The articulacy, networkedness, and sheer audacity of the AfD ensured that the new party received a good deal of attention as the 2013 Federal Election approached. However, this was not just a media phenomenon. As Weldon and Schmitt demonstrate, the salience of European integration to German political parties (as measured by *inter alia* the percentage of parties' election programs given over to European issues) has always been higher than the European average but in the past this had not had much of a practical impact on actual electoral outcomes. By 2013, however, this had changed and subsequent analysis of the election was to reveal a new and significant correlation between European positions and voter behavior. Like the 2006 elections in the Netherlands, the run-up to the 2013 Federal election saw a collective turn towards a more Eurosceptical position on the part of all of the main political parties. And in the midst of this the AfD emerged as a new and potentially disruptive political force that enthusiastically channeled the new mood amongst voters. As Weldon and Schmitt put it 'a quarter of a century after reunification and seventy years after World War II, the battle over Europe seems to have arrived in German politics' (Weldon and Schmitt, 2014: 65).

[Figure 1 about here](#)

In the run-up to the Federal election, the AfD polled consistently around the 4.5 to 4.7 percent level, which placed it potentially within reach of scaling the Federal Republic's 5 percent electoral hurdle, especially as pollsters suspected that these numbers were actually under-estimates due to the reluctance of respondents to admit support for such a party in traditionally pro-EU Germany. In the end the AfD just failed to scale the 5 percent hurdle. The results of the 2013 Federal election and changes in vote share from the previous election in 2009 are set out in Figure 1. The figure shows that the CDU and its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) was the clear winner, polling 41.5 percent of the vote (up 7.7. percent on 2009) and narrowly missing out on an absolute majority in parliament. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) did less well, up 2.7 percent on 2009 to 25.7 percent of the vote. The established smaller parties did badly, with the Free Democrats (FDP) down 9.8 percent to 4.8 percent and therefore falling below the 5 percent hurdle, the Left Party down 3.3 percent on 8.6 percent, and the Greens down 2.3 percent on 8.4 percent. But the AfD did respectably: very narrowly failing to enter the Bundestag with 4.7 percent of the vote. On the same day, the AfD also narrowly failed in the Hesse *Landtag* elections with 4 percent of the vote (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2013).

In a UK context, these two electoral near misses would have been demoralizing for a new party in that it could have been years before such a chance to compete on the

national stage came around again. However, the timing of European Parliament elections combined with the phasing of *Land* parliament elections across the electoral cycle for the Bundestag means that German politics often appears to take the form of a 'permanent election campaign' (Roberts, 2006: 119). In this context, it was not long before the AfD had more chances to establish a foothold and this time they took them.

The first opportunity was the election to the Eighth European Parliament in May 2014. In the run-up to the election the AfD discussed potential alliances with other European parties, including rather pointedly ruling out an alliance with UKIP and with Geert Wilders' Freedom Party. This was no accident as the AfD was keen to avoid being pigeonholed as the kind of narrow right-wing anti-immigrant party that had never gained leverage with the German electorate in the past. By contrast, the AfD leadership was very complementary about the British Conservative Party and its foundation and leadership of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group. In addition, the AfD held talks with Law and Justice and the Civic Democratic Party, respectively the Polish and Czech members of the ECR group in the seventh European Parliament. In the election on the 25 May 2014, the AfD won 7.1 percent of the national vote, coming in fifth behind the CDU (30.02 percent), SPD (27.27 percent), the Greens (10.7 percent), and the Left Party (7.39 percent). The following month the AfD's seven newly elected members of the European Parliament were accepted into the ECR group, albeit on a split vote. The AfD was established on the European stage.

[Table 1 about here](#)

The European Parliament elections provided the impetus for further respectable electoral performances in *Land* elections across Germany. Table 1 provides us with the percentage vote shares won by the AfD in the Bundestag and State elections, sorted by individual state, over the period 2013 to the present. In August 2014 the election to the *Landtag* in the eastern German state of Saxony saw the AfD gain 9.7 percent of the vote, coming in fourth behind the CDU (39.4 percent), Left Party (18.9 percent), and SPD (12.4 percent) but in front of the Greens (5.7 percent) and the far right NPD (4.95 percent). The following month, elections in the eastern states of Thuringia and Brandenburg saw the AfD poll 10.6 percent and 12.2 percent respectively. Again these elections placed the AfD as the fourth largest party, behind the CDU, Left Party, and SPD in Thuringia and the SPD, Left Party, and CDU in Brandenburg. Again, the AfD polled more than the Greens and, in Thuringia, also more than the FDP. In western Germany, the AfD has only fought two *Land* elections. As already noted, in September 2013 the AfD failed to gain representation in the Hesse *Landtag* elections but this was before the electoral

bandwagon had really started to roll for the party. A second chance came in February 2015 when the AfD won 6.1 percent of vote in elections to the Hamburg state parliament. However, unlike in the eastern states, the AfD remained the smallest party in the state parliament, behind the SPD (45.6 percent of the vote), CDU (15.9 percent), Greens (12.3 percent), Left (8.5 percent), and FDP (7.4 percent). It remains to be seen if this indicates that western Germany is objectively a less benign environment for the AfD's political message. Table 1 seems to indicate that this might be the case. The outcome of the forthcoming Bremen state election, in May 2015, will give us more to go on.

