“Something’s Brewing in the East”: Germany’s Right-Wing Resurgence as an Unintended Consequence of the 1990 Reunification

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Glossary: Key Figures, Terms, German Definitions

Alexander Gauland: (1941 -) lawyer, journalist, co-founder of the AfD and its leader since 2017. Gauland originally belonged to the CDU.

Alternative für Deutschland (AFD): translating to Alternative for Germany, this is the far right-wing party in the Bundestag, founded in 2013.

Angela Merkel: (1954 -) leader of the CDU party and chancellor of Germany since 2005. She has served four terms and will be retiring as chancellor in 2021.

Aufbau Ost: translating to "reconstruction of the East," this was the economic restructuring and rebuilding of East Germany to adapt it and integrate it into the Federal Republic of Germany.

Bjorn Höcke: (1972 -) regional leader of the AfD in Thuringia. Höcke was a history teacher from North-Rhine Westphalia before becoming a politician.

***Bundestag*:** German federal parliament. It has 709 seats and is directly elected by the German people. It can be understood as comparable to the US House of Representatives or UK House of Commons. The three largest parties in the Bundestag are, in order of size, the CDU/CSU, the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and the AfD (Alternative for Germany).

CDU/CSU: essentially two sister parties that form a political alliance, made up of the Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union. The CSU is elected only in Bavaria, while the CDU operates in the other fifteen German states.

Deutschmark: the currency of the FRG which became the official currency of reunified Germany, up until the adoption of the Euro.

Die Wende: "the turn" or "the turning point," a term referring to the peaceful revolution of 1989 that led to reunification, first coined in a *Der Spiegel* article in October 1989.

Federal Republic of Germany (FRG): called the BRD in Germany, this was the East German constitutional republic that existed from 1949 to 1990. Today, Germany's official name is still the Federal Republic of Germany.

German Democratic Republic (GDR): called the DDR in Germany, this was the East German one-party socialist republic that existed between 1949 and 1990.

Helmut Kohl: (1930-2017) chancellor of West Germany from 1982 to 1990, then chancellor of reunified Germany until 1998.

Lutz Bachmann: (1973 -) founder of the PEGIDA movement. Bachmann is a chef, graphic designer, and owns a public relations and advertising company.

Mauerfall: German word used for the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.

Ossis*:* informal name for East Germans (*Ost* means East in German).

Ostmark: the currency of the GDR.

PEGIDA: *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, or Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident, is an anti-Islam, far-right political movement, initially founded in Dresden in 2014 as a protest against plans to open 14 new refugee centers in Dresden.

Solidaritätszuschlag: also called the *Soli*, and translating to "Solidarity Surcharge," this is a supplement to income and corporate tax levied to cover the costs of reunification. It was initially meant to last only one year, but is still in place today. It is meant to be reduced greatly in 2021, at which time it will be limited to the wealthiest Germans.

Treuhandanstalt: often shortened to *Treuhand*, and translating to "Trust Agency," it was established on June 17, 1990, with the purpose of restructuring and selling East German companies, ranging from steelworks to film studios.

Trabant: car produced in East Germany from 1957 to 1990.

Wessis**:** informal name for West Germans.

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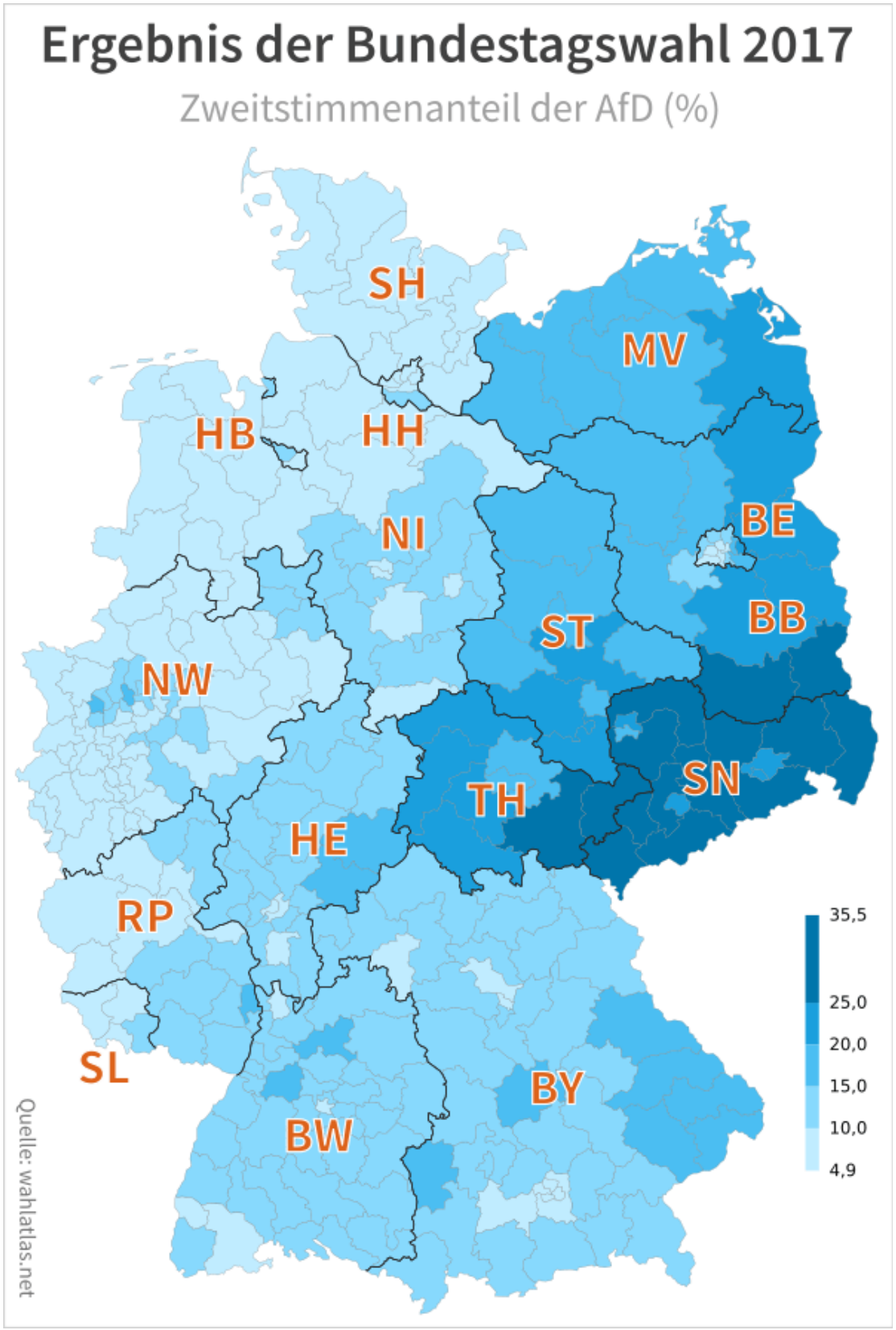
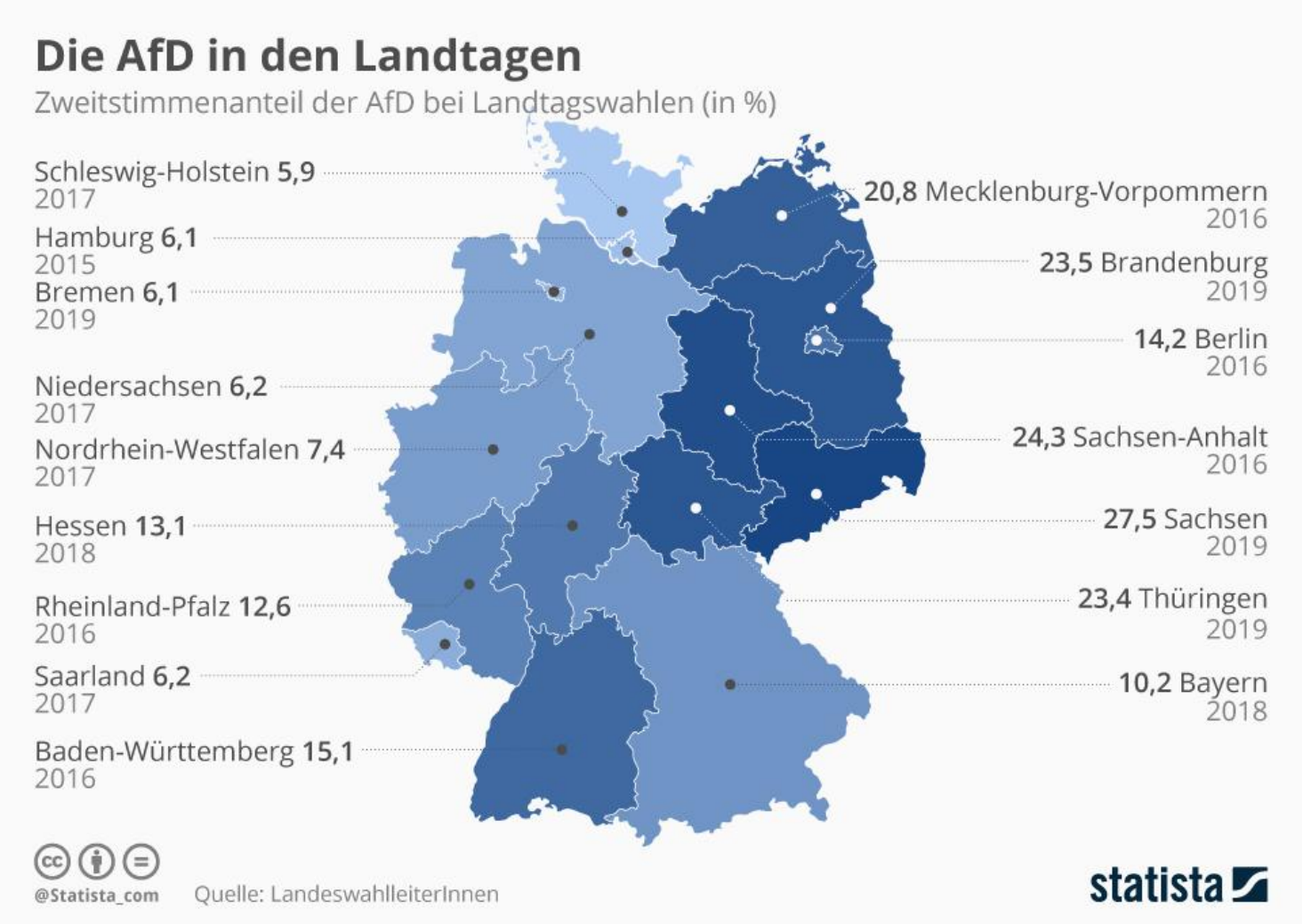
2. East and West Germany, 1949-1990

3. “Results of the Federal Parliament Election 2017”: Vote percentage of the AfD



4. "The AfD in the State Parliaments": Vote Percentage of the AfD (2019)



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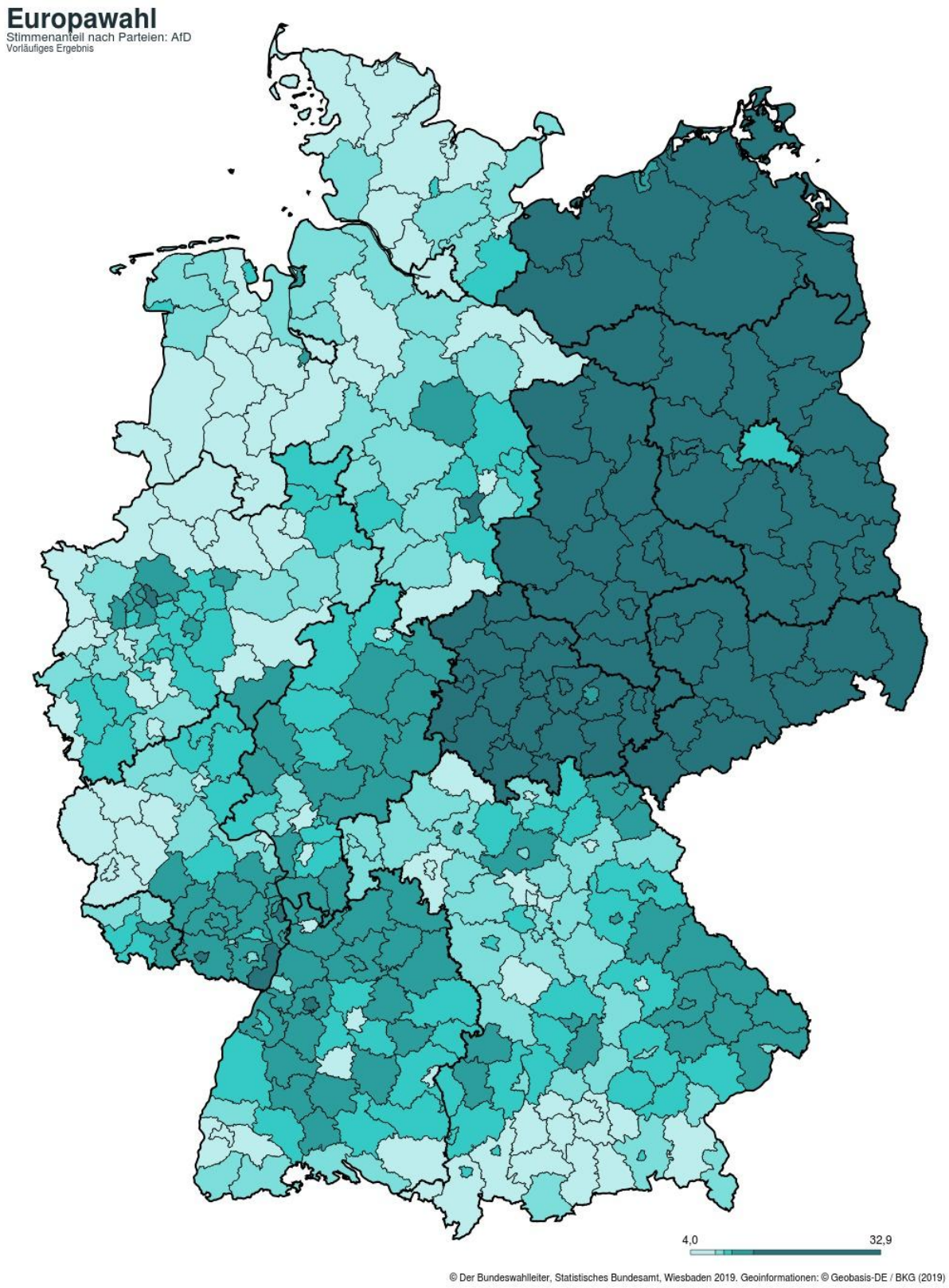

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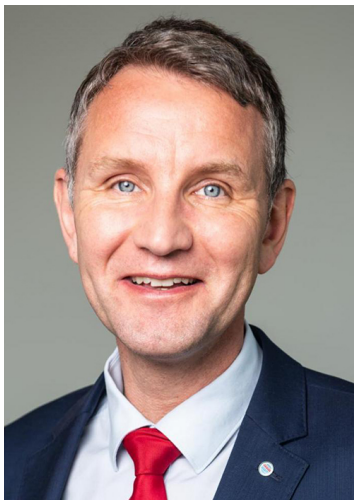

Image 6

Image 7

1. **Introduction**

In the early hours of August 26, 2018, Yousif A. and Alaa S. were accused of stabbing a Cuban-German man to death in the town of Chemnitz in eastern Germany. A few hours later, around 800 citizens of Chemnitz took to the streets, threatening police and attacking anyone who looked like they might not belong—anyone who was not White. By the evening, the crowd of angry Germans numbered 6,000, chanting "We'll get you all" and performing the Hitler salute with vigor. The existing far-right presence in Chemnitz appropriated the Cuban-German man's death at the hands of an Iraqi and a Syrian immigrant, to promote their xenophobic and racist agenda.[1] Had the perpetrators been White, native-born Germans, it is unlikely that the murder would have caused such a reaction and attracted nationwide attention. Chemnitz is no small idyllic town where every crime is a matter of neighborly concern; it is the third largest city in the state of Saxony. The reason that this murder triggered such an enthusiastic display of blatant neo-Nazism, masquerading as a movement of "concerned citizens" and endorsed by Germany's young far-right party, the AfD, is that the perpetrators were non-White immigrants.[2] Right-wing Germans, both radical and not, both the politically involved and the galvanized civilians, jumped on this event as an opportunity to promote their vision of a monoethnic, nationalist Germany.