[Figure 2 about here](#)

What is clear is that levels of support for the AfD nationally, as measured by monthly opinion polling from Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, is relatively stable within a band between 4 and 6 percent (with a temporary spike of 8 percent at the end of 2014). Taken in the round we can see a modest uptick from the levels of support seen just before the 2013 Bundestag election and if this were to be translated into second votes under Germany's mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system it might well be enough to get the party over the 5 percent electoral hurdle in the 2017 Bundestag election.

[Figure 3 about here](#)

The systemic effects if this was to take place are hard to judge. Figure 3 maps out the development of the party system in the Bundestag over the period 1949 to 2013 and I have added a final column with a possible scenario following the 2017 Bundestag election. We can see that from 1949 until the late 1970s, what was then West Germany went through a thirty-year period in which dual processes of ideological moderation (in terms of the ideological range of the parties represented) and of system consolidation (in terms of the number of parties represented and, to a lesser extent, the relative volatility in the numbers of seats won by them) allowed the CDU/CSU and SPD to dominate the party system, with the FDP playing a balancing or 'liberal corrective' role between them. There then followed two systemic junctures that broke down this two-party dominance. The first of these took place in 1983, when the Greens were first elected to the Bundestag, and the second took place in 1990, following German Unification, with the election of the PDS, now the Left Party (Lees, 2005). The cumulative impact of the two junctures, especially the second juncture associated with German Unification, is that the current Bundestag currently has 631 seats compared with 402 in 1949, has an ideological centre of gravity that is significantly more left leaning than it was in 1949, and – in the absence of the FDP - contains five party groupings (CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, Left Party) instead of three.

Figure 4 about here

The margin by which the FDP and the AfD failed to enter the Bundestag was wafer thin and if less than 1 percent of votes cast were distributed differently it is quite possible that we might now be talking about a seven party system in the Bundestag. Having said that, however, in comparative terms the German party system is by no means an outlier. Figure 4 places Germany in the context of 73 other states as positioned by the effective number of parties in their national parliaments and the degree of disproportionality of their electoral systems. The data span the period 1990 to 2014. What the Figure demonstrates is that, whilst it is possible for countries with proportional systems to generate low numbers of effective parties through two party dominance (Malta: National versus Labour) or even one party dominance (the ANC in South Africa), all things being equal there is a common direction of travel between the level of disproportionality of the electoral system and the number of effective parties in the legislature. Moreover, in heavily disproportional systems it is rare to find a high effective number of parties in the parliament even if, as is the case in the UK, the actual number of parties in the parliament is quite high. In this comparative context, Germany's MMP system is relatively proportional and tends to generate coalition governments but the effective number of parties is in fact quite low compared with other national systems with comparable levels of proportionality. Over the period since unification in 1990, the average effective number of parties in Germany was 3.8, compared with 8.12 in Belgium and 6.46 in Israel. This is still higher than the United States (1.97) and Sri Lanka (2.51) but still places Germany a little below the trend line compared with all 74 countries.

So if the AfD were to enter the Bundestag in 2017 this could potentially constitute a third major juncture in the development of the German party system. This is not just because it would add another player and potentially increase the effective number of parties in the Bundestag but also because the emergence of a populist electoral competitor to the right of the CDU/CSU would fundamentally alter the ideological space in which party competition and also coalition formation takes place. In terms of party competition, German parties had traditionally mobilised around the class (mediated through trade union membership) and religious (Protestant/Catholic and religious/non-religious) cleavages, although the influence of these cleavages has declined since the late 1960s. In the decade and a half after reunification a distinct territorial cleavage between the east and west of the country also played out within the party system, particularly at the level of state-level party systems. Although there are exceptions and variations, we can still discern two very distinct types of state level party system in Germany: with a four-party



system, made up of the Greens, SPD, CDU/CSU, and FDP, in the states of the old West Germany and a three-party dominant system made up of the Left Party, SPD, and CDU, in the new states in the east (Lees, 2012). As already discussed, the AfD's political appeal appears to be stronger in the east of Germany and this could potentially re-ignite the territorial cleavage at the point when it was seemed to be dissipating. More intriguingly, however, is the disruptive potential of the new ideological dimension that the AfD would introduce if it were to enter the Bundestag with a fully-fledged right-wing populist program. It is to this program that the paper now turns.

### 3. Judgmental analysis of the AfD's policy positions

*'The Greeks are suffering. The Germans are paying. The banks are clearing up'*  
(AfD Federal election poster, 2013)

Any keen student of politics, even without reference to the now copious literature on populism in general and right wing populism in particular, can see that the campaign slogan above defies simple classification. It is true that appeals to notions of 'the Germans' could be construed as going beyond appeals to German frugality to embrace a potentially *Völkische* tone but the manner in which 'the Greeks' are described is more empathetic than the kind of othering narrative that populists often call upon to create 'the people' of the imaginary 'Heartland' (Taggart, 2000, 2003) to which they often appeal. Where the notion of the 'the people' is more present is in a more demotic sense of the people versus the elites, and especially the elites that make up the European political class and who are considered to run the EU for the benefit of old money, big business, and international finance. Thus, what could on one level be a simple slogan about the specific iniquities of the Eurozone bailout arrangements carries a powerful subtext about the contested and adversarial narrative around the asymmetrical power resources possessed by the people vis-à-vis political and economic elites (Mudde, 2004). Moreover, this appeal to populist instincts and prejudices is 'chameleon-like' (Taggart, 2000 Op Cit) in that it adapts to specific national conditions and displays the colors of the political left and/or right as appropriate to the political terrain. Thus in Germany left wing populism is quite successfully harnessed by the Left Party but the right wing variant has traditionally failed to thrive. It is no surprise, therefore, that 'the AfD – as a *functional equivalent for a right-wing populist party in Germany* [my italics] - follows a different and more nuanced communication strategy than other European parties of the right' (Berbuir et al, 2014: 8).

So what is the programmatic profile of the AfD and how is it communicated? I would argue that the AfD's program constitutes two 'levers', as it were. The first is a 'narrative lever', through which potentially disruptive and adversarial propositions are smuggled into the mainstream political discourse in the manner of the 2013 Federal election poster described above. The second is a 'procedural lever' through which the constraining political institutions and modes of deliberation and social choice that have kept populism in check are themselves brought into question by the AfD's narrative in favor of political alternatives that are more conducive to the dissemination and entrenchment of the party's anti-establishment message. Taken together, the two levers constitute a praxis of political insurgency that is fundamentally alien to politics as it has been conducted in the Federal Republic.

The narrative lever is wielded through the AfD's key proposition – that the Eurozone is the creation of an out-of-touch and metropolitan elite whose interests and the interests of whom they serve are very different from those of the people, still nested in the Heartland. In some instances the people is a generic concept and could be construed to encompass any ordinary citizen of an EU member state, be they German, Greek, and so on. In other instances, especially when complaining about the actual costs of the Euro bailout, the people are clearly German. What is clear, however, is that the AfD is not an anti-European party *per se* but rather favors 'a return to subsidiarity', 'more democracy, more public involvement', 'less bureaucracy, less costs for member states' (AfD, 2014: 8-10). The substance of these calls is more Gaullist than Farageist. This reluctance to cross the threshold from 'soft' to 'hard' Euroscepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2001) is consistent with the established pattern found in German politics where even far right parties such as the German People's Union (DVU) and National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) have tended to eschew an overtly anti-European stance in their party programs (Lees, 2008).

There is a degree of ambiguity about the AfD's broader economic program and the party's policies and pronouncements can appear to be as much neo-liberal as conform to the more traditional ordo-liberal position. The neo-liberal references in the AfD's program position it reasonably close to the FDP, but generates a degree of policy distance from any of the other established political parties in Germany. A neo-liberal position would be an interesting choice of issue space for a supposedly populist party in that neo-liberalism - in its Anglo-Saxon manifestation at least - has never commanded a great deal of support in Germany. So it is no surprise to see that the party's economic liberalism

remains tempered by appeals to traditional ordo-liberalism and also cites Germany's social market principles and stresses the need to apply these at the European level. Thus, the AfD's manifesto for the 2014 European Parliament election valorized ordo-liberal prescriptions such as 'stability union rather than joint debt liability', 'no joint liability for bank indebtedness', and 'more stringent capital resource and liability regulations for banks' (AfD, 2014 Op Cit: 3-7). This is the now familiar German narrative of the need to avoid moral hazard and (re)establish credible commitments across the Eurozone. In the same document there are also appeals to a 'social EU' in which labour market and social policies should be 'made at the local level' and there should be 'no free trade agreement to Europe's disadvantage' (ibid: 12-16). The retention of ordo-liberal and social market elements mean that, behind the anti-Euro rhetoric, the AfD's approach to economic policy contains a great deal of continuity with the past. This supports the German political scientist Werner Patzelt's assertion that, in this domain of policy at least, the AfD is not qualitatively different from Germany's established conservative intellectual agendas but rather 'has filled a gaping hole on the German political right caused by Merkel shifting her ruling conservative Christian Democrats to the left' (Paterson, 2014).