Germany is radicalizing. Chemnitz is far from the only case of alarming far-right activity since 2015. Every year since the refugee influx, Germany has seen such reactions that have attracted international attention. In October 2015, Henriette Reker, who was running for mayor of Cologne, was stabbed in the neck by a right-wing extremist for her benevolent attitude toward refugees. In July 2016, a gunman killed nine people in a Munich shopping mall, for what were

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[1] Barbara Manthe, "Scenes of 'Civil War'? Radical Right Narratives on Chemnitz," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right* (October 17, 2018).
[2] Spiegel Staff, "Return of the Ugly German? The Riots in Chemnitz and their Aftermath," *Spiegel International* (August 31, 2018).

later revealed to be racist motives, as detailed in a manifesto he had written. From 2017 to 2018, the number of right wing attacks rose by another 25% after their initial dramatic spike in 2015.[3] In June 2019, CDU politician Walter Lübcke, known for supporting Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming asylum policy, was murdered.[4] A few months later, a gunman injured three people and killed four while attacking a synagogue in the eastern city of Halle, in Saxony-Anhalt. In February 2020, a right-wing extremist attacked two shisha bars in the Western city of Hanau, killing ten and wounding five others.[5] These events mentioned are only the most well-known ones; such attacks on immigrants and ethnic minorities in Germany continue to occur daily.[6]

Perhaps even more shocking than these individual incidents has been the dramatic increase in right-wing political power in recent years. In 2013, a new far-right party called the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, or AfD) just narrowly missed the five percent vote minimum required to enter the German parliament, the *Bundestag*. In 2017, the AfD finally received enough votes to break into parliament, and by 2019 they became the third largest party in the Bundestag after the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. In other words, they are the first far-right party to achieve this level of influence in politics since Adolf Hitler's National Socialist party. Their extra-parliamentary sidekick group, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA), was formed in 2014 in Dresden. It has borne several offshoots in other cities, and shows no sign of diminishing either.

The most common explanation given for Germany's recent right-wing surge is the 2015 refugee "crisis," which I will be referring to as the refugee influx throughout this thesis. From

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[3] Jack Ewing, Melissa Eddy, "Far-Right Shooting Shatters an Already Fragile Sense of Security in Germany," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2020.
[4] Peter Hille, "Right-wing Terror in Germany: A Timeline," *Deutsche Welle,* February 20, 2020.
[5] Hesseschau, "100 Tage nach dem rassistischen Terror: Die Anschlag von Hanau -- eine Chronologie," *Gesellschaft*, June 12, 2020.
[6] BBC, "Germany Hate Crime: Nearly 10 Attacks a Day on Migrants in 2016," February 26, 2017.

late 2014 to 2016, German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Image 1) made the decision—laudable according to some, disgraceful according to others—to accept an unprecedented influx of asylum seekers, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. For this controversial decision, Merkel was named TIME's Person of the Year while being labeled a traitor by some of her own people. More specifically, while the left praised Merkel for her *Wilkommenskultur*—welcoming culture—policy, the right wing denounced her as the *Schlepperkönigin* ("Queen of the smugglers") and called for her arrest.[7] As Germany financially, structurally and culturally reckoned with the arrival of 1.1 million refugees just that first year, the nation was also forced to face an issue it has struggled with to varying degrees since at least the 1930s: far-right extremism and racial nationalist violence.[8] Between 2014 and 2015, the number of attacks on asylum shelters alone increased from 199 to 1,031.[9] The increase in migrants in 2015 seemed to fuel the fire of a right wing characterized by nativism and xenophobia, and cause a dramatic uptick from the previous year in anti-immigrant violence.

However, one look at AfD votership maps immediately complicates the story. There is a stark contrast between the party's popularity in the Eastern states and the Western states; in fact, the former border between the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) closely correlates with the border between the highest and lowest concentrations of AfD voters. This provokes the question: why, thirty years after the Berlin Wall came down and after massive efforts dedicated to reunification, is Germany still so politically divided?

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[7] Reinhard Meier, "Schlepperkönigin Merkel?" *Journal 21.ch,* September 14, 2015.
[8] Cynthia Kroet, "1.1 Million Refugee Arrivals in 2015," *Politico Europe,* January 6, 2016.
[9] Barbara Manthe, "Germany Remembers Solingen Arson Attack," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, May 31, 2018.

In this thesis, I will provide a more nuanced and historical understanding of the challenges Germany faces, particularly in the states that had belonged to the socialist German Democratic Republic (East Germany) from 1949 to 1990. While 2015 was certainly the spark, I am interested in the kindling that had been laid over the previous twenty-five years since East and West Germany became one. This thesis highlights the tensions and frustrations which were practically waiting to be ignited by some large and sudden event. In particular, this thesis will examine the implications that the German reunification of 1990 had for East and West Germany, and what enabled far-right extremism to flourish, particularly in the East, to a degree unparalleled since World War II.

To summarize, this project sets out first to clarify that the right-wing extremist surge since 2015 is not a unique phenomenon, but a heightening of activity seen in Germany for decades, dating back at least to the immediate post-reunification years. The bulk of the thesis will then be concerned with answering the question: How did the reunification of 1990 inadvertently set up the East to be more likely to house the radical right today, and how does the far right exploit these circumstances to further its xenophobic and islamophobic agenda?

I will begin by providing some necessary historical background, and will then dissect the process, results, and long-term consequences of reunification, to explain why the East shows a greater tendency toward right-wing extremism today. Then, I will examine the AfD's platform and strategies and how it capitalizes on Eastern frustrations to spread its Islamophobic and xenophobic agenda. This latter discussion will also include an analysis of PEGIDA, a far-right group which works hand-in-hand with the AfD and whose rhetoric supports my argument about the Eastern connection. Finally, I will evaluate governmental and popular efforts to combat right-wing extremism, and consider some implications for the future.

2. Sources and clarifications

This thesis is written with extensive consideration of both primary and secondary sources. While the academic scholarship around this topic is relatively limited, there are several books which help to illuminate the situation in Germany after 1990 as well as the conditions under which reunification was carried out. Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (1994) discusses the political and international aspects of uniting Germany, but also devotes a portion to domestic issues regarding reunification, such as changes in immigration patterns and policies, dissatisfaction with government, and "anti-semitic rumblings in the East" before, during and after reunification.[10] Hämäläinen also underlines the flawed execution of reunification due to the West's misjudgment of the political and cultural situation in the East, particularly the East Germans' needs and desires. The latter point is vital to the argument of this thesis. We must look beyond the logistics of reunification and consider its social and cultural dimensions that the Federal Republic of Germany overlooked when incorporating former citizens of the German Democratic Republic.

This topic is also covered in Hope M. Harrison's recent book, *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present* (2019). Harrison explores the role rhetoric plays in shaping historical memory and how it can accentuate or mitigate divisions between Germans. The part of her book that most supports this thesis, however, discusses East-West relations surrounding and following reunification. With three decades of reflection behind them, Germans have more or less solidified their opinions on reunification, and for many

[10] Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 135.

Easterners, that opinion is quite negative. Harrison delves into the mentality of East Germans around the time of reunification, particularly when it came to learning to coexist with their Western counterparts. Each side held prejudices about the other and had concerns which have endured to this day and have proven to be difficult to uproot.[11]

The book *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany After Reunification* (1997) by Hermann Kurthen et al. deals with all the topics discussed above as well as historical revisionism, a topic which I broach towards the conclusion of my thesis.[12] The book is valuable to this project because it delineates the costs and cultural repercussions of reunification, which, as mentioned, are a primary focus of this thesis. However, its relevance to the most recent events I discuss is limited by the fact that it was published in 1997. Kurthen et al. could of course not have foreseen the AfD, PEGIDA or the 2015 migrant influx, much less have commented on it. This book nevertheless enables me to add to the developing literature around reunification and the right wing since 2015. It establishes the undeniable existence of right-wing extremism, particularly in the East, long before Björn Höcke, Lutz Bachmann, or any other actors of AfD and PEGIDA appeared on the scene.

While data and statistics will be incorporated in this work, the research will not be purely data-driven. Oral histories, multimedia, sources and witness accounts are paramount to understanding the complex feelings and cultural attitudes involved in the aftermath of reunification, and are at times more telling than any quantitative data. As the AfD and PEGIDA are relatively new groups who utilize social media platforms to cast a wide net and spread their messages, I have also made use of relevant social media content, particularly from Instagram,

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[11] Hope M. Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present* (Cambridge University Printing Press, 2019).
[12] Hermann Kurthen, Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb, *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany after Unification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Facebook, and the Youtube channel of PEGIDA founder Lutz Bachmann. Several other primary sources are included, such as the AfD's manifesto and immigration-related documents from the collection *Germany in Transit: Nation in Migration, 1955-2005* by Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes. This group of documents is particularly useful because it includes sources not only from the period of reunification but from the Gastarbeiter era and in the wake of other alterations to German immigration policy since then. Statistics will also be incorporated from German government websites, most notably concerning election results and other such relevant information.

Some further clarifications are in order. When I mention "East Germany," I mean the state that existed from 1949 to 1990. "Eastern Germany," on the other hand, refers to a region, to the states today that once belonged to East Germany and the GDR. Thus, "East Germans" are those who lived under the GDR, and "Easterners" are those who today live in the former states of East Germany. There is often overlap between the two; many Eastern Germans lived in the GDR before its collapse just over thirty years ago. The same thing goes for the West: "West Germany" refers to the Federal Republic of Germany before the 1990 reunification, while "Western Germany" refers to those same states post-reunification, since West Germany as a separate entity no longer exists. I will also be moving back and forth chronologically a bit throughout the thesis, as I am discussing three periods: reunification (1989-1990), the first post-reunification right-wing wave (early 1990s) and the second, beginning soon after the AfD's inception (2014 and on). The scope of the thesis is limited to the thirty years between 1990 and 2020, with the exception of a few references to the Third Reich (1930s and 1940s). I have also included a glossary with key figures and translated German phrases, as well as maps and figures that help illustrate the circumstances in Germany. In most instances, the AfD is referred to as a far-right

party; it is important to keep in mind that Merkel's party, the CDU, is officially a center-right party.

Perhaps the most valuable sources to this project are scholarly articles, particularly by Barbara Manthe, Carl Berning, Thomas Brussig, Kai Arzheimer, Emily Schultheis, Sabine Volk, Ralph Bollmann, Helga Druxes and Constanze Stelzenmüller. These articles provide and analyze statistical data that are crucial to my argument. Many of these scholars were eyewitnesses who personally experienced reunification, hence they provide valuable analysis of the events of the time while also interweaving their individual perspectives into their research.

I cite witness accounts and personal opinions that other scholars have gathered, but I have also conducted oral histories myself with Germans of various age groups, from various regions, the results of which are incorporated throughout the thesis. These help to illustrate primarily the East-West cultural divides and experiences surrounding reunification. All names are pseudonyms.

As this thesis is primarily discussing the post-reunification era (in other words 1990 onward), the far-right activity discussed centers around xenophobia and Islamophobia more than anti-Semitism. Certainly, there have been anti-Semitic incidents post-reunification, just as there were anti-refugee incidents before reunification. Germany is still home to much anti-Semitic activity, but for the sake of relative brevity and an adequate treatment of the issue at hand, anti-Semitism will not be the focus of this thesis. AfD and PEGIDA are xenophobic and specifically Islamophobic groups. Although their membership does include official and unofficial neo-Nazis, and both groups participate in a glorification of Germany's Nazi past, they were not formed with the intent to pursue Hitler's goals of eradicating Jews or Judaism in Germany. Instead, they scapegoat minorities from Africa and the Middle East, presumably

because anti-Semitism and symbols relating to the Third Reich are strongly prohibited in Germany in a way that Islamophobia and general xenophobia are not.

Finally, this thesis in no way discounts the existence of the right wing in the Western states. The West certainly plays a role in this narrative, and it is acknowledged wherever necessary. However, due to the undeniably greater right-wing fervor in the East than the West (as shown by the AfD votership maps and the way PEGIDA has planted its roots in the East) my research questions are specifically focused on reasons for Eastern dissatisfaction and the long-term consequences of reunification in the East.

3. Historical background

To understand the events mentioned in this thesis, a brief historical introduction is warranted. After Adolf Hitler committed suicide and the Nazis capitulated in 1945, Germany was split into four zones occupied, respectively, by Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union. In 1949, France, Great Britain and the United States merged their occupation zones into one West Germany, while the Soviet Union's zone became East Germany. West Germany (known as the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG], with its capital in Bonn) became part of the Western Bloc while East Germany (known as the German Democratic Republic [GDR], with its capital in East Berlin) remained a Soviet satellite state as part of the socialist Eastern Bloc. While West Germany was able to catch up, so to speak, with the ideals of the capitalist democratic West, East Germany was a socialist authoritarian state. While several parties, like the Christian Democratic Union to which Merkel belongs, were officially allowed to

exist, in East Germany the GDR was a *de facto* one-party state, dominated by the Socialist Unity Party (SED).[13]

West Germany was composed of today's Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Bremen, Lower Saxony, North-Rhine Westphalia, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. The remaining states: Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony and Thuringia, comprised East Germany (see map 2). Movement was restricted between the two countries, and they became vastly different places to live. Berlin was an anomaly, because although it was located in East Germany, the city itself was divided into East and West Berlin, the latter belonging to the FRG. In 1961, the GDR erected a concrete wall between East and West Berlin. Armed guards patrolled it with dogs and did not hesitate to shoot those trying to flee from East to West.[14] Under the GDR, East Germans had little to no access to Western products. Consumption of Western media was prohibited.[15] East Germans were constantly under surveillance by the government's state security system, the *Stasi*, which pitted neighbors and family members against each other in an effort to root out dissenters. While it was not objectively as dangerous or ideologically extreme as Hitler's Third Reich, the GDR is widely remembered as a second dark period in Germany's recent history for its repressive and, despite its name, anti-democratic nature.

This was the state of affairs until 1989, when, as part of a wave of democratic revolutions in central and eastern Europe, the repressive and unsustainable regime of the GDR finally collapsed and the Berlin Wall came down as part of a peaceful citizen-led movement. Germany was officially reunified on October 3, 1990, a process which involved economic, political, social

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[13] Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, "Die erste und letzte freie Wahl in der DDR," March 17, 2020.
[14] Christel Kucharz, "The Man Who Opened the Berlin Wall," *ABC News,* October 21, 2009.
[15] Marlis Schaum, "West German TV: The Class Enemy in the Front Room," *Deutsche Welle,* January 7, 2009.

and cultural changes in both former halves of the country. This thesis will discuss the resulting changes and how the effects of reunification rendered former East Germany more susceptible to right-wing extremism in recent years. After all, voter turnout for the AfD is significantly higher in the former East than the former West (see maps 3, 4, 5).

Germany's relationship to migrants is complicated, precarious, and ever-changing. From 1955 to 1973, West Germany recruited migrant workers as part of a formal Guest Worker, or *Gastarbeiter* program. The program first recruited Italians, Greeks and Spaniards, but in 1961, it expanded to include Turks. This is significant because Turks still make up Germany's largest foreign population today. In fact, it is misleading to call them foreign, as they have planted roots and built communities in Germany for decades, and have contributed to Germany becoming a more diverse society. In 1973, the Gastarbeiter program in West Germany ended for migrants outside the European Communities, meaning that Italians, Greeks, and other southern Europeans were able to continue entering the country for work but that Turks, for example, were not.[16] From then on, the focus in West Germany turned from recruitment to integration of migrant workers and their families. In the 1980s, for instance, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl stressed the importance of creating "the most frictionless coexistence possible between foreigners and Germans," and emphasized that this integration was only possible if West Germany did not accept any more migrants.[17] It seems that Germany had let in more migrants than it had meant to, and that it now wanted to minimize their distinct presence in the country and pressure them to either assimilate or leave. A similar narrative unfolded in East Germany, with Vietnamese, Cuban, and Mozambican workers being recruited into the GDR from Easterner bloc countries.

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[16] Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes, *Germany in Transit: Nation in Migration, 1955-2005* (London, England: University of California Press, 2007), 45.
[17] Ibid, 46.