The AfD's populist instincts are more apparent in other policy domains, such as social policy, immigration and the environment. But once again these could just as easily be described as conservative or national-liberal as outright populist in nature. Social policies, including gender policy were upon in the 2014 European election, with the party manifesto arguing that 'the AfD calls for equal rights for the sexes, recognizing their different identities, social roles and life situations' (AfD, 2014 Op Cit: 17), a statement that needs little decoding to position them very much on the conservative side of the issue. The manifesto goes on to argue for a supposedly 'humane' immigration policy in which 'the immigration of non-EU workers is to depend exclusively on German needs' though a Canadian-style points system (Ibid: 15). The party's stance on environmental policy was also made clear, including a wholesale rejection of the German Renewable Energy Act (EEG) and a repatriation of EU environmental competences to the national level (Ibid: 19-20). However, it was in the 2013 Bundestag and subsequent *Land* elections that the party's positions on these policy domains had more resonance and adopted a sharper populist tone. AfD posters in the 2013 Bundestag election contained a good deal of 'dog whistle' politics, using slogans like 'Courage for Truth' (similar to the UK Conservatives' 'Are you thinking what we're thinking?' in the 2005 UK General Election), whilst an earlier poster had argued for 'classical education over multicultural re-education'. As Bebuir at al point out, AfD communications strategy on social media in particular often taps into the stock 'vocabulary of right-wing politics, such as denial of

multi-culturalism, the condemnation of non-heteronormative lifestyles such as same-sex unions or 'political correctness' (Berbuir et al, 2014 Op Cit: 12).

As already noted the AfD's eclectic but distinct blend of conservative, national-liberal, and populist policy positions, as well as the narrative in which they are framed, places the party at some distance from the political-economic and cultural consensus shared by Germany's mainstream political elites. Thus, all things being equal, it is a lonely position to occupy in Germany's centripetal political system. Three decades ago, the late Gordon Smith talked about Germany's 'efficient secret' - a configuration of institutional structures and norms, as well as partisan ideology - at the heart of the German polity that generated what he called a 'politics of centrality' and institutional stability (Smith, 1986: 231-5). According to Smith, the politics of centrality is buttressed by a number of institutional features, two of which are particularly germane to this paper. These are, first, Germany's MMP system and the 5 percent electoral hurdle, which promotes coalition government, limits the number of effective parties within the legislature, and shuts out flanking parties of the right or left, and, second, the idea of the *Partienstaat*, which gives the established parties a stake in the maintenance of state legitimacy, and discourages the kind of 'anti-system' sentiment that the AfD is trying to mobilise. The impact of these features is further amplified by the relatively deferential and compliant media and also the constraining effects of Germany's Basic Law, which severely limits the use of plebiscites and referendums, both of which we discussed at the start of this paper.

This is why the procedural levers that the AfD propose in their party literature and communications is so interesting and potentially disrupting. At the level of the individual states, however, all states have some provision for non-binding 'indirect initiatives'. The most common form of referendum in Germany is a non-binding 'people's enquiry' (*Volksbefragung*), whilst the binding 'people's decision' (*Volksentscheid*) is only mandatory in very few cases, such as in the event of major changes of the constitution or in changing the territorial dimensions of the Republic or of individual states (such as in the popular rejection of the merger between the states of Berlin and Brandenburg in 1996). Hesse and Bavaria also allow for a binding referendum in the event of changes to their state constitutions. The restriction of direct democracy in the Basic Law was a reaction against the use of plebiscites by the Nazis in the 1930s. And in the context of the fragility of Germany democracy in the early years after the second world war, it also reflected an unspoken distrust, not just of the dark forces that these processes of direct democracy had unleashed, but also arguably of the German people itself. The AfD's initial proposal was specifically for a referendum on any future Euro bailout proposals but

it has since developed into proposals for a set of direct democratic practices based on the Swiss model. These would include binding referendums on such divisive issues as Germany's abortion laws (*Die Welt*, 21/08/14) and on local proposals to build mosques in German cities (*Bild*, 28/03/15). These proposals do represent a break from the past and, if ever enacted, would not only invert the core democratic principles embedded in Germany's Basic Law but also potentially unleash the centrifugal forces that are currently held in check by the set of institutional features that make up Germany's 'efficient secret'.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This paper charts the rise of the AfD and asks three questions. First, does the AfD really have the potential to alter the underlying dynamics of German party politics? Second, how can the AfD be classified in relation to other Eurosceptic and/or right-wing populist parties? Third, to what extent do its policy ambitions stretch beyond opposition to aspects of the European integration process to the extent that they encompass a more profound critique of the elite political-economic settlement at the heart of Germany's consensual political system?

In addressing the first question, it is too early to tell whether the AfD will enter the Bundestag in 2017. However, as already discussed, they are currently in a relatively strong position polling around 4 to 6 percent nationally and enjoying spikes of support, particularly in *Land* elections in the eastern states. At the very least, the territorial concentration of support in the east might serve to reactivate Germany's fading territorial cleavage. And, if the AfD does overcome the Federal Republic's 5 percent electoral hurdle and does enter the Bundestag in 2017 it would in my opinion constitute a third historic juncture that would not only alter the numerical balance of power in the Bundestag but would also fundamentally change the nature of the issue space and the subsequent patterns of party competition and coalition formation.