Once the Berlin Wall came down and the process began to integrate the East into the FRG, a wave of violence against immigrants—and, more broadly, people who did not look ethnically German—was unleashed. Long before Chemnitz, Hanau, or Halle, anti-refugee hate already had an established presence in Germany, particularly in former East Germany. In September 1991, a group of White youths—so-called Skinheads due to their shaven heads—in the major Saxon town of Hoyerswerda attacked and chased home several Vietnamese peddlers. Soon after, the young men made their way to a refugee home housing Vietnamese, Cubans and Mozambicans and attempted to burn it down. This time, they were followed by enthusiastic bystanders, residents of Hoyerswerda who saw the imminent attack and decided to tag along for the show. *Spiegel* magazine described the incident as a "pogrom-like assault," a reference in no uncertain terms to the violent and destructive anti-Semitic riots in the 1930s.[18]

The fact that this first major attack post-reunification was made on Vietnamese immigrants is telling; Vietnam was a major contributor to the German Democratic Republic's immigrant population. The GDR had become home to around 60,000 Vietnamese people by the time the Berlin Wall fell.[19] After the collapse of the GDR, many contract workers lost their jobs and their legal resident status. Tens of thousands returned to their home countries under the incentive of a few thousands German marks and a free flight home, but some chose to stay.[20] Although East Germans became used to the idea of foreigner workers as guests and guests only, many of these immigrants established roots in East Germany and continue to contribute to Germany's multiculturalism today. In this sense, reunification stripped Vietnamese immigrants of the relative safety and tolerance they had enjoyed under its regime. With the collapse of the

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[18] David Krenz, "Krawalle in Hoyerswerda 1991: Die Tage der Schande," *Spiegel Geschichte,* September 20, 2016.
[19] Kristin Hermann, "Manchmal wünscht sie sich die DDR zurück," *Berliner Zeitung,* September 27, 2019.
[20] German History in Documents and Images, "Vietnamese Guest Laborers Leaving the GDR (May 31, 1990)," Accessed October 12, 2020.

GDR, they were rendered vulnerable to the wave of right-wing fervor unleashed after reunification. While under the GDR they had political commonality going for them, the official end of Communism in East Germany meant that they no longer shared common ground with ethnic East Germans, and were now vulnerable to discrimination based on their ethnicity.

After seven days, the Hoyerswerda police had failed to suppress the rioting masses and began frantically relocating 230 asylum seekers to safety. Cries of "Germany for Germans! Foreigners out!"—as well even more blatant callbacks to Nazism, like "Sieg Heil!"—filled the streets.[21] One thing had become clear: law enforcement had just given in to neo-Nazi aggression. Power dynamics had shifted dramatically as right-wing extremists claimed the upper hand. A month later, the *New York Times* quoted three young men sitting at a cafe and reminiscing fondly about the events in Hoyerswerda, expressing their desire for an immigrant-free Germany. "Let them stay in the bush," one man proclaimed, to his friends' approval. "This is Germany. They don't belong here," another said. "German women with black babies—can you believe that?"[22] The perceived victory of the neo-Nazi youths had introduced the dangerous idea that it was indeed possible for the right wing to see their dreams of an ethnically pure Germany become reality. Concerned Germans remembered the atrocities committed against millions of Jews when, less than a century prior, the National Socialist party espoused the same ideas. Those atrocities were even fresher in memory in 1991 than they are in 2020. To them, the events in Hoyerswerda were extremely alarming. Overhearing the three men at the cafe, an older man heard their racist talk and confronted them, saying, "You don't know what that kind of ideology leads to! I spent

[21] Thilo Schmidt, "Rassistische Ausschreitungen in Hoyerswerda 1991: Ausländerjagd im rechtsfreien Raum," *Deutschlandfunk Kultur,* September 15, 2016.
[22] Stephen Kinzer, "A Wave of Attacks on Foreigners Stirs Shock in Germany," *The New York Times,* October 1, 1991.

four years at war, and then five years in a prison camp. That's the result of hatred. Don't let it happen again."[23]

As can be expected when extremism is not strongly confronted, it did happen again. Less than a year later, the eastern city of Rostock exploded in violence. It was a cruel dejà vu: attacks on Vietnamese immigrants in an asylum home; chants of "Germany for Germans, foreigners out!"; a crowd of enthusiastic bystanders—this time thousands, not hundreds—applauding the extremists.[24] Once again, it was labeled a pogrom by the press, but little was done about it. Some media sources even drew a comparison between those three nights in 1992 and *Kristallnacht*, or Night of Broken Glass, a nationwide pogrom in 1938 that Hitler's paramilitary forces carried out against Jews. Yet, most of the perpetrators got away with suspended sentences or probation.[25]

A few months later, arson attacks in Mölln and Solingen claimed the lives of five girls and three women.[26] This time, the victims were Turkish. This time, the cities were in western Germany, which is important to note before making any blanket statements about extremism being a purely eastern phenomenon. And this time, they finally spurred the German government to take action and ban radical right organizations.[27] Chapter 18 will delve deeper into governmental attempts to address right-wing extremism.

It soon became clear, however, that ordinary citizens who did not belong to the neo-Nazi underground still fully intended to continue such attacks. As we shall see, right-wing extremism does not come and go at random; it ebbs and flows in response to political, economic and cultural changes. For example, neo-Nazi activity first began to flourish in the late 1970s as a

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[23] Ibid.
[24] *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk,* "Gewaltexzesse in Ostdeutschland: Pogrome gegen Ausländer und Asylsuchende," September 16, 2016.
[25] Sven Felix Kellerhoff, "Rückkehr der Pogrome - als Rostock 1992 brannte." *Welt.* August 22, 2012.
[26] Kevin Costelloe, "Three More Arrests in Worst Neo-Nazi Violence." *Associated Press*. June 4, 1993.
[27] Manthe, "Solingen Arson Attack."

West German phenomenon, when people began to question when and if the Gastarbeiter would return to their countries of origin.[28] These questions sparked tensions and resentments between born-and-raised Germans and immigrants, much as reunification later led to cultural divides between the former East and West. Even sooner than Hoyerswerda and Rostock, on April 7, 1991, East Berlin youths attacked Polish tourists with rocks, rioting against the opening of Polish traffic into former East Germany.[29]

As shown by these events, which are still remembered as some of the most shocking moments in Germany's short history since reunification, right-wing extremism is nothing new. To understand the wave of violence in the early 1990s, we must first examine the sociopolitical climate of that time, particularly in former East Germany where the so-called pogroms occurred most frequently. In the few months following Hoyerswerda, however, 21 percent of East Germans and 38 percent of West Germans polled expressed sympathy for "radical rightist tendencies."[30] Indeed, it bears emphasis that the radical right was initially more visible in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) than in the GDR. This is because the GDR, as a socialist authoritarian regime and a one-party state, considered itself to be officially free of right-wing extremism. Today, however, the far right has firmly planted its roots in former East Germany. That is not to say that western Germany is now free of right-wing hate or extremism, but that it pales in comparison to the former GDR territory. The following chapters will analyze the character of the modern right wing, the precise reasons for this phenomenon and potential ways of combating it.

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[28] Barbara Manthe, "Racist Violence in West Germany Before 1990." *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*. January 20, 2020.
[29] Der Spiegel, "Die schlagen schneller zu," (1991).
[30] Manthe, "Racist Violence in West Germany."

The frequency and vigor of right-wing and neo-Nazi violence since 1990 dispel the notion that Germany's right-wing resurgence was created by the 2015 refugee crisis. Violence against refugees has been recurring throughout the thirty years since reunification. What is new, however, is the mainstream political presence that the right wing has gained in recent years. This thesis will prove that under the guise of protecting German culture from foreign incursion, both political and non-political right-wing groups capitalize on decades-old frustrations and tensions that are particularly prevalent in former East Germany.

From street food to music, the Turkish cultural influence is strong in Germany—as the Italian and Greek influence had been in the decades before until it became an almost indistinguishable element of the German mainstream culture—and ethnic Germans seemed to find little issue with this until Islam became the scapegoat targeted by the current far-right wave. Islam has become the right wing's tool to garner support among Germans who are frustrated with their lot and their government. Islam and integration have emerged as central concerns not only among far-right groups like the AfD, but among establishment politicians as well. Merkel herself stated in 2010 that cultural integration had "absolutely failed" because immigrants had only ever been "supported" and not had anything demanded of them—arguably a euphemistic way of calling them coddled.[31] At the time, her views aligned with those of German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who insisted that immigrants need to integrate by aligning themselves with the "German guiding culture," which is shaped by Judeo-Christian values as well as "humanism and enlightenment."[32] Presumably, she viewed the existence of kebab shops, Turkish markets and mosques as proof of a failed integration experiment, as many ethnic Germans did. However,

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[31] *Der Spiegel,* "Integration: Merkel erklärt Multikulti für Gescheitert," *Politik*, October 16, 2010.
[32] *Spiegel*, "Multikulti Gescheitert."

Merkel went on to defend her 2015 decision to grant asylum to refugees from Africa and the Middle East as "doing what is morally and legally required" of Germany.[33]

There are Germans who both support and oppose this statement. Their opinions are largely dependent on their experiences and their level of satisfaction with the current system. This is where tensions borne of the 1990 *Wende*, or "turning point," as the reunification is called, rise to the surface and tend to manifest themselves in right-wing activity. Circumstances and opinions change in short periods of time, and despite the narrative of successful reunification, it is important to consider the various factors contributing to the rise of groups like AfD and PEGIDA, rather than explaining it away as an unfortunate hateful reaction to the 2015 refugee influx.

After all, divided Germany is not a very distant memory. Many Germans distinctly feel the differences between pre- and post-1990 Germany, and some even yearn for the pre-reunification days. Although borders have been redrawn and physical barriers have come down, economic, political and cultural chasms remain between the former eastern and western halves. Rhetoric and memory play a significant role in the story, perhaps more in Germany than in any of the other countries that accepted refugees in 2015, due to Germany's increasingly distant yet ever-present past of fascism and genocide. Thus, 2015 can be viewed not as the cause of far-right extremism, but as a catalyst in a long-term reaction against immigrants and against the German government as a whole. Far-right extremism has been brewing since before reunification. The way Germany has grappled with its past and addressed—or failed to address—right-wing extremism goes hand in hand with the rise of AfD and other, even more extreme groups. To label Germany's increasing far-right fervor as a recent isolated recent event

[33] Deutsche Welle, "Chancellor Angela Merkel Defends Germany's Refugee Policy as Moral and Legal." *News.* September 3, 2015.

overlooks more deep-rooted problems and the complexities of Eastern Germans' relationships with their history, their government and their compatriots. This thesis will historically contextualize the rise of the AfD and other far-right groups in the East, beginning with a discussion of the reunification of 1990.

4. Legacies of the GDR

The very nature of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) still shapes some Eastern mindsets today, especially for those who were alive before its collapse. "I had a happy childhood under the GDR," remembers Susanne*, now in her sixties and still living in Eastern Germany, "although that was because my parents worked in government service and were loyal to the regime. I remember an incident at university where a girl got in trouble for expressing political ideas that were contrary to the government." The repressive nature of the GDR's socialist regime embedded a deep mistrust and fear of government in its citizens even after the regime collapsed, traces of which may very well inform their political opinions today.

The GDR was also not a very immigrant-friendly place. According to Hermann Kurthen, Werner Bergmann, and Rainer Erb's study of right-wing hate in Germany, the GDR did accept *Gastarbeiter*—guest workers—from socialist "brother countries." However, these Gastarbeiter were usually quite isolated and East Germans' relations with them were indifferent at best, hostile at the worst, so after the GDR was no more, there was nothing to keep relative peace between them. Additionally, in the early 1990s, asylum seekers who entered Germany were distributed across East German hostels to meet a federal quota for each region. Accordingly, the Kurthen study reveals that by 1992, xenophobia was 15 percent more prevalent among East

Germans than West Germans.[34] Clearly, the introduction of these asylum seekers provoked a certain degree of shock to this largely homogenous society, who were used to having foreigners be mere guest workers and not permanent residents who would be beneficiaries of government welfare.

This is not to say that West Germany, the FRG, was a haven for immigrants or a peaceful safe zone. Post-reunification arson attacks were widespread in both East and West. Already in the early 1980s, FRG Chancellor Helmut Kohl had run for re-election on a platform of reducing immigration, pledging to halve the number of Gastarbeiter in Germany.[35] Germany was dealing with high numbers of asylum applications years before reunification, and politicians were already making efforts to shed the image of Germany as an "immigration country." This made it difficult for Kohl to preach tolerance or unity among all people living in Germany once he presided over the reunified country. Merkel, whom Kohl mentored, has had a similarly difficult time altering the narrative around immigration and creating a more welcoming policy that emphasizes immigration as an enrichment, not a detraction.

Another legacy of the GDR and its collapse was the lack of a united identity for the people of former East Germany. Without the isolated community forcibly created by their authoritarian government, *Ossis*, as East Germans are known to their Western counterparts, were somewhat disoriented. Former GDR subjects struggled to feel affinity for their new compatriots under the FRG. After all, they did not have a common religion, political ideology, dialect, or culture to unite them with the Westerners. All they had were the memories and culture of the GDR regime, which many clung to as they faced globalization, multiculturalism, and the unpredictability of capitalism for the first time. Susanne remembers how traumatic reunification

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[34] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 145, 156.
[35] Göktürk et al., *Germany in Transit,* 11-13.

was for some of her compatriots. “The whole socialist system was abolished. People had to try to adjust to it. Marriages and families failed during this time, they couldn’t withstand the changes and pressures. One guy I knew committed suicide.”

What we see here is an identity crisis of sorts. Other scholars have found various ways to describe this crisis, but whether we call it a “local phenomenon of the disappointed after 1989,” or, more specifically, “mental homelessness, organizational orphanhood and loss of political representation,” one thing is clear: the right-wing wave in the early 1990s was a direct result of these complicated feelings.[36] For an example of the effects of identity loss following identification, consider the rise of a far-right group that called itself HooNaRa (Hooligans, Nazis and Racists). HooNaRa formed in the early 1990s around the East German football club Chemnitzer FC as an expression of Eastern German pride and “to remind Germany and Europe that Saxony exists.”[37] Today, similar and associated groups exist such as the NS-Boys and Kaotic Chemnitz, who openly flaunt neo-Nazi sentiments and have been officially designated as part of the extreme right. While not all instances of xenophobia can be explained away as a byproduct of such a unique event as a country’s reunification, in the case of Eastern Germany it is certainly a valid interpretation. Losing one’s identity could lead to extreme means of constructing a new one.

The main difference in right-wing extremism between the FRG and GDR pre-reunification, however, is that in the GDR, it was largely covered up. After all, the idea of neo-Nazis existing within a socialist regime was not compatible with the GDR’s staunch anti-fascist image. Since right-wing extremism purportedly did not exist, it did not feature in the

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[36] Malte Thran and Lukas Boehnke, “The Value-Based Nationalism of PEGIDA,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 3 June 2015, 186.
[37] Maximilian Kreter, “‘HooNaRa’: Football Clubs in (East) Germany and their Problems with Right-Wing Extremism” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right* (June 4, 2019)

GDR's list of concerns, and was thus not addressed. Nazis in the GDR were dismissed as "rowdies" and "Western provocations."[38] The GDR was in no way free of neo-Nazis, it simply refused to acknowledge them. The dominant narrative in the GDR regarding Nazism was that the West were the real Nazi collaborators, while the peaceful and protective socialist regime in the East made no room for fascism. Since it was a Soviet satellite state, the GDR perceived itself as having ended up on the winning side after World War II. In reality, all this brought about was a delay in East German reckoning with its Nazi past. West Germans had been dealing with the repercussions, both logistical and mental, since World War II ended; East Germans, on the other hand, were only forced to properly confront their past—in which Nazis featured prominently—after 1989, once Eastern and Western Germans officially shared a common past and culture.[39]

In fact, the widely-read read news magazine *Der Spiegel* was already bringing attention to East German right-wing extremists in 1991. In an article called "They Strike Faster" they pointed out that as much as the SED (Socialist Unity Party) that ruled the GDR touted themselves as a model of freedom and anti-fascist virtue, the SED itself was an anti-democratic regime. This repressive regime, combined with the GDR's general refusal to acknowledge that there were neo-Nazis among its citizens, made Eastern Germany a "greenhouse" in which right-wing extremism flourished. Even that early on, the *Spiegel* writers picked up on an attitude of disaffection in the East. They cited civil rights campaigner Jens Reich, who believed that "the mood in the east of Germany is similar to the time of the 1929 economic crisis." In other words, the conditions in Eastern Germany in the 1990s were reminiscent of the conditions in which Hitler gained immense popularity. The article was published after a fatal racist attack in which

[38] Constanze Stelzenmüller, "German Lessons Thirty Years After the End of History: Elements of an Education," *The Brookings Institution* (2019).
[39] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall*, 400.

Mozambican Gastarbeiter Jorge Joao Gomondai was thrown out of a tram in Dresden. According to *Der Spiegel*, eighty neo-Nazis heckled mourners at his funeral, shouting "Sieg Heil" and "Ausländer raus" (Foreigners out).[40] The more we delve into attacks of the past and examine the general attitudes of East Germans both before and after the GDR collapsed, the more evident it becomes that 2015 was simply another spike in a deeply rooted pattern, an event that happened to spark long-standing anger and xenophobic hate.

The GDR itself is not fully to blame for the East's tendency toward right-wing extremism, however. To fully understand why today's far right primarily makes its home in the East, it behooves us to delve into the process and effects of reunification. Why, thirty years after the Berlin Wall fell, are the former halves of Germany still so different from each other?

5. "Blooming landscapes": reconstructing the East

On July 1, 1990, Helmut Kohl delivered a televised address to the nation. A year earlier, he had been Chancellor of just West Germany. Now, he presided over a newly reunited Germany and faced the immense challenge of integrating the East into the FRG. That day marked the new currency union of East and West, a matter which was contentious and revealed the shaky ground on which reunification rested. In an attempt to inspire enthusiasm and collaboration between East and West Germans during his 1990 campaign for federal reelection, Kohl assured his audience that "through a joint effort, we will soon be able to transform Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

[40] "Die schlagen schneller zu," *Spiegel* (1991).

and Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia into blooming landscapes once again, where it is worthwhile to live and work."[41] Not only did this statement express Western condescension towards the Eastern states, implying that life there was not worth living, but this speech, particularly the phrase "blooming landscapes," would end up haunting Kohl and become a standard by which the successes and failures of reunification are measured to this day.

At the time of reunification, Eastern landscapes were far from blooming. In a regional economy where manufacturing and industry had dominated, other aspects, like health and the environment, had largely been overlooked. In its heyday, East Germany was a main supplier of industrial technology to several Soviet states. As a result, the Eastern landscape was ravaged by industrial pollution. For decades, "acid rain, corrosive soot and chemical toxins had been fouling its air," posing an invisible threat to workers' health.[42] In 1990, secret environmental records that the GDR had kept under wraps about the state-owned manufacturing companies came to light. They revealed that unequivocal "ecological disasters" had been inflicted on the East, by the East. Inspired by this release of information, *Spiegel* published an article on the city of Bitterfeld in Saxony-Anhalt, which was particularly afflicted by decades-long extreme pollution. An unknown "toxic cocktail" had been brewing in its groundwater, given the immeasurable hazardous waste remaining from the past hundred years. To blame were unregulated open-cast lignite (brown coal) mining, film and paint factories, pesticide plants and a six-kilometer-long open pit mine. At the time, Bitterfeld District Council Chairman August Pietsch reocgnized the situation for how urgent it was: "We are sitting on a time bomb," he said. If Bitterfeld did not receive help soon, there would be disastrous effects on the population's health.

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[41] Source of English translation:
Konrad Jarausch, Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994) 172-174.

[42] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany*, 187.

Before it began to be cleaned up post-reunification, Bitterfeld was widely considered to be the dirtiest city in Europe. In 1990, it was calculated that the city's smokestacks emitted three times more dust and sulfur dioxide than the West German city of Hesse, which is 46 times larger. Particles in the air were known to cause skeletal deformities. Gardens produced inedible fruit. Glass in church windows had to be replaced at an abnormally quick rate because it simply disintegrated in the corrosive air. Factories built during the Third Reich were repurposed after the war—and insufficiently modernized, if at all—and were still in use in 1990. In some places, Bitterfeld positively stank. Toxins in wastewater posed a threat to people's kidneys and livers. At a meeting of the Bitterfeld Chemical Combine, chemist Günter Krieg pleaded, "We only have one life, we still want to have some of it." His worry about a shortened lifespan was no exaggeration; people died of cancer at unusually high rates in Bitterfeld. The Deputy Production Director at the Bitterfeld Electrochemical Combine had a more precise request: "We urgently need Western help."[43] Not only were the dire ecological circumstances a danger for East Germans, but the polluted state of these lands was worrisome to the FRG leadership because it did not bode well for future Western investments in Eastern industries. After all, a prospective Western family would be unlikely to be enticed to move east by murky rivers, smoggy skies and the "sorry state" of Eastern infrastructure.[44]

Enter: Kohl's promise of blooming landscapes. His vision for reunification was most successfully realized in terms of ecological rehabilitation in the East. In July 2014, German weekly news magazine *Stern* published a photo series in which locations throughout the East were pictured before reunification, side by side with photos from 2014. It is incredible how drastically the landscape had changed in less than thirty years. In the Saxony-Anhalt town of

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[43] Christiane Kohl, "Die Leute werden dun im Kopf," *Der Spiegel,* January 8, 1990.
[44]Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany*, 187.

Leuna, for example, a polluted street with a tram rattling through it is now neatly lined with trees. In Bitterfeld, the abhorrently polluted focus case of the *Stern* piece, thick, impenetrable-seeming smog has been replaced by blue skies. South of Bitterfeld, near a town called Wolfen, toxic industrial runoff once poisoned a marsh, ironically named the Silver Sea (Image 2). Today, an idyllic pond populated by water plants has taken its place (Image 3). While the pond is still closed to the public for its level of toxicity, this is a marked improvement from the past, and the area shows signs of hope and life that were nowhere to be found before reunification.[45] These places, plagued by the consequences of an unbridled, industrial command economy, are not yet blooming landscapes, yet they finally show a potential for revitalization.

Though vegetation may be growing back in the East, however, so too is dissatisfaction with the government and animosity toward immigrants. Louisa*, 34, lives in Berlin, Germany's most cosmopolitan city, but has family in Saxony, the Eastern state with the highest prevalence of right-wing extremism. She speaks fondly of the *Aufbau Ost* (Eastern Reconstruction) programs, in particular the environmental clean-up, but warns of a sullen mood in the Eastern states and a dangerous tendency toward hate and resentment. "The landscapes are actually beautiful now," she says, "but you don't want to live there. I know what I'm talking about because I studied in Thuringia" (the state in which Björn Höcke, one of the AfD's most controversial figures, is chairman) "and I still have family there and in the rest of Saxony. Everyone knows the poor, desolate regions in the East where there are no jobs and where a bunch of frustrated people are stuck. Whenever I visit, it never feels quite right. Something terrible is brewing there and I always have a deep urge to get away."

[45] Florian Gossy, Dieter Hoss, "Bitterfeld 1989 - und Jetzt:Von blühenden Landschaften und beleuchteten Wiesen." *Stern,* November 7, 2014.

6. Tensions and contention: early challenges in reunification

Indeed, something was brewing in the East, and was is an issue that has proved to be far more difficult to uproot than toxic waste: right-wing extremism. Unfortunately, the environmental progress made in the East was just about where the unequivocally positive results of reunification ended. Everything else is a matter of opinion and debate, and differs based on whether you ask a *Wessi* or an *Ossi*—a Westerner or an Easterner. Although it was regarded as a victory at the time, much of the reunification project played out in a way that left East Germans feeling disoriented, underappreciated, and ostracized by their new countrymen.

The federal government was determined to assimilate the East to its own economic and social standards, to essentially scrap the East German system. Initially, spirits were high and optimism radiated on both sides. However, for multiple reasons, this mood soon faltered as logistical difficulties became apparent. In March of 1990, the federal government unveiled a plan for the conversion of East German currency—the Ostmark—to West German currency—the Deutschmark. As explained by historian Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, the plan "allowed the East Germans to convert up to 2,000 Ostmarks at a one-for-one rate for the far more valuable Western currency."[46] The rest of their money, however, could only be exchanged at a two-for-one rate; this included pensions and wages. Predictably, East Germans were outraged, calling the plan a "swindle" and taking to the streets to protest against it. At the end of the day, neither exchange rate boded well for the East. Both the one-for-one and two-for-one left Easterners with significantly lower wages than the West: one-third and one-sixth, respectively. The government struggled to reach a compromise between the demands of the federal bank, the *Bundesbank*, and

[46] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany*, 170.

the demands of irate East Germans. After all, a generous exchange rate would mean depreciation of the Deutschmark and of West German stock markets. Eventually, the one-to-one rate the Bundesbank had feared was announced.

While ordinary East Germans had cause to celebrate, economists already foresaw the issues this could cause in terms of market competitiveness for the East and adaptation to a market economy system that Eastern workers had never experienced. The economists' fears would eventually be realized. However, at that moment, the West had given and the East had received, which not only showed Kohl's determination to make his vision of "blooming landscapes" a reality, but also a streak of political bravery for promoting an exchange rate that was viewed skeptically by his supporters, all in the name of reunification. In any case, the notion that the economic contributions of the East were of lower financial value than those of the West was made very clear through this debate.

Friedrich*, 60, grew up in West Germany. He recalls visiting Berlin when the Wall still divided East and West. "Women with strollers and little babies would corner you to exchange money on the black market," he remembers with a laugh. "There was an exchange rate of one to one ultimately, but in Berlin, for a while there was an exchange rate of one to twenty. So you could go for a great meal anywhere in a restaurant for one Westmark." Evidently, both West and East were in agreement that Western money was far more valuable and powerful. The currency debate, rather than equalizing West and East, further entrenched the popular notion that the East was hopelessly behind the West, and created a Western savior complex of sorts.

Along with the tensions created by the currency debate, there was a fundamental difference in how the East and West handled and perceived money. Easterners had to adjust to the idea of privately owned significant wealth that existed in the West. "There was no private

ownership in the GDR," remembers Susanne*, "so parents in East Germany didn't really have inheritances to pass down to their children." This difference in systems and relationship to money already put East Germans at a financial disadvantage compared to their new Western compatriots. It was perhaps the first clue that true reunification and integration of the East into the FRG was a much greater challenge than simply adjusting currency and redrawing borders. Lifestyles and attitude differences due to the extremely different nature of competitive capitalism and collectivist socialism were much more deep-seated hurdles to overcome.

Initially, Kohl and his CDU party enjoyed popularity among the newly incorporated Easterners. Having taken the helm of reunification, he also won the first free election that East Germans had participated in since 1933.[47] Alongside him, Lothar de Maziere briefly became Prime Minister of the GDR, effectively its last leader. De Maziere had a record of protecting dissidents and conscientious objectors, which aligned with the East's proud revolutionary spirit following the fall of the Wall. However, not long after his election, accusations surfaced that the new members of what was essentially the GDR's last government had connections to the Stasi. This was a shock; the Stasi had been the GDR's secret police system and perhaps the most oppressive and feared institution of the GDR. Maziere was included in the accusations, as were many lesser politicians.[48] Clearly, after having endured a dictatorship, East Germans had been left with considerable scars and a lingering distrust of their government. In particular, the Stasi's surveillance methods left people suspicious of their leaders, neighbors, friends, and even family members. Today, right-wing parties and groups exploit these lingering anxieties and skepticism by painting the establishment in a scheming light to gain supporters (see chapter 12).

[47]Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany*, 144.
[48] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany*, 146, 147.

Another point of contention between East and West, which today leads people to call the success of reunification into question, is the economy. Immediately following reunification, Germany confronted its greatest recession since World War II.[49] Although this took its toll on both former halves, East Germany was hit especially hard, as it was already experiencing an intense period of economic readjustment. Even ten years after reunification, the unemployment rate was twice as high for citizens of former East Germany as it was for those who had lived in the FRG all along. By 2018, the gap had shrunk significantly; former East Germany had 7.6 percent unemployment, and the rest of the FRG had 5.3 percent.[50] While this was an improvement worth recognizing, it seems that by 2020, the economy in the East has stagnated again. The remaining inequalities between Eastern and Western job prospects are relatively minor, but nonetheless noticeable and frustrating to East Germans. The Eastern economy seems to no longer be actively growing. As a result, it may seem to some East Germans that reunification was a source of profit for West Germany and a disaster for them. Of course, this ignores the fact that all Germans have been paying taxes to support the integration of the East for decades.

The East indisputably faced great financial struggles due to the economic adjustments of reunification. Political analyst Constanze Stelzenmüller cites the reunification-era job turnover as a major reason for Eastern disorientation and frustration, even thirty years later. With the "communist caretaker state" gone, East Germans experienced competition in a new and daunting way. Stelzenmüller describes observing the *Treuhandanstalt*, a government agency established in 1990 to oversee the privatization of East German corporations. She recalls

[49] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 128.
[50] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall*, 401.

"despondent foremen" working in factories in Berlin which "looked like locations for movies set in the 1950s, or the 1850s."[51]

The East had a lot of technological catching up to do, but rather than being given the chance to attempt it themselves, the FRG's federal government took over, altering and in many ways dismantling the Eastern economy as it saw fit. Thus, the anger and resentment Easterners feel can be understood as a "displacement emotion" for "those who feel unheard, culturally marginalized, disrespected." Rather than trying to meet their new compatriots halfway, West Germans gave them an "egalitarian promise,"—read: "you'll become just like us"—and expected assimilation without complaint. It is hardly surprising, then, that 58 percent of the people polled in the former Eastern states responded that they do not feel more protected from "arbitrary government" than they did before 1989.

Taking a closer look at the *Treuhandanstalt*, or *Treuhand*, it becomes clear that while the West was able to move on from reunification, for the East the wounds are still fresh. A 2020 documentary by the German broadcasting channel ZDF focuses on the Treuhand and why many East Germans still blame it for their grievances today, despite its dissolution in 1994. The documentary features clips in which newly incorporated FRG citizens react in horror to the Treuhand closing Eastern factories and taking over corporations. "It feels like there is an occupying power here," one man said. "They're destroying all businesses." One woman goes so far as to say, "They're going to destroy us all. The whole GDR. Former GDR." Another calls the activities of the Treuhand the "greatest annihilation of productive assets in peacetime." The documentary supports this, citing the GDR as the tenth-strongest industrial nation in the world before its collapse.[52] Indeed, after the Treuhand had finished its work, 80 percent of the East's

[51] Stelzenmüller, "German Lessons."
[52] ZDF, "Das Erbe der Treuhand: Aufbruch und Ausverkauf" directed by Heike Nielsen (2019: Februar Film), Broadcast episode aired October 4, 2020.

production assets went to Western Germany, 14 percent went to foreign investors, and only 6 percent remained with Eastern Germany.[53] This remains an extremely sore spot today for many Easterners, who view the Treuhand situation as woefully mismanaged integration of the East at best, and extortion at worst. Consequently, these frustrations need to be taken into account in terms of understanding Eastern hostility towards immigrants. For example, Saxon Interior Minister Petra Köpping demands that Merkel's government "integrate us first!" instead of focusing on the needs of immigrants.[54]

It likewise bears emphasis that the GDR economy had served as the foundation of Eastern social lives and lifestyles. Often whole families would work for the same manufacturer or company. "It was actually nice," Marita Heissig remembers. She and her entire family worked at Automobilwerk Eisenach in Thuringia (Image 4) and felt at home with their colleagues and the childcare that AwE provided for its workers. Post-reunification, as Easterners became overwhelmed by all the consumer options, and they began to choose used BMWs manufactured in the West over new Wartburgs manufactured at AwE. Wartburg cars had been considered a luxury item in the GDR. Within a year of reunification, however, they were obsolete and the company was shut down. Marita Heissig's husband was one of the first to be let go, followed by 4,500 others from one day to the next. The family still feels the heartbreak of that day. Her relative Jens Heissig explains, "In the GDR it was seen to that you could always work. This concept of unemployment was heretofore unknown to these families."[55] Many felt that the Treuhand took away jobs without sufficiently replacing them. Instead, it enforced the West's competitive capitalist system on the GDR, forcing workers to retrain for jobs they were often not

[53] Kerstin Decker, "Integrationsministerin Petra Köpping: die Seelsorgerin der Sachsen" *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 11, 2018.
[54] Ibid.
[55] ZDF, "Das Erbe der Treuhand."

suited for. While today the federal government praises itself for having objectively raised the average standard of living for Eastern Germans, introducing them to modern technology and systems, those affected by the collapse of the GDR do not feel that such "improvements" made up for the loss of their former lives and identities.[56]

At times, East Germans struggled to keep up with the pace and standards of a market economy. The labor circumstances under the GDR are best summed up by Hämäläinen:

> Having grown up with a controlled system of guaranteed markets and prices, the East German managers' main worry had simply been to meet the quantitative quotas assigned to them; quality mattered less. Now they had to face the new and unfamiliar challenge of trying to sell their products in a new highly competitive market which put a premium on quality.[57]

In other words, not only were East German manufacturers now competing against the often technologically superior products of the West, but they had to unlearn the working mindset of the GDR. The latter ideology had essentially taught them that if there was only one brand of coffee being sold, for instance, it did not matter how good the coffee was; it was the only option, so people would buy it regardless of quality. As Hämäläinen states, the GDR had discouraged economic competition through both taxes and propaganda. This explains the case of the Trabant, the Eastern car brand that today is more or less an endearing yet pitiful symbol of the GDR and the often shoddy quality of products manufactured in a system with little to no market competition. The Trabant, or *Trabi* as it is commonly and affectionately known (Image 5), was a

[56] Stefan Berg, "Goodbye Ossi: The Demise of Eastern German Identity" *Der Spiegel*, August 30, 2013.
[57] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany,* 168-170.

compact, cheaply made car, whose design has remained more or less unchanged since its creation in 1957 up until the Wall fell in 1989. In 1990, it received a new type of engine from Western automobile giant Volkswagen, but the Trabant was discontinued two years later.[58] It simply could not survive in the newly merged Germany, where top-of-the-line Western automobile designs were constantly chosen over the Trabi, which was often likened to a car constructed of plastic or cardboard. Incidentally, thousands of Trabis can still be seen around Germany, but they are a collector's item and are regarded with the same comical intrigue as one observes a rare bird with strange plumage. To be fair, the economic issues East Germans experienced stemmed from the system of the GDR itself, and were not exclusively the product of reunification. However, putting the blame on the West and reunification was likely much easier for East Germans than to acknowledge how ill-prepared they were to handle the pressures and pacing of a capitalist system.