This brings us to the second question. The impact of the changes described above is hard to predict and would depend on the direction of travel of the AfD's programmatic development. As discussed, the AfD's profile is adapted to the political terrain in which the party operates and this is consistent with the 'chameleon-like' nature of populism described by Taggart (2000 *Op Cit*). However, this also means that the AfD's current profile displays disparate elements, including appeals to traditional conservative and national-liberal concerns. This mix is at its most eclectic in terms of the AfD's approach to

European policy and broader economic policy, in which neo-liberal, ordo-liberal, social market and right wing populist elements coexist together. Given this degree of ambiguity, I think Berbuir et al's notion of the AfD as a 'functional equivalent for a right-wing populist party in Germany' is an appropriate description of the party at this point in its development (Berbuir et al Op Cit, 2014: 8).

And now to the final question of the extent to which the AfD's policy ambitions stretch beyond opposition to aspects of the European integration process and encompass a more profound critique of the elite political-economic settlement at the heart of Germany's consensual political system? In other words, what kind of 'alternative for Germany' does the AfD propose? Again, at this point in the party's programmatic development, any conclusions must be tentative and much depends on whether the CDU/CSU maintains its current centrist positioning - camped on what is essentially SPD territory - or moves back towards the right to counter the AfD's challenge. However, both in terms of the substance of the AfD's program, with its narrative lever of rejection of the Eurozone and procedural lever of proposals to introduce Swiss-style direct democracy, as well as in terms of its framing, with its anti-establishment and effectively anti-*Parteienstaat* narrative, the AfD's program does constitute a critique of the current political-economic settlement.

To conclude, a Federal Republic remade in the AfD's image is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. But if such an outcome were ever to come about it would indeed be an alternative for Germany that would redistribute power resources across the political system, between parties, between elites and ordinary citizens, and between insider and outsider societal groups. It is for that reason that Germany's established political parties, its peak associations, and other key societal actors are currently watching the development of the AfD with keen interest.

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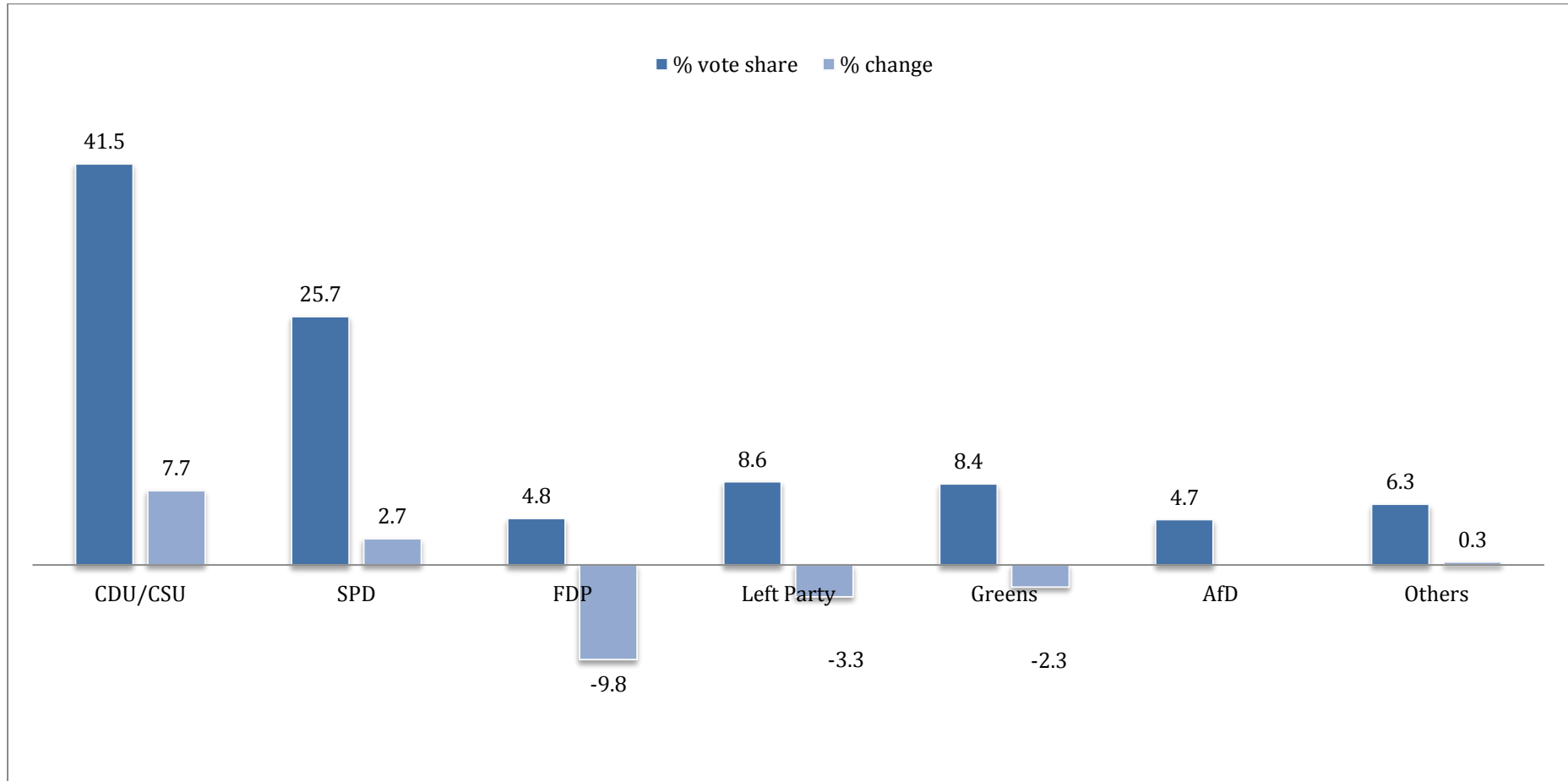
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**Figure 1. The eighteenth Bundestag Election of 22 September 2013: Percentage Vote Share and Percentage Change since 2009**