7. After the "Woodstock feeling": lasting East-West divides

In a nationwide poll conducted in January 2019, 29 percent of West Germans and 52 percent of East Germans responded that they thought regional divisions still set Germans apart from each other. The fact that Westerners are less aware of or bothered by such divisions is telling. Although Western Germans did carry a financial burden to reunify Germany, Easterners feel the unintended consequences of reunification more strongly. Nonetheless, these divisions are legitimate, and are perhaps most evident in the stereotypes that West and East continue to perpetuate about each other. The East knows the West as the *Besser-Wessis*—a spin on the

[58] Deutsche Welle, "The Trabant, the Iconic East German Car, Turns 60" *Lifestyle*, November 7, 2017.

German word *Besserwisser*, meaning "know-it-all." To the East, the West is a condescending rich cousin, perhaps even with imperialist tendencies. Some Easterners feel that the way West Germany scrapped the structure and ideals of the GDR and imposed its own system on the Ossis was dismissive and overly critical of their way of life. In the meantime, the West knows the East as the *Jammer-Ossis*, or "whiny Easterners." In other words, the stubborn, less competent yet never satisfied junior sibling. Neither Wessis nor Ossis feel adequately appreciated by the other.

The previous chapter delved into some of the reasons for Eastern frustrations and resentment. However, the West had gripes of its own. Many Westerners are resentful of how much money continues to be pumped into the former East Germany, which estimates show to be an equivalent of two trillion dollars total since 1990.[59] In fact, all Germans, regardless of Eastern or Western origin or location, pay the *Solidaritätszuschlag,* or solidarity surcharge, a monthly tax anywhere from one to two thousand euros depending on financial status. The Solidarättszuschlag was levied to close the gap between East and West in a variety of ways: pensions, unemployment pay, welfare, infrastructural modernization, and much more. Incidentally, the tax is meant to be abolished in 2021 for 90 percent of Germans; it will continue to be paid at a reduced rate by 6.5 percent of Germans, and in full by the wealthiest 3.5 percent.[60] A poll in May 1990 revealed that 80 percent of West Germans felt that they financially suffered from reunification. The West German government in Bonn had assembled an enormous Unity Fund aid package to incorporate East Germany into the FRG, and arranged for infrastructural and industrial experts to help East Germany modernize and transition into capitalist society. Bearing such costs on their shoulders, West Germany entered the 1990s weary and resentful.

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[59] Stephen Beard, "Fall of the Berlin Wall: Itemizing Germany's $2 Trillion Bill for Reunification" *Marketplace.org* (November 5, 2019).
[60] Bundesministerium der Fnanzen, "Fragen und Antworten zur weitgehenden Abschaffung des Solidaritätszuschlags," *Steuern*, November 18, 2020.

Despite the uncertainties and the problems to come, reunification was initially a joyous event. The Wall came down, Germany was one again, a peaceful revolution had taken place. Elsa*, 93, who has lived in the Western half of Germany all her life and lived through not only divided Germany but also the Third Reich, still remembers how emotional reunification was for both Easterners and Westerners. "You can't imagine how we cried and celebrated," she says. She also insists that the words "Ossi" and "Wessi" never entered her vocabulary, and that she was overjoyed to see Germany reunified. It is important to note, however, that Elsa witnessed Germany before it was ever divided, and that reunification likely carried a connotation of revived pan-Germanity for her, especially since she grew up imbued with Nazi propaganda about German supremacy and a Manifest Destiny-style doctrine.

Other Westerners spoke of the East a bit more cynically. "Growing up (in the FRG) we made fun of them," remembers Victoria*, 54. "In general, the perception was that they were controlled. We thought that they were stupid because it was Communism and we always thought, that's not the right system… It was always, 'what can we send them? What can we help them with?' Because they were obviously lacking things." Today, Victoria acknowledges that she was imbued with a different sort of propaganda under the Western capitalist system, and that there were some aspects of the GDR, such as childcare and gender equality, which were superior to their Western equivalents. However, the way she looked down upon the East in the past is quite representative of how Westerners generally felt about Easterners.

Even younger people who never witnessed a divided Germany express prejudices or at least stereotypes about Easterners. Julia, who is 20 and lives in southwest Germany, says, "We think they're a bit more right-wing in the East. We don't really like the way they talk." She laughs and continues, "Some might say you can even tell from the way a person dresses whether

they are from the East." She says this all light-heartedly but adds, "Our perception has also changed because, well, AfD! The young people have changed my view a little bit because they're like me, but the older generation… I think lots of people have left the East and so the people remaining in the East are unhappy with the situation, so they're voting for whoever appeals to them. They'll vote for anything but what we have right now." While Julia feels detached from the reunification era and the East, she says that her father cries every year on November 9, when the Berlin Wall fell, and that his license plate is custom made to bear the year of reunification. Clearly, those who witnessed reunification, even from the West, were at least initially very emotionally invested in it.

Friedrich*, who visited Berlin while the 1990 currency debate was ongoing, recalls a feeling of wonder and excitement when the country was reunified, because a significant part of Germany's shared heritage had been "lost" when the country was split. Many pillars of German culture, from Johann Sebastian Bach's musical compositions, to Berlin's renowned natural history museum, to some of Germany's best universities such as Leipzig and Humboldt, had all been cut off from West Germany, and had seemed to vanish in the closed-off East. Thus, at least in the early 1990s, people on both sides were excited for the changes that were happening—Westerners were relieved to have regained their lost other half, and Easterners were throwing off the yoke of a socialist dictatorship.

Thomas Brussig, an Eastern writer who criticized the GDR through his satirical works, describes the initial joys of reunification as a "Woodstock feeling."[61] He explains that reunification and the fall of the Wall, collectively known as "*die Wende*"—the turning point—was initially an almost "romantic event," but that ultimately, the East paid a hefty price it

[61] Thomas Brussig, "Deutsche Einheit: Was nach dem Woodstock-Gefühl Kam," *Spiegel,* 2019.

had not anticipated. At its core, reunification became "a practice in coldness and devaluation" for Easterners as everything they knew was deemed insufficient and in need of replacement. It is safe to say that most, if not all, Easterners were affected in some way. Countless academics, engineers and other skilled workers lost their jobs and struggled to find new ones in the reunified nation.[62] As mentioned, regions were deindustrialized, thus affecting laborers as well. People's living situations seemed unstable as properties were suddenly threatened with gentrification. This concern, incidentally, continues to echo through many Eastern cities, perhaps most strongly in Berlin where young international entrepreneurs flock to find their own corner in the increasingly cosmopolitan city. Berlin sees frequent protests about rising housing prices, and people who are born and raised there are understandably shaken by how quickly the city seems to change in appearance and demographics.[63]

Not only did Easterners watch their institutions being dismantled and their economies deindustrialized, but they were also expected to adjust seamlessly to Western bureaucracy. Brussig explains that, being a populace with firsthand experience of dictatorship and freshly released from an authoritarian regime, Easterners "are more sensitive to what they see as overreach by German politicians." It is not only the nostalgic Easterners who were happy under the GDR who resent Merkel's government. Even some of those who rallied for the GDR's collapse feel repressed and cheated by the current system; many see themselves as veterans who survived oppression together, and have a tendency to bond with each other over this shared experience. As a result, despite reunification, they may still feel more closely aligned with fellow Easterners than with Westerners and the FRG.

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[62] Peer Pasternack, "East German Universities Ten Years After" *International Higher Education* No. 21 (March 25, 2000), 18.
[63] Elizabeth Schumacher, "Thousands Rally in Berlin over World-Record Property Prices" *Deutsche Welle*, April 14, 2018.

In his razor-sharp commentary, Brussig exposes the Western affinity for capitalism as no better an indoctrination than the East's comfortable familiarity with authoritarian socialism. He posits that "Westerners, to whom free and social market economy, parliamentarianism and federalism were administered through their mothers' breast milk," could not possibly understand the complex feelings that Easterners had towards their former government. Certainly, expecting some degree of assimilation is no tall order. However, it seemed to many Easterners that they were being given one option—adapt or die, essentially—and that if they complained or demanded adjustments, they ran the risk of being dismissed as *Jammer-Ossis*. These factors combined to make Easterners feel like immigrants themselves, strangers in their own land. As explained by Brussig, who was raised in East Berlin, "we had to fight to be recognized in this country, we have all that in our past, and it wasn't pretty." Bearing this all in mind, it becomes clearer why some Easterners feel resentful of the immigrants that the German government admits today, and why they are more likely than Westerners to support the AfD, who demand that immigrants fully assimilate to German culture.[64]

The difficulty Easterners had in adapting to the market economy's labor standards led many Westerners to write them off as lazy, inefficient and lacking in stereotypically German attributes like punctuality, reliability, and diligence. In reality, it took significant mental retraining to refocus one's attention to quality rather than quantity, to competition and an ever-changing market rather than collaboration, comradeship, and stability. Easterners were being chastised for methods and traits that they had been praised for under the slower-paced, uniform labor style of the GDR.[65] The impatient attitude of the West did nothing to encourage Eastern integration either. With these factors at play, it turned out that the largest challenge in

[64] Schumacher, "Rally in Berlin."
[65] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany,* 168.

rebuilding the Eastern economy was not money but the mindset change required of Easterners to be able to perform in the Western economic system.

Louisa*, 34, who was a child when the Wall fell, says that "people simply didn't feel like they were on board anymore. Many didn't have any opportunities for advancement, others had the opportunities but didn't use them and couldn't keep up. So, they were gradually overtaken by highly motivated immigrants. Those Easterners couldn't stand it, so they turned foreigners into a Bogeyman." Today, Louisa is a social worker in Berlin and works with young refugees who came to Germany during the 2015 refugee influx. She applauds the welcoming system in Berlin but says that in Saxony, where her family lives, there is little to no infrastructure dedicated to integrating immigrants. Clearly, there are Easterners still in denial of the fact that refugees and immigrants are increasingly contributing to Germany's workforce, often in areas where Easterners failed to adapt.

8. An imperfect union: evaluating reunification

While Kohl spoke in 1990 as if the ideal of the blooming landscapes would materialize in the next few years, in 2010 economic journalist Christoph Keese predicted that it would only take shape after fifty years of reunification, if then. He recalls how disheartening this realization was. "Most people, myself included, really thought there was magic at work and that this could succeed within five years. But after two years it was clear this could not work in five years. And that's when a strong disillusionment set in. And frustration. And a belief that it would never work."[66] Disenchantment with Kohl's sweeping promise became abundantly clear even sooner

[66] Klaus Wiegrefe, "Kohl's Lie About the Blooming Landscape, " *Spiegel Politics*, May 26, 2018.

than the initially imagined five-year deadline. When Kohl visited the Saxony-Anhalt town of Halle in 1991, he was pelted with eggs and heckled by attendees. The facade of the seamlessly unified nation was slipping from the start, and, as humiliating as the Halle visit may have been for Kohl, it was ordinary Germans who suffered the consequences of reunification daily.

As if to add insult to injury, after leaving office in 1998 Kohl admitted that he had not only glossed over the dire condition of the East with his "blooming landscapes" rhetoric, but that he now considered his optimistic statement in itself to be a "mistake." Later on, he admitted that it was not even a mistake, but an outright lie. According to transcripts of a recorded conversation between Kohl and a confidant, at the moment in time, he had been hesitant to call out the ailing Eastern economy for what it was. In a later memoir, he again addressed his ambitious campaign promise and confessed that he had been misled by GDR propaganda about the true economic strength of the socialist East before reunification. He had failed to see the cracks in the Eastern system and had thus insufficiently prepared West Germany to take on an unexpectedly large burden. Though Kohl comfortably won the federal election 1999, and the CDU—today Merkel's party—continued to dominate reunification politics, the promise of blooming landscapes was quickly shattered.

It is hardly surprising, then, that national-socialist clubs called *Kameradschaften* formed in the former East after reunification, particularly around the turn of the millennium. A notable one was founded by Lutz Kronenberger in Gorbitz, a bleak, socialist high-rise studded district southwest of Dresden. Groups like Kronenberger's united around common frustrations like the widespread unemployment and impoverishment in the East, which fostered "a dangerous mix of emotional socialism and boy scout romanticism."[67] At that point, the rise of right-wing

[67] *Spiegel,* "Die schlagen schneller zu.".

extremism and neo-Nazism were driven by a longing for the communist order that had crumbled and the current struggles Easterners now faced as a result. The strong nostalgic element of the Kameradschaften, combined with the sometimes very tangible wounds that reunification left on many East Germans make them a part of a distinctly Eastern right-wing movement. Certainly, it is misleading to imply that violence is endemic to a certain region. However, the failed promises of reunification and its lasting impact have bred a unique right-wing movement in the East which distinguishes it from the West. The at times drastic measures taken in the East to express or remedy their grievances—such as marching in the streets with Islamophobic signs or voting for parties espousing Hitler-reminiscent rhetoric—are an Eastern phenomenon, attributable to the distinct difficulties the East faced. The East experienced reunification differently and to a more negative degree than the West did, so it stands to reason that Eastern right-wing activity would take on different and/or stronger forms than in the West.

As detailed in Hämäläinen's study of the flawed process of reunification, the core problem was West Germany's general misunderstanding and "lack of foresight" regarding the Eastern condition. Some West German intellectuals viewed the GDR as a "successful socialist experiment," a notion which seemed to be supported by the fact that it was considered the most successful economy of the USSR's bloc. However, the GDR's relative economic strength did not translate into East German satisfaction with their government. As Hämäläinen explains, "to them it was no consolation that they were better off than the poverty-stricken Poles or the Soviets—they were comparing their lot with their fellow Germans in the [FRG]."[68] The Western intellectual perception of the East German conditions, then, was out of touch with Eastern concerns and aspirations. Coupled with the indescribable pollution taking place (which was

[68] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany,* 58.

revealed only after reunification), it is clear that the West's understanding of the East was profoundly flawed. With these Western misconceptions in mind, it stands to reason that the FRG thought economic modernization was the key to reunification. However, the false conviction that what East Germans wanted above all was the material plenitude of the Western capitalist system above all led to the West overlooking the Eastern desire for self-determination and recognition of their own distinct identity.[69]

The FRG leadership also overestimated (or, in their defense, perhaps they had no way of predicting) the degree of Eastern enthusiasm about the West. While many Easterners looked forward to receiving economic aid and new consumer opportunities from the West, they were also wary of property seizure and economic destabilization; as it turns out, their fears about both were justified. East Germans remembered the property confiscations that occurred after World War II. Specifically, they recalled the Communist expropriation of some properties belonging to people now living in the West. Hence, they were insistent that "new injustices should not replace old ones."[70] Furthermore, going back to the idea of lost identity and lack of common ground, it is important to remember that part of the motivation to unite Germany was to disentangle both East and West from any potential Cold War conflicts.[71] A reunified Germany meant that East Germany would no longer be dragged into Soviet affairs, especially as the Soviet Union itself teetered on the edge of collapse. However, once the Soviets and communism were out of the picture, internal divisions and inequalities surfaced. For some, the German government became the new enemy, especially as Easterners saw issues like the exchange rate debate play out. The same is true today; since Germany is in peacetime, there is neither a common enemy to unite against, nor a single unifying force to rally around. Thus, internal inequalities have become a

[69] Ibid, 59.
[70] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany,* 130.
[71] Ibid, 229

source of ire for Easterners who feel that their circumstances are still not ideal, thirty years after joining the FRG. l

Reunification was certainly successful to the extent that it reconfigured borders and accomplished the mammoth task of, at least on paper, fusing East and West Germany back together. That said, the degree of integration (be it economic, political and cultural integration) did not meet expectations. Certainly, we can acknowledge the obvious triumphs of reunification. The collapse of a repressive, unsustainable, and dysfunctional regime meant that East Germans could suddenly enjoy greater freedom of speech, expanded consumer options, and be part of a more culturally pluralistic and cosmopolitan world. Their purchasing power was increased, having received "real money" as some called it. Of course, these are all deemed successes by Western standards. In the perspective of some Easterners, they were unwelcome and alarming changes.