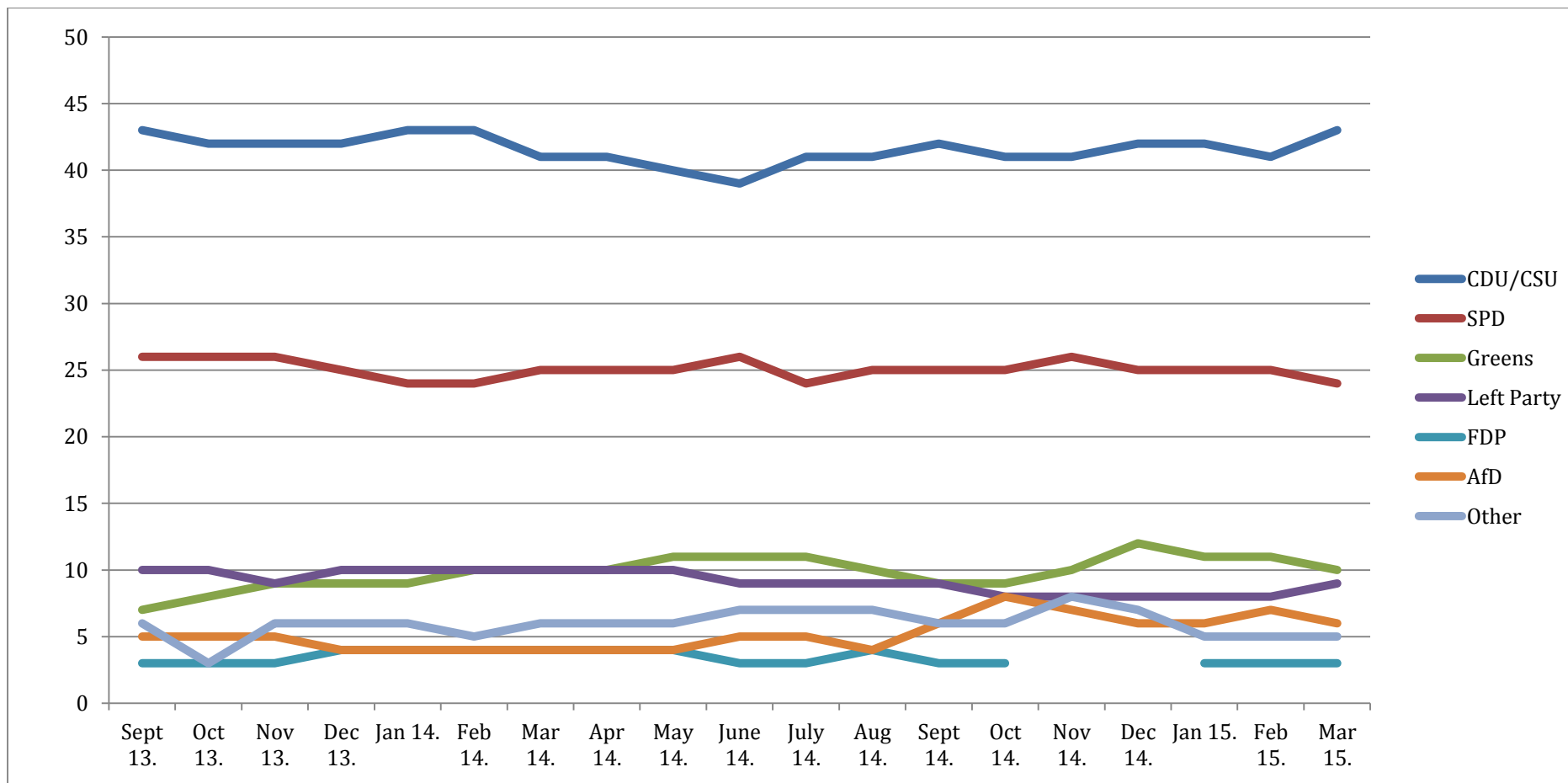
Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen

**Table 1. Percentage vote shares for the AfD in the Bundestag and State elections, by individual states, 2013-**

	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal election (second vote)</b>	<b>State election</b>
<u>East</u>	Saxony	2013 6.8 percent	2014 9.7 percent
	Thuringia	2013 6.2 percent	2014 10.6 percent
	Brandenburg	2013 6.0 percent	2014 12.2 percent
	Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	2013 5.6 percent	
	Saxony-Anhalt	2013 4.2 percent	
	Hessen	2013 5.6 percent	2013 4.1 percent
	Baden-Württemberg	2013 5.2 percent	
	Saarland	2013 5.2 percent	
<u>West</u>	Berlin	2013 4.9 percent	
	Rhineland Palatinate	2013 4.8 percent	
	Schleswig-Holstein	2013 4.6 percent	
	Bavaria	2013 4.3 percent	
	Hamburg	2013 4.2 percent	2015 6.1 percent
	North Rhine Westphalia	2013 3.9 percent	
	Bremen	2013 3.7 percent	2015 ?? percent
	Lower Saxony	2013 3.7 percent	
<u>All</u>		2013 4.7 percent	---

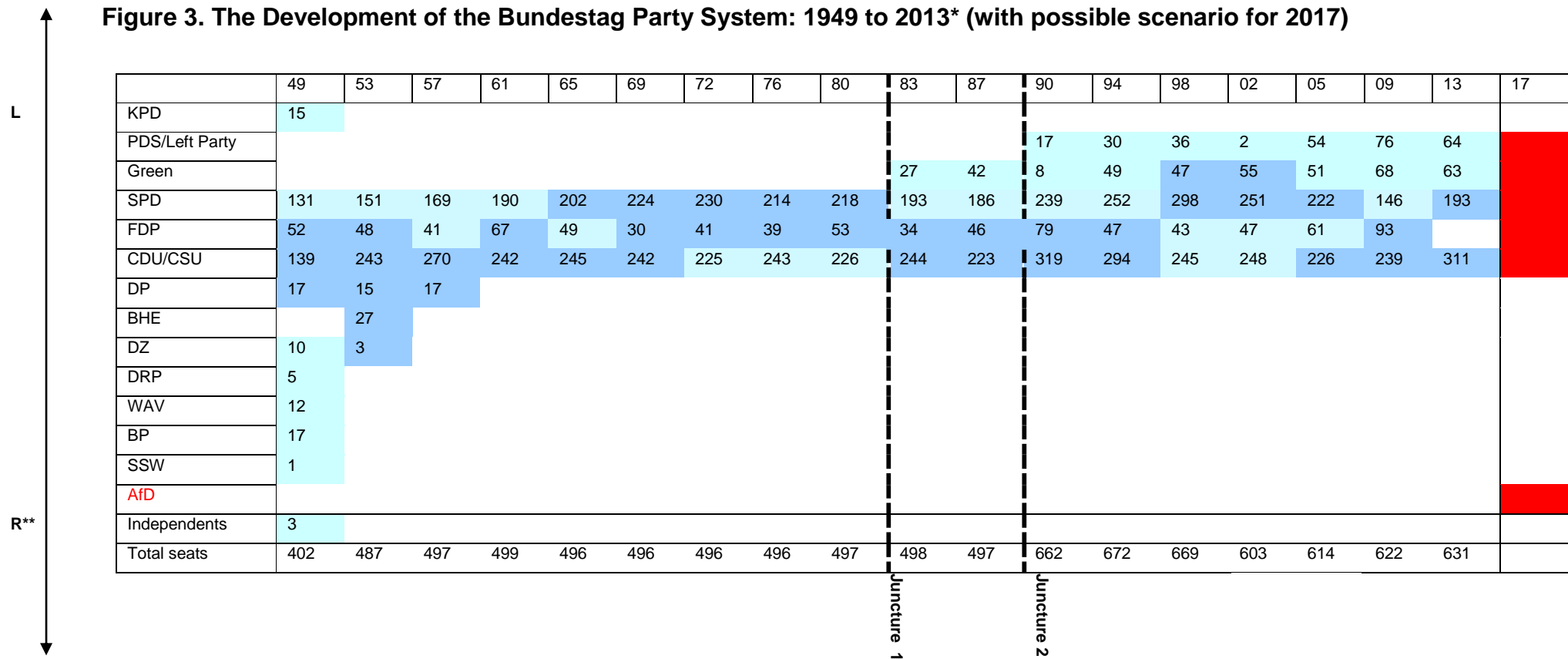
Source: Bundeswahlleiter, adapted by the author.