At the end of the day, though, Easterners were able to start enjoying the benefits of a welfare state. Hämäläinen puts it best, pointing out that "the very same things that attracted masses of refugees to Germany also ensured that the unemployed East German multitudes did not live in dire destitution."[72] In fact, it is the same thing that continues to draw refugees to Germany today, and which Germans are becoming increasingly protective of. Having discussed the logistical issues behind reunification, it is crucial that we now examine arguably the largest barrier to complete reunification: the inability of East and West to see each other as a united, single people. Yes, some landscapes in the East are certainly thriving in comparison to their pre-reunification state. However, as evidenced by the existence of AfD and PEGIDA, relations

[72] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany,* 242.

between Germans and their government, not to mention relations between Germans and their society's increasing cultural pluralism, can hardly be classified as blooming.

9. Misunderstandings and Nostalgia

Reunification involved successes, but also broken promises and uncertainties. Ultimately, it bred resentment on both sides. The process itself, as well as its after-effects, created cultural divides that left a disoriented and undervalued populace seeking vindication.

East Germany joined the FRG with doubts and uncertainties. Coupled with Helmut Kohl's government's misunderstandings of what the East wanted, this set up the country for decades of resentment and made it near impossible for East and West to attitudinally become one. Although the initial mood after the collapse of the Berlin Wall was celebratory, as Hämäläinen observes, "the party could not last forever."[73] Political scientist and East German specialist Klaus Schröder examines the "costs" of reunification. He notes how some even question whether the true cost of reunification can be known, or whether the government is hiding the true figures. Schröder primarily speaks about the financial aspect of reunification, but emphasizes that money "was only half the story. We should have also paid attention to the fact that this reunited nation would need to start sharing common values. Back then, everybody thought that these problems would go away if you threw money at them. That's proved not to be true." This has led a surprising number of Easterners to believe they would be better off if the GDR had never collapsed, a phenomenon commonly known as *Ostalgie* (nostalgia, but for the East—the *Ost*).

[73] Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany,* 224.

Lutz R., who lives in Berlin and experienced reunification in his early thirties, is a textbook example of an Easterner with Ostalgie. He claims that he felt a greater sense of freedom under the GDR than under Merkel's democratic government. He goes so far as to say that he felt reassured by the existence of the Berlin Wall, echoing the propagandistic name the GDR coined for it: the "anti-fascist protection rampart."[74] Even thirty years after the Wall's collapse, Lutz yearns for the East's former border and claims that it was not there to trap East Germans but "to protect us from the West."[75] To Westerners who never experienced the difficult transition from GDR to FRG, Lutz's attitude seems ludicrous; indeed, the East Germans who fled the GDR would agree with the West. However, a 2009 survey revealed that nearly half of those polled would agree with Lutz; while 60 percent said that the GDR was an *Unrechtsstaat*, or unjust state, the remaining 40 percent said that it was not.[76] To them, the fall of the Berlin Wall signified the end of a life of peace and order, not the beginning of freedom.

What about the freedom to dissent and disapprove? The abundance of goods and choices in a capitalist society? "Freedom is relative," Lutz R. argues. He claims that in East Germany, he was able to complain to his boss without fear of being fired, and that in reunified Germany, this freedom to express one's thoughts does not exist. "In East Germany, I could say what I thought. Not about the government, of course, but then I didn't have anything against the government." To this, one could respond that perhaps Lutz had it easy, that he did not have neighbors spying on him or have to spend a stint in the Hohenschönhausen prison as countless East Germans did. Or, perhaps he was so indoctrinated with the GDR's fervent anti-West propaganda that, thirty years later, he remains brainwashed. However, could it not simply be that some people feel satisfied

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[74] Stelzenmüller, "German Lessons."
[75] Deanne Corbett, "Breaking Down the Wall in the Head," *Deutsche Welle,* October 3, 2004.
[76] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall,* 314.

with the familiar and jarred by what is new and different? Certainly that is part of what drives some who march with PEGIDA today.[77]

Historian Hope Harrison points out that even those who marched in the streets and protested for reform in the GDR were not necessarily advocating reunification. It is important to remember that "not all of the East Germans calling for change wanted a Western-style system of democracy and capitalism."[78] Some simply wanted an improved socialist system; these people would have felt robbed by the collapse of the Wall and the reunification that turned their lives upside down in many ways. The fact that Lutz's nostalgia for the pre-reunification era is so strong, and that he is not alone in these sentiments, further underscores the point that Easterners still do not feel quite at home in the FRG.

Harrison goes so far as to say that Easterners feel as though they have been colonized by the West and by capitalism.[79] This is a bold statement, considering the celebratory mood that characterized reunification in its early days. However, it is true that not all East Germans were thrilled to be incorporated in a system that was economically, politically, and culturally alien to them. Many simply had wanted a regime change in the sense that they wanted the Stasi to be abolished and the GDR to become less authoritarian. Consequently, for those who still wanted to keep their familiar socialist system, this unexpectedly drastic upheaval of the lives they knew was unwelcome. At that point "the improved infrastructure and air quality in the east did not always compensate for these sentiments." Harrison's analysis mirrors Schröder's in that both scholars identify the government's underestimation of East Germans' bond to the GDR. In the narrative of capitalism triumphing over socialism, of free speech and revolution winning out over oppression, it was easy to forget that many, if not most, East Germans had never known a life

[77] Corbett, "The Wall in the Head."
[78] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall,* 323.
[79] Ibid, 136.

outside the GDR, and that its collapse was traumatic to a certain degree. Having their entire way of life devalued and deemed outmoded did not sit well with everyone.

As Harrison explains, even the act of calling the GDR an *Unrechtsstaat*, or "state without the rule of law"—as the dominant discourse since reunification tends to do—is perceived as an insult by Eastern Germans. Many feel that this narrative condemns and invalidates the lives they lived, which in turn alienates them and breeds further Ostalgie. Indeed, Harrison continues, while Westerners speak of the Unrechtsstaat, many Easterners look back fondly on living "a life of good within the bad state," with the Wall as "a backdrop to their everyday lives."[80] In oral histories, subjects reminisced about happy childhoods in the Young Pioneers socialist group; having Soviet children as penpals; and feeling fortunate to live in an anti-fascist state, away from the exploitative, crime-ridden West. Clearly, perceptions of and experiences manufactured by the GDR span a wide spectrum and continue to shape East-West relations and tensions today.

What about immigrants? What part do they play in this story? After all, the focus of this thesis is the rise of right-wing extremism that, though its roots were planted in reunification, was catalyzed by the 2015 immigrant influx. As the cases of Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen and Mölln show us, reunification also unleashed a wave of right-wing extremism and violence. Immediately after the Wall came down and the GDR collapsed, East Germans were welcomed with open arms in the West. However, the mounting pressures and difficulties of reunification that we have discussed: unemployment in the East, rising taxes for the West, cultural differences and great misunderstandings—collectively "brought to a halt tendencies towards postnationalist attitudes and more cultural pluralism."[81] It was as if each individual German was in a survival

[80] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall*, 15, 325, 347.
[81] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 261.

mode of sorts. As a result, working to patch up East-West misunderstandings, as well as welcoming immigrants, slid down their list of priorities.

This set of circumstances, from a destabilized East to lingering East-West tensions to hostility towards foreigners, created the ideal environment for a reinvigorated right-wing movement. So, when the inevitable right-wing wave occurred, it was led by a group that cleverly capitalized on those circumstances to promote its own agenda: the AfD.

10. Not since the Nazis: the rise and agenda of the AfD

Among the slew of events that signaled the reemergence of right-wing extremism since 2015, the rise to prominence of the AfD was the most significant. It gained momentum just as Germany grappled with its largest population boost in decades, receiving enough votes in 2017 to enter Parliament as the largest far-right party since Adolf Hitler's Nazi party.[82]

The AfD is an ever-changing party. It began as a Eurosceptic populist party in 2013, and was highly organized and goal-oriented from its inception.[83] In 2013, the AfD missed the minimum vote quota to enter the *Bundestag*, the Parliament, but only by 0.3 percentage points. Evidently, it was off to a strong start and had already garnered much attention.

The party soon veered further to the right, particularly in 2015 when chemist and businesswoman Frauke Petry took the helm as party chair.[84] Her antagonistic relationship with founder Bernd Lucke resulted in his leaving the party, lamenting that it had "fallen irretrievably

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[82] Stefan Trines, "Lessons from Germany's Refugee Crisis: Integration, Costs, and Benefits," *World Education News and Reviews*, May 2, 2017.
[83] Günther Lachmann, "Enttäuschte CDU-Politiker gründen Wahlalternative," *Welt: Politik,* October 4, 2012.
[84] Alex Pearson, Nancy Isenson, "Who is Frauke Petry, the AfD's Controversial Co-Chair?" *Deutsche Welle,* September 25, 2017.

into the wrong hands" with Petry's xenophobia-based rise to power.[85] Indeed Petry's takeover can be understood as the AfD's shift to the right, a shift that continued through the party's entrance into the Bundestag. Ironically, even Petry, who was dubbed "Adolfina" by a French news magazine and notoriously said in a 2016 interview that border guards should shoot those crossing the border illegally, left the party due to clashes with its even further right-wing members.[86] In the lead-up to the 2017 Bundestag election, Petry advocated a more moderate approach in order to expand the AfD's voting base. She even suggested forming closer ties with the establishment party CDU/CSU, an idea which, among others, got her moderate platform rejected by fellow party members. Once the AfD broke into the Bundestag in 2017, capitalizing on lost CDU votes in the East, Petry resigned.[87]

Enter the most provocative figure of the AfD to date: Björn Höcke (Image 6). With piercing blue eyes and a mischievous smile, Höcke's elvish appearance, fiery speeches, and passionate gesticulations have become synonymous with Germany's far-right resurgence. Originally a history teacher from West Germany, he is now the leader of the AfD in the Eastern state of Thuringia. From defending Holocaust deniers, to denouncing Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe as a "monument of shame," to his use of phrases like "We're taking back our country!", Höcke's relatively short time in the party has seen no shortage of controversies.[88] In 2017, in response to such inflammatory remarks, several party leaders decided to expel Höcke from the party, as he was giving it a reputation of racism and Nazi-reminiscent

[85] Deutsche Press Agentur, "AfD Founder Resigns Over "Xenophobic Power Grab" *The Local*, July 9, 2015.
[86] Thomas Meaney, "The New Star of Germany's Far Right," *The New Yorker*. October 3, 2016.
[87] Carl Berning, "Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – Germany's New Radical Right-wing Populist Party" *DICE Report*, 15.4, Winter 2017: 16-19.
[88] *BBC,* "Germany's AfD: How Right-Wing is Nationalist Alternative for Germany?" *News,* February 11, 2020

ideology. Even Frauke Petry called his "unauthorized solo actions" "a burden to the party."[89] However, Höcke had already established an iron foothold in the state of Thuringia, where an arbitration court rejected the AfD executives' request for expulsion.[90] As of 2021, this scandal has not discouraged Höcke in the slightest. He continues to make appearances at right-wing rallies and spout radical commentary.

To get an idea of why Höcke alarms many Germans and why the German intelligence service deems him an extremist, one need only consider an interview he gave with broadcaster *Zweit Deutsches Fernsehen* in 2019. Several AfD party members were read quotes from Höcke's book, *Nie Zweimal in denselben Fluss* (*Never Twice in the Same River*), and asked to identify whether the author was Höcke or Adolf Hitler. Considering that his book contains terms used almost exclusively by the Nazis, such as *Lebensraum*—the term for Hitler's imagined living space that he wanted to conquer for Germany—and *Reinigung*, meaning cleansing or purification, it is unsurprising that the AfD members were unable to distinguish between Höcke's words and Hitler's. Several politicians answered that they had read neither *Mein Kampf* nor Höcke's book. Höcke was shown the footage, and to this, he replied, "A shame, actually."[91] Soon after, he refused to continue the interview and left bitterly. The significance of this interview is not only that it exposed how Höcke's ideas are indistinguishable from those of Germany's most abhorred historical figure. Also noteworthy is the fact that prominent politicians are relatively unbothered by it. This tolerance of alarming right-wing ideas, even if they did not directly speak in support of them, is what allows people like Höcke to continue unbounded.

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[89] Deutsche Welle, "Germany's Right-Wing AfD Seeks to Expel State Leader Over Holocaust Remarks," *News*, February 13, 2017.
[90] Lisa Hänel, "AfD's Björn Höcke: Firebrand of the German Far Right," *Deutsche Welle,* February 7, 2020.
[91] ZDF, "AfD-Abgeordnete können Höcke nicht von Hitler unterscheiden," *ZDF Politik,* September 15, 2019.

In 2015, the same year masses of refugees were welcomed into Germany, a group of AfD members formed Der Flügel (The Wing) an even more extreme right-wing offshoot centered around Höcke. The group was founded in reaction to Merkel's decision to send economic aid to Greece, despite an earlier pledge she had made that Germany would not directly support its fellow EU members financially. In March of 2020, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution deemed Der Flügel an extremist group, which led top AfD leadership to demand its dissolution. Der Flügel pledged that it would comply with this directive, and its online presence appears to have vanished. Nevertheless, the government continues to monitor its activity for any undercover resurgences.[92] While the government is keeping a close eye on the AfD, so far, this has not interfered with the AfD's popularity or its ability to reach a wide audience via its xenophobic platform.

11. Imagining an alternative for Germany

Certainly some of the AfD's ability to spread its ideology can be attributed to its attractive anti-establishment image, staged as it may be. However, criticizing the CDU for its elitism is by no means the only key to the AfD's success.

A certain amount of credit also has to be given to their manifesto, which can tend to be overlooked in the face of the AfD's aggressive posters and social media campaigns. The manifesto consists of 14 chapters, addressing typical political issues such as education, housing, the economy, foreign policy and the environment. Whether the AfD is sincerely concerned about all of the issues it mentions in the manifesto, or whether the manifesto includes them in its

[92] Christine Rießling, "Nach 'Flügel'-Auflösung: Verfassungsschutz beobachtet weiter," *Mitteldeutscher Runkfunk Aktuell,* May 7, 2020.

platform to craft an image of political legitimacy (perhaps to defend themselves against accusations that they are purely an anti-Islam party) is open to interpretation. In its preamble, the AfD claims to be made up of "liberals and conservatives" and to offer a political alternative, separate from the establishment. Another notable detail is its invocation of "the two revolutions of 1848 and 1989" which the AfD cites as a main motivator. The significance of that statement will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.[93]

The official party platform itself is multi-faceted. As an anti-establishment party, the AfD advocates for referenda and a shift to a model of direct democracy. The party also embraces typical conservative initiatives such as looser gun control, increased law enforcement, stronger border control, and prioritizing Christian values. While the party promotes government decentralization in some aspects, it also encourages increased social security for families with children. However, the most salient sections of the manifesto concern culture and immigration. The manifesto has a specific clause about "preserving German culture," which rhetorically implies that German is under siege by foreign actors. Other sections advocate "German as Predominant Culture Instead of Multiculturalism" and "The German Language as Focal Point of Our Identity." Islam in particular features prominently: in fact, the word "Islam" appears 37 times. Specifically, the AfD argues that Islam's perceived proliferation in Germany is causing damage to German culture and values.

While in 2015, political scientist Kai Arzheimer found that there was no evidence of nativism or populism in the party's manifesto, in 2016 the manifesto was amended to contain a subsection titled "Islam Does Not Belong in Germany."[94,95] Analysis of the AfD's literature and

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[93] Alternative für Deutschland, "Manifesto for Germany: The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany," *Alternative für Deutschland,* 2017.
[94] Kai Arzheimer, "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" *West European Politics* 38.3 (2015): 535-56.
[95] Heather Horn, "The Voters Who Want Islam Out Of Germany," *The Atlantic,* May 27, 2016.

manifesto across time allows us to chronicle the party's steady radicalization. The fact that they amended this document to target one specific religious group is significant. In subsection 7.6, "Islam and its Tense Relationship with our Value System," the AfD cites the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam as evidence of the incompatibility of Islamic and German values. In this way, they imply that people who practice Islam or come from a predominantly Muslim country have some sort of moral deficiency which renders them unfit to live in Germany. Such generalizations form the backbone of much of the AfD's argument against immigration. The manifesto includes many Islam-focused demands, such as banning full-body veiling in public places, ending foreign sponsorship of mosques in Germany, closing Quranic schools, ending "special rights" for Muslim students, and forbidding Islamic organizations from gaining public body status.

Here, time is on the party's side. Due to Germany's past, the government has for years been on high alert for signs of anti-Semitism or explicit neo-Nazism. By officially targeting the values of a religion, not a specific ethnicity, the AfD seeks to dodge accusations of overt racism.[96] Enough years have passed since the fall of the Third Reich that the AfD has been able to craft its own platform, beginning with euroscepticism and shifting to open Islamophobia, and not be instantly associated with Hitler. The AfD is generally not considered to be a direct successor to Hitler, the way right-wing groups were in pre-reunification West Germany. After all, the number of living witnesses to the Holocaust and Third Reich is diminishing every day. Many of Germany's voters do not bear the burden of historical guilt that their parents and grandparents have shouldered for the last eight decades. Thus, they are likely to feel distanced enough from

[96] AfD, "Manifesto for Germany."

that past to view the AfD as a true revolutionary party, with a new concept and a fresh approach to politics.

Anti-immigration sentiment permeates several sections of the manifesto. The AfD believes the government has been neglecting to differentiate between refugees and "irregular migrants," that is, people who are not in immediate danger and thus do not deserve asylum status. Their language implies a conspiratorial foreign takeover and the degradation of German culture and values if "mass migration" continues to be left unchecked. The manifesto also stresses the importance of full cultural integration, emphasizing that "integration is more than just learning the German language." This is where the issue of integration intersects with the AfD's fixation on Islam. The implication is that Muslim immigrants are threatening German culture by practicing their own religion and allowing their children to speak Turkish or Arabic, for example, in public. Along with limiting immigration and enforcing integration measures, the manifesto also calls for "transparency in the costs of immigration" and "no disguising and hiding of immigrant crime." This reveals the AfD's attempts to inspire paranoia about government deception, and to target Merkel for allowing, even encouraging, this cultural threat through her policies that foster multiculturalism. [97]

In reading the manifesto, the xenophobia and feelings of cultural superiority do come through, but it is not an explicit manifesto of hate, nor does it seem to condone neo-Nazi violence. However, in the speeches and individual statements of AfD members such as Petry and Höcke, one encounters threatening messages that are far more radical than anything mentioned in their official platform. In this way, journalist Emily Schultheis observes, as the AfD continues to radicalize, it is "constantly pushing the boundaries of what's considered politically acceptable."[98]

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[97] AfD "Manifesto for Germany," 62, 63.
[98] Emily Schultheis, "Germany's Right-Wing Populists Push Boundaries in a Polarized Society," *Institute of Current World Affairs,* 2019.

Therein lies perhaps the greatest danger of the AfD: it newly legitimizes racist and xenophobic ideology that has been both legally and de facto banned in Germany since the defeat of the Nazis. The AfD seeks to be the voice for a wide spectrum of discontented Germans seeking validation as well as a scapegoat for their frustrations. Thus, with this carefully crafted strategy, the party garners a much higher level of support in the Eastern states. For, in the East (for all the reasons stated above) such feelings are much more prevalent than in the West.

12. Appealing to the East: AfD image and rhetoric

The AfD strikes a balance between the polished and the populist. To further distance itself from the establishment in character as well as in ideology, the AfD portrays itself as the everyman's party, the party for the working-class and the neglected. This image is largely fabricated. Although it is a nationalist populist party, the AfD's leadership is not as grassroots as one might expect. It includes university professors and is thus not too different from Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU).[99] However, with the departure of founder Alexander Gauland in 2019, the AfD chose tradesman Tino Chrupalla to replace him in Parliament. Chrupalla, who worked as a house painter and interior decorator before entering politics, explained that the AfD had "taken great care not to elect an academic" so as to appeal to a wider voting base and differentiate itself from mainstream politics.[100] This approach is typical of populist parties seeking to appeal to a middle- or lower-class voting base and to galvanize voters through shared feelings of resentment and bitterness. Unsurprisingly, this strategy is proving to

[99] Bering, "Alternative für Deutschland."
[100] Judith Mischke, "A Far-Right German Wolf Dons Sheep's Clothing," *Politico,* December 1, 2019.

be effective, particularly when combined with rhetoric that caters specifically to the Eastern states.

While this thesis is primarily concerned with the conditions in East Germany and why reunification planted the seed for today's right-wing extremism, it is important to reiterate that the AfD is not a uniquely Eastern phenomenon. In fact, according to journalist Christian Bangel, the xenophobia and enthusiasm for the AfD we see in the East "comes out of the ideological reserves of the West."[101] However, just as the AfD leaders present themselves as everyman's party while belonging to the highly educated class, they also claim to embody the revolutionary spirit of former East Germany while three-fifths of its membership comes from former West Germany.[102]

During the 2017 parliamentary elections, most of the votes the AfD gained were votes they poached from Merkel's party, the CDU, especially in the former East German states.[103] This was not the first time the CDU suffered electoral losses due to its benevolent politics. In the early 1990s, the small, far-right Republikaner party formed after voters defected from the CDU/CSU because of the state of Bavaria's willingness to provide financial aid to newly incorporated East Germany.[104] It seems that whenever large amounts of aid are given to a populace that is deemed 'the other,' certain groups perceive this to be a sign of neglect of the 'true' German people. Back in the early 1990s, 'the other' was East Germany; today, Easterners have in many ways (though not all) ceased to be 'the other' and indeed feel as though they have earned the right to criticize the government for a benevolent policy similar to that which had benefited them thirty years prior. Interestingly, the CDU is not the only party to lose voters to the AfD. As traditionally

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[101] Mische, "Far-Right WOlf.".
[102] Christian Bangel, "Es ist auch euer Höcke," *Zeit Online*, 2019.
[103] Bering, "Alternative für Deutschland."
[104] Nicole Berbuir, et al., "The AfD and Its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Party for Germany?" *German Politics*, 24.2 (2015): 154-78

left-wing parties like the SPD (Germany's second-largest party) increasingly become associated with the establishment, they no longer attract protest voters—those now go to the AfD.[105]

The AfD's rhetoric, best understood through their campaign materials, differs depending on whether it is directed to an Eastern or Western audience. In the Western state of Bavaria, for example, the party circulated a poster that read: "Burkas? We prefer bikinis." In Duisburg, a Western city, billboards read: "End Asylum Fraud!" and: "Stop Islamization." In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the party's fear-mongering is on full display with a large billboard that urges Germans to vote AfD "so that Germany is not destroyed!" These signs all refer to the AfD's platform which centers around expelling a perceived Islamic threat from Germany. Walking through an Eastern city, by contrast, one still sees the standard Islamophobic posters but with the addition of another rhetorical layer which is unmistakably crafted to appeal to frustrated and disenchanted Eastern Germans. The characteristic blue and red posters feature slogans invoking Eastern tropes of liberation such as "The East Rises Up," "Peaceful Revolution with the Ballot," and "1989-2019: Be There When History is Made."[106] At rallies, posters announce a "Revolution 2.0" and are echoed by chants of "We are the people!"—a slogan widely known from the peaceful protests in 1989 against the un-democratic rule of the GDR. In the East, the AfD's campaign material is a direct appeal to the reunification era and to enduring East-West- divides.

Given the complex relationship between East and West Germans today, and the relatively high level of dissatisfaction on the Eastern side, it is obvious why the AfD chooses and succeeds with this strategy. A 2019 poll by German news channel *Das Erste* asked participants from various political parties to indicate the level of their "approval of developments since

[105] James F. Downes, Felix Wiebrecht, "East v. West? The Internal Battle Within the Far Right in Germany" *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right* (June 19, 2019)
[106] Emily Schultheis, "AfD Lays Claim to East German Identity," *Institute of Current World Affairs,* 2019.

reunification." Every party except those from the AfD were overwhelmingly satisfied with reunification. Among those who identified themselves as affiliated with the AfD, 56 percent were unsatisfied. The AfD also had the highest percent (by a significant margin) of respondents who concurred with the statements: "The GDR state did more for its citizens" and "East Germans are still second-class citizens in many ways."[107] Evidently, the AfD has succeeded in capitalizing on Easterners' feelings of resentment and sense of insecurity since reunification and used these feelings to drive a xenophobic and anti-establishment agenda. It has convinced an ever-growing number of Germans that their government does not care for them.

Even if AfD policy-makers do not yearn for the GDR themselves, they appeal to Ostalgie to attract supporters who were either alive during that era or have a rosy-eyed view of it without ever having experienced it. The latter group is likely so dissatisfied with their situation that they see this imagined GDR as an alternative that they are willing to accept. If it is not possible to go back to the GDR, then the AfD will do just as well. The AfD did not need any refugee influx to secure their support—it bears emphasis that the party was founded two years before the 2015 migrant wave. That said, the 2015 refugee influx certainly helped the AfD take further advantage of the bitterness and resentment that had lain relatively dormant since 1990.

While he sympathizes with Eastern frustrations, Eastern satirist Thomas Brussig (see chapter 7) makes a point of discrediting the AfD's supposed revolutionary image. At the time of reunification, he explains, there was a consensus on nonviolent resistance, "rooted in noble morals, which the AfD cannot say about itself. The AfD is the party of base instincts, resentments, institutional grouchiness." In other words, the AfD's claim to be conducting a "*Wende* 2.0" ("Revolution 2.0") is not only false, in Brussig's perspective, but in a way, it

[107] Das Erste, "Umfragen zu Ostdeutschland" *Landtagswahl 2019 Thüringen* (Accessed November 29, 2020)

debases the peaceful revolutionary spirit of 1989. Though the party's Thuringian firebrand Björn Höcke may stand at podiums and shout, "We're completing the revolution!", inspiring his crowds to chant the 1989 slogan, "We are the people," Brussig insists that Höcke's agenda does not resemble the pre-reunification movement in character, objectives or rhetoric.[108] Nonetheless, given, the devastating effects of industry privatization and the work of the Treuhand, it makes sense why Björn Höcke's calls to "resist" some imagined dictatorship hits home for disillusioned Easterners.[109]

Characteristically, the AfD currently capitalizes on Treuhand-related frustrations and the decades of bitterness resulting from lost jobs and economic restructuring. When AfD supporters hear Höcke speak of impoverishment and the destruction of the Eastern homeland, they feel seen. It does not matter whether Höcke, at that moment, is talking about the catastrophic ramifications of the Treuhand or, just as likely, the perceived threat of Muslims to German culture. The core message is that the AfD will correct the injustices committed against East Germans and will save the country and its culture from immigrant incursion. The AfD is not an Eastern party; it is an iÍslamophobic and xenophobic party. However, it uses specific rhetorical appeals to entice Eastern voters and gain support for its platform.

This strategy, as well as the AfD's platform as a whole, involves a fair amount of contradictions. To take one notable example, at the same time that they spoke of "completing the revolution" of 1989 (the revolution which peacefully brought down the Berlin Wall) they openly admired then-president Donald Trump's goal to build a wall.[110] Apparently, walls can in some

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[108] Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk Zeitreise, "Wer ist das Volk? Die AfD und die Tradition der Bürgerrechtsbewegung in der DDR," March 11, 2021.
[109] Constanze Stelzenmüller, "German Lessons Thirty Years After the End of History: Elements of an Education," *The Brookings Institution* (2019)
[110] Christian Booß, "Braune Wurzeln? Thesen zu den Folgen des Rechtspopulismus im Osten," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, September 4, 2019.

instances be used to keep people out, but only the people whom the far right deems undesirable.[111] The very nature of Höcke's East-targeted rhetoric is brazenly fraudulent; though he claims to be the "voice of the East," he himself comes from former West Germany. Even Frauke Petry, formerly one of the AfD's more extreme members, has criticized his rhetoric, pointing out that "Höcke capitalizes on the dissatisfaction of citizens in the East without coming up with any proposals of his own."[112]

Nonetheless, Höcke's style and word choice has proven to be highly effective at galvanizing potential voters with this style and word choice. Listening to him speak emphatically about revolution and nationalism, one would think that the courageous overthrow of a dictatorship was imminent. Likewise, other prominent party members have made similarly contradictory statements to paint rival politicians in a negative light. For example, even though the AfD often targets its message to appeal to Eastern German voters, AfD co-chairman Tino Chrupalla has attacked Merkel in the past for belonging to the Free German Youth, the official socialist youth movement of the GDR, when she was young. Presumably, this is meant to insinuate that dictatorship is in her blood.

A prevalent theme in AfD speeches and campaign literature is that immigrants pose a physical and cultural threat to Germans. On the contrary, according to the federal police statistics in 2018, crime in Germany is at its lowest rate since 1992.[113] In fact, even during the highest spike of crimes following 2015, the rates were still far off from the 1993 crime rates. It is also important to keep in mind who is committing these crimes; the demographics matter. A large number of the refugees in the influx we are discussing were young males. According to Dr.

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[111] Severin Weiland, "Die Wüste Gegenwart," *Spiegel*, 2019.
[112] Kay-Alexander Scholz, "How the Far-right AfD Taps Into Germany's East-West Divide," *Deutsche Welle,* April 18, 2018.
[113] Bundeskriminalamt, "Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik - Berichtsjahr 2018: Änderungsnachweis," July 13, 2020.

Dominic Kudlacek from the Criminological Research Unit of Lower Saxony, this specific age and gender group is more likely to commit crimes in any society.[114] Although there was indeed a spike in crime immediately following the refugee influx of 2015, the data show that this spike was actually quite small in proportion to the immense number of refugees that entered Germany.[115] It must also be remembered that so-called "crude" crime rates include crimes committed *against* refugees, not just *by* refugees.[116] Politically motivated crimes also rose after 2015, more than half of them committed in the name of right-wing ideology.[117] Although crimes motivated by leftist political ideologies certainly occur in Germany, and crimes occur amongst immigrant communities (for example, among Turks over issues like the banning of the Kurdistan Workers' Party) the majority of crimes seem to have been directed against minority and immigrant groups more than ethnic Germans. Notably, about half of the crimes labeled as politically motivated by right-wing ideologies are committed by Easterners, despite the fact that they make up only 19 percent of the German population.[118]

For such a young party, the AfD has developed a highly effective strategy that has allowed it to rise to prominence in less than a decade. Put simply, the AfD has developed its image and rhetoric to specifically appeal to those who feel frustrated and cheated by their government. Due to the consequences of reunification, their strategy has been especially effective in Eastern Germany.

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[114] BBC News, "Reality Check: Are Migrants Driving Crime in Germany?" September 13, 2018.
[115] Vinicius Bivar, "Germany's East-West Divide Fuels the Far Right," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,* December 3, 2019.
[116] Fray Lindsay, "Refugees in Germany Did Not Bring Higher Risk to Germans," *Forbes,* August 29, 2019.
[117] Deutsche Press-Agentur, "5 Things We Learned From the Latest German National Crime Report," *The Local*, April 24, 2017.
[118] Deutsche Press-Agentur, "Examining Why Right-Wing Extremism Still Plagues East Germany," *The Local*, May 18, 2017.

13. "People like me vote AfD"

Although the AfD does gain votes in all German states, it is no secret that their votership is dramatically higher in the former East German states, be it in state elections, federal elections, or the European Parliament elections (see maps 3, 4, 5). The Eastern factions of the party also have a greater tendency to include members who used to belong to even further right-wing groups, such as the NPD, a commonly known neo-Nazi party.[119] The fact that AfD voters are more willing to support a party with connections (be they current or past) to neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists, rather than support the CDU/CSU, is cause for concern.

Knowing the AfD's tendency to condone and foster extremism, one might expect its constituency to largely consist of Der Flügel-level right-wingers and neo-Nazis harking back to the days of Hitler. However, most of the AfD's voter base is not reflective of its more extreme ideologies. Notably, satirist Thomas Brussig (see chapter 7), expresses alarm at the AfD's ability to reach even moderate or formerly liberal Germans, pointing out that "people like me vote AfD."[120] He noted that AfD voters have been shown to belong to all socioeconomic classes, all geographical locations. Brussig's assessment is supported by a report issued by the Belgian think tank Bruegel, which found in 2017 that while AfD votership was higher in small towns and among the less educated (as tends to be the case with populist parties) "the clear structural divide in voting behaviour is in fact between East and West Germany." Their regression analysis showed that, for example, "the positive association between unemployment and votes vanishes once we control for the East-West divide."[121]

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[119] James F. Downes, Felix Wiebrecht, "East v. West? The Internal Battle Within the Far Right in Germany," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,* June 19, 2019.
[120] Thomas Brussig, "Die Wende-Anmaßung der AfD," *Der Spiegel,* September 24, 2019.
[121] Alexander Roth, Guntram B. Wolff, "What has driven the votes for Germany's right-wing Alternative für Deutschland?" *Bruegel,* October 5, 2017.