Figure 2. Opinion polling on party preference in Germany: Sept. 2013 to March 2015



Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen

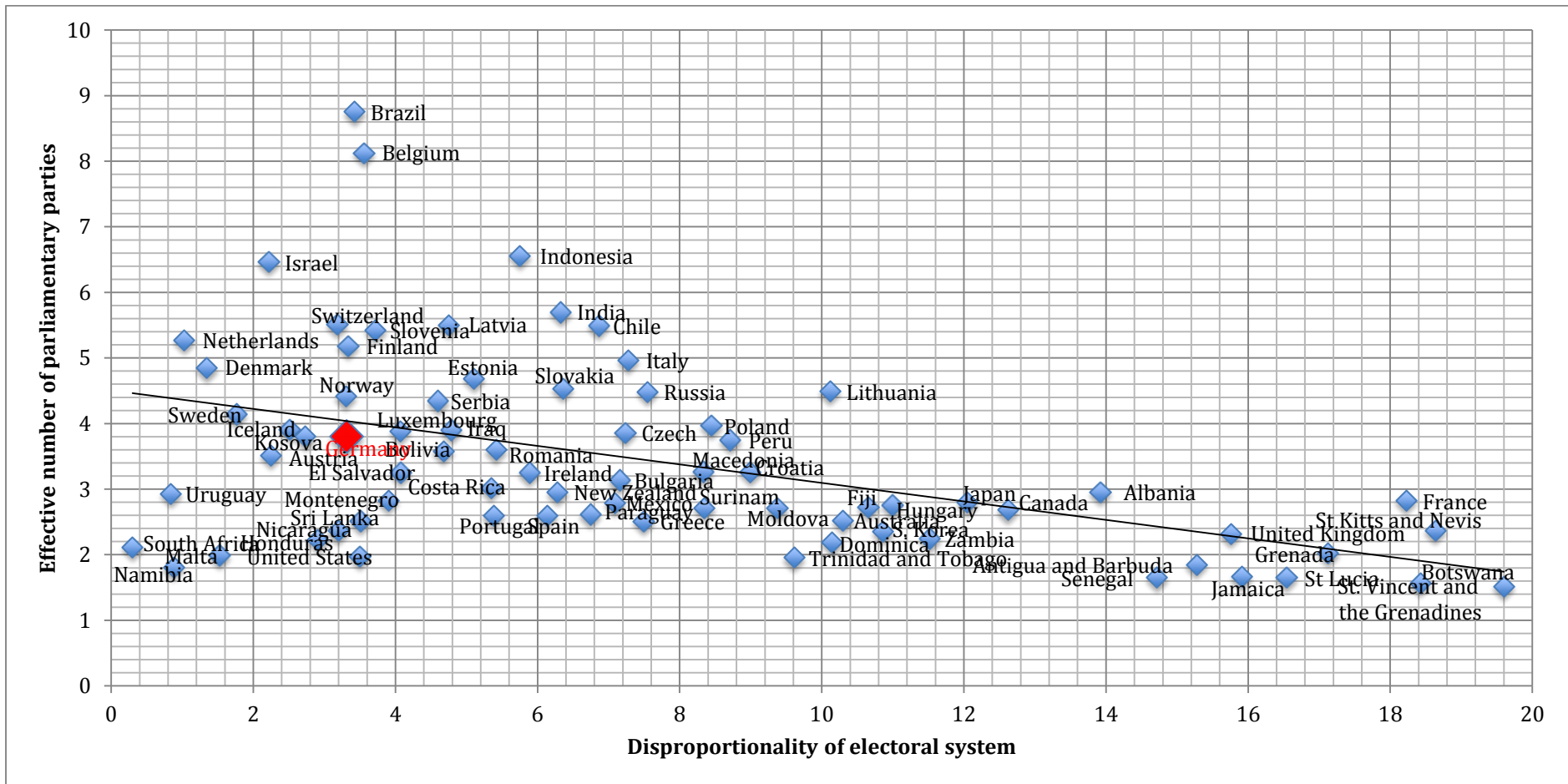
**Figure 3. The Development of the Bundestag Party System: 1949 to 2013\* (with possible scenario for 2017)**



\* Parties in Bundestag in pale blue; number of seats in cells (excluding Berlin deputies); parties in government in darker blue.

\*\* For taxonomical reasons, the particularist parties such as the BP and SSW as well as AfD and independents have been placed on the right of the left-right spectrum.

Figure 4. 74 states by effective number of parties and electoral disproportionality: 1990-2014



Sources: World Resources Institute; ACE Electoral Knowledge Network; The Electoral Systems Website

[http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/EISystems/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php)