In other words, the AfD is not a neo-Nazi group that simply can be weeded out and disbanded. They are a relatively diverse voter base acting within legal means—although the party's legality has been questioned repeatedly to date—that has chosen this right-wing party to follow for a variety of reasons. Some use their vote for the AfD to express frustration with their economic situations and resentment of the perceived elite or as rebellion against a status quo which, in their eyes, is not working. Some, of course, support the AfD because they share its xenophobic sentiments. There is no single motive driving Germans' shift to the right. Certainly a portion of the AfD voters are extremists, but what explains the choice of the moderate or centrist voters to associate themselves with such a controversial and xenophobic party? To answer this question, we can consult historian Hermann Kurthen, who provides a succinct and logical explanation for the phenomenon:

> "Extremism in the population is primarily an ideological and partisan phenomenon, a product of disaffection with the political mainstream. The broad population does not support extremism primarily because it hates minorities or opposes democracy, but because it is indifferent to their fate. Yet because the leaders of extremist parties do often hate them, minorities and democracy are generally the first victims when extremists come to power."[122]

This relationship between indifference or self-prioritization and right-wing votership can be applied to the AfD. If a voter feels his concerns (be they economic, social, environmental, or relating to healthcare) are represented by Party A more than by Party B, they will vote for Party

[122] Kurthen, *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 129-

A regardless of that party's stance on an issue that does not directly affect that voter, for example whether asylum laws are lenient or stringent. A working-class German who just lost his job is likely more concerned with his own welfare come election time than with how immigrants are faring. While many Germans are proud to be led by Merkel and her welcoming policy toward immigrants, other Germans, particularly Easterners, feel that they are not receiving the same level of care and attention. This leads them to consider alternatives to Merkel—why not vote for a party that literally claims to be an alternative for Germany? If they feel their needs are being met by this alternative party, they may be willing to overlook its extreme side.[123] Some may also condone the party's more extreme ideas, such as those espoused by Höcke, in the name of regaining a feeling of national pride or achieving the social welfare goals delineated in the AfD's manifesto.

These feelings of resentment can be encapsulated by the word *Politikverdrossenheit,* which translates to "political discontent" or a lack of confidence in the government. The word is an umbrella term for the weariness and disillusionment some Germans feel and the disadvantaged position in which they perceive themselves to be. Dr. Volk and other scholars call this target group the *Modernisierungsverlierer*, meaning those who lost their economic standing during and after the shift from socialism to capitalism in the 1990s. As a result of this loss, Volk theorizes that Eastern Germans' feelings of deprivation and underrepresentation make them more likely to join far-right groups.[124] While the economic aspect of reunification is certainly key in understanding the frustrations of the former East, Volk's argument here leaves out the equally important cultural aspect.

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[123] Conor Friedersdorf, "What do Trump's Voters Actually Want?" *The Atlantic,* August 17, 2015.
[124] Sabine Dorothea Volk, "'Wir sind das Volk!' Representative Claim-Making and Populist Style in the PEGIDA Movement's Discourse" *German Politics* (2020)

Sociologist Holger Lengfeld provides a more comprehensive analysis of the *Modernisierungsverlierer* theory. He cautions against the overemphasis of economic motivations that we see in Volk's work. Using statistics regarding the socioeconomic breakdown of AfD voters, he found that many people who qualify as *Modernisierungsverlierer* are actually not more likely to vote AfD. He also underscores how the AfD takes the free market economic approach of Ordoliberalism, thus arguing that, in consequence, their voters would be less likely to support the AfD if they were poor Germans reliant on the welfare state.[125] Indeed, the AfD's focus as a party is not on economics, but on culture and politics; it convinces Germans that their socioeconomic standing is at stake, and that the presence of immigrants further threatens it. The AfD's actual economic platform is much murkier; after all, it is difficult to pose as a populist party when most of the leadership has a university education and thus does not represent the majority of its voters.

To account for the AfD's popularity among Eastern Germans, Lengfeld employs the theory of "relative deprivation," which in this context means that even if someone is not at the bottom rung of the social ladder, they can feel neglected or disadvantaged, especially in situations where they are forced to change their lifestyle or accept a sudden change in status.[126] This sentiment is evident in a speech by far-right activist Kathrin Örtel, who insisted that "as long as there is even just one Dresden citizen who is worse off than any immigrant from a foreign country, Dresden's politics have to look after Dresden's citizens."[127] In her view, Merkel is letting down her country, as she is offering shelter and resources to foreigners while there are born-and-raised Germans living in poverty.

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[125] Lengfeld, Holger, "Die Alternative für Deutschland: eine Partei für Modernisierungsverlierer?" *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie,* No. 69, 214.
[126] Lengfeld, "Eine Partie für Modernisierungsverlierer?" 213.
[127] Dana Schülbe, "Kathrin Oertel - diese Frau gibt 'Pegida' ein Gesicht" *Rheinische Post,* January 8, 2015.

Lengfeld presents the rise of right-wing extremism in Germany as resulting from one of three methods of appeal: a nationalistic appeal with a focus on cultural homogeneity, a provocative appeal as a party for protest votes, or a populistic appeal emphasizing the detrimental effects of globalization on Germans.[128] In reality, the AfD utilizes a composite of all three, made all the more effective given the historical backdrop of German reunification. Using rhetoric specific to that time period and painting itself as a beacon of hope for the East, the AfD simultaneously: seeks to reawaken national pride, taps into feelings of neglect and downtroddenness, and condemns Merkel to gain protest votes.

14. "Because we know how it was": an earlier migrant generation

It is important to keep in mind that, at one point, many East Germans themselves were immigrants. Immediately following the defeat of the Nazis in World War II, millions of ethnic Germans living in Nazi-occupied areas such as Poland and the Czech Republic relocated to areas in both the Allied-occupied West Germany and Soviet East Germany. This was often a case of forced expulsion, as the Soviet Union replaced ethnic Germans in those regions with ethnic Poles or other USSR member populations.

Around five million Germans fled from Poland alone, and many were deported, murdered, or forced to work in labor camps as reparations to the Soviet Union.[129] These expulsions tended to be cruel, disorganized and revenge-motivated, so for these Germans, many of whom had deep roots in those territories and had been living there for generations, it was a

[128] Lengfeld, "Eine Partei für Modernisierungsverlierer?" 215.
[129] Karl Corell, "Poland's German Minority," in *German Minorities in Europe: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Belonging,* ed. Stefan Wolff (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 75, 78.

traumatic experience.[130] Ultimately, Germany, which was recently ravaged by war, accepted an exponentially larger number of refugees than it did in 2015, with a mere fraction of the resources it has today. The topic of ethnic German expulsion merits an entire thesis on its own, but it is worth touching upon here to demonstrate that, whether they like to remember it or not, many of the ethnic Germans rallying against the 2015 refugee influx have a definitie, and relatively recent, refugee history of their own.

From 1948 to 1988—essentially as long as the GDR stood—almost three million East Germans fled to West Germany and other countries, often risking their lives and freedom to do so.[131] They were known as "refugees of the republic," and were political refugees, like many who enter Germany today. Around half of them were young and educated, leading to a so-called "brain drain" in the East that continued after reunification and left behind a subsequently older than average population.[132] Some have returned to the East since 1990, while others left for good. Either way, many East Germans who witnessed the GDR, especially those who fled it themselves, do sympathize with refugees; it would be unfair and overly simplistic to categorize East Germans as an overall xenophobic people, as some are wont to do.

In 2015, the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* interviewed a selection of East Germans in an article called "Because We Know How it Was." THe article coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of reunification. One interviewee, Roland Schreyer, recounted his experience digging through the sewers at a border town to smuggle his family from East to West. Another, Christian Bürger, fled to Bavaria via Prague. Though he eventually moved back to the East to

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[130] Erica Lamontagne, "A Post-World War II Tragedy: The Expulsion of Ethnic Germans From Poland and Czechoslovakia, 1945-49" *The General Brock University Undergraduate Journal of History*, No. 2, April 17, 2017, 39.
[131] Bernd Martens, "Der Zug nach Westen - Jahrzehntelange Abwanderung, die allmählich nachlässt," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, May 7, 2020.
[132] Solon Ardittis, "The new brain drain from Eastern to Western Europe," *The International Spectator,* 27:1, 1992, 79-96.

open a guesthouse in Chemnitz, he is still grateful for the help he received while fleeing. "Who knows what would have happened to my parents and me," he said, "if nobody had taken us in." Due to his experience, he views Germany as a nation of immigrants—something that PEGIDA and the AfD would rather forget. Other immigrants featured in the article echoed Bürger's sentiments of gratitude, citing the "guardian angels" who took them in and gave them "a wonderful experience of hospitality." Reflecting on the freedoms they were able to enjoy as a result of human kindness, they describe how much they see themselves in the immigrants from Syria, Afghanistan or Hungary.

Andreas Kieling, who is today a documentary filmmaker and self-described adventurer, was also featured in this article and provided a moving testimony about his refugee experience. In 1976, at age sixteen, he swam across the Danube River and suffered a life-threatening gunshot wound by the Czech border guards. Eventually, he was taken in by a shelter in Gießen, a town near Frankfurt. "I felt helpless," he recalled. "I think today's refugees feel the same… My urge for freedom drove me to go out into the world. I hope that others will get this chance, too."[133]

The predominant opinion among this group was that Germany has the resources and ability to welcome the refugees seeking entry, and that it is basic human decency to do so. Silke Fischer, who fled East Berlin in a friend's car via Hungary and Austria, insisted that "today it is still the duty of every citizen to take care of people who are in need." These immigrants' experiences made them more sympathetic to the refugees of 2015. Several of them acknowledged that they were comparatively fortunate in terms of what and how they were fleeing. They mentioned the conditions in war-torn countries where human rights atrocities are committed, including some of the major contributing countries to the refugee influx of that year,

[133] Anne Hänig, Julius Lukas, Martin Machowecz, "Weil wir wissen, wie es war," *Zeit Online,* 37/2015, September 10, 2015.

and cited this as yet another reason to let these refugees in. In other words, they believe that while East Germans had it bad, refugees today have it worse. For example, a Berlin study found that a total of 327 East Germans died fleeing the GDR during its 50-year regime. By comparison, the number of migrants who have died while crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe in the last five years alone is at least double that.[134] For that reason, many believe that Germans have no excuse for shutting them out. Instead, Germany must accept refugees, as they are just as deserving of the freedom and warm welcome that the East German refugees were granted in the West.[135] Some of the East's political refugees are fervent activists today, such as Wilfried Siering, who founded a welcome initiative for refugees in his village at age 80.

On the other hand, as captured in Dr. Hope M. Harrison's 2019 book *After the Berlin Wall*, other Easterners feel that by accepting this refugee influx and expecting the German public to cooperate, Angela Merkel, an Easterner herself, effectively abandoned her compatriots in favor of foreigners. Since she grew up in the GDR and witnessed its collapse, these Germans expected Merkel to prioritize their needs, and now protest "that the finances and political attention that have been devoted to the recent refugees should be devoted to them instead."[136] Harrison's book underlines Eastern Germans' desperation to identify with each other and be valued by their government, as well as the sense of betrayal they feel if these needs are not met.

In the *Die Zeit* article, one former East German, Maxi Biewer, recalled her experience fleeing to a transit camp in Marienfelde, in southwest Berlin. The Marienfelde Refugee Camp, now a memorial and museum, is still a temporary shelter for current refugees, and a site of frequent right-wing provocation. According to Axel Klausmeier, the site's overseer and the

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[134] BBC, "East German border claimed 327 lives, says Berlin study," June 8, 2017;
BBC, "Hundreds of Migrants Still Dying in Med Five Years Since 2015," August 31, 2020.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall,* 400.

director of the Berlin Wall Foundation, tour guides are specially trained to deal with the "populist, racist" right-wing visitors who "have become such a regular, aggressive presence" at the museum. They heckle tour guides with demands to see more German history and less about non-German refugees.[137] These provocateurs act under a mental disconnect between the political refugees from the GDR and the refugees seeking asylum in Germany since 2014. Ironically, the Marienfelde museum and shelter, which was founded for East Germans, is now hounded by East Germans. The Easterners who now visit the Marienfelde memorial to criticize it and undermine its value live in the post-reunification East, and are presumably far enough distanced from that part of Germany's past to have forgotten their own history as refugees and feel little or no sympathy for non-German migrants.

While some Easterners appear detached from this past, for others, the concept of a refugee hits so close to home that they will take extreme ideological stances to distance themselves from it. Take the AfD's co-founder Alexander Gauland, for example (Image 7). When asked about immigrants, he mentioned the notorious image of toddler Alan Kurdi, a refugee who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea on September 2, 2015. Kurdi's body was photographed by Turkish journalist Nilüfer Demir and became an international sensation.[138] The photograph sparked conversations about the world's responsibility to take in refugees and grant them asylum, but Gauland's response was, "We can't be blackmailed by children's eyes." Gauland's indifferent reply might be expected from someone who has never felt the urgency to flee his land nor witnessed loved ones fail to make it to the other side. Yet, Gauland himself fled the GDR and settled in West Germany in the 1960s. When confronted with this fact, he replied, "That is something else: I'm German. And I went from Germany to Germany. It is quite different

[137] Ibid,398.
[138] Ashley Fantz, Catherine E. Sholchet, "Syrian toddler's dad: 'Everything I was dreaming of is gone'," *CNN*, September 4, 2015.

when someone comes from Eritrea or Sudan. He has no right to the support of a foreigner."[139] There is only one possible difference that Gauland could mean: a man from Eritrea or Sudan is not ethnically German, therefore he is undeserving of German aid or the opportunities afforded to ethnic Germans.

Although the experiences of the GDR refugees interviewed in *Die Zeit* were not exactly comparable to those of refugees fleeing war-torn countries or who today cross the Mediterranean in overstuffed rubber boats, they were certainly still refugees of an oppressive regime. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the East German refugees sought out "economic opportunity and a generous social welfare system in the West," just like the refugees that the AfD abhors.[140] How do they reconcile this hypocrisy? For one, they were still considered Germans. Secondly, they were White. Be that as it may, immigration into Western Germany after reunification was significantly greater than immigration into the East. The West received many Eastern immigrants, but the opposite was not true. In that moment post-reunification, the East Germans were the liberated yet stateless ones, the emigrants. Gauland himself, however, displays a strong desire to distance himself from this group, presumably because his party condemns admitting refugees. From the green tweed jacket that is a mainstay of his wardrobe, to his years with the CDU, he clearly sees himself as part of the rarified German class. It is unlikely that he would ever admit any connection to the refugees of today, despite his own experience fleeing an oppressive and authoritarian regime.

Political scientist and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* journalist Ralph Bollmann offers an alternative analysis of the relationship between East Germans and immigration. He argues that East Germans as a whole, all 17 million of them that lived in the GDR at the time of its collapse,

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[139] Kate Brady, "AfD's Unlikely Duo: Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel" *Deutsche Welle*, September 24, 2017.
[140] Göktürk et al., *Germany in Transit,* 14.

were immigrants—"Immigrants in their own land," as he calls them. Bollmann interprets the AfD as a "barometer" of how successful the integration of these immigrants into reunified Germany was. After all, the AfD constantly stresses the responsibility of immigrants to assimilate to whatever culture is taking them in. Bollmann points out the irony in this part of their agenda; he views the AfD itself as a testament to the failure of the integration of the 17 million East German immigrants. Bollmann's argument is sound, as is his ability to turn a group's argument on its head and point out its inconsistencies. For instance, he also brings up how appalled many Germans are at the Turkish Germans who support the authoritarian regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, when they have chosen to live in Germany's welfare democracy. Bollmann argues that Germans have no reason to be shocked when so many of them vote for the AfD. In his view, the two are no different; Easterners who vote AfD are voting against the freedoms and democratic principles that they enjoy now that they live safely as part of the FRG.

Bollmann makes another compelling point, though logically it is a bit more of a stretch. He goes so far as to call the 2015 refugees the second generation of migrants, the first being the East Germans of 1990. Bollmann theorizes that the resentment East Germans feel is not unusual for the first migrant generation in a country. The first generation tends to have to take jobs beneath their qualification level as well as endure some kind of ostracism or unjust treatment in their new home. Thus, the improved conditions enjoyed by subsequent generations of migrants may be a source of ire for the first generation, who feel as though they laid the difficult groundwork and deserve more than the migrants after them do. This feeling of resentment is exacerbated when competition for jobs or resources is thrown into the mix.

Bollmann's interpretation may be an oversimplified view of the East. Firstly, I likewise consider the postwar expelled ethnic Germans to be the first large, distinct group of migrants into post-war Germany, followed by the Gastarbeiter generation of the 1950s to the 1970s. Secondly, the AfD and PEGIDA do have a solid presence in the West, albeit a smaller one. Nonetheless, Bollmann's theory is one valid way of understanding Easterners' attitudes towards immigrants.[141]

Right-wing Easterners not only like to forget that Germans can be immigrants as well, but they also overlook the substantial financial and infrastructural aid the East received from the West in 1990 and continues to receive to this day. According to Bollmann, however, in 1990 the West was well disposed and prepared to pump enormous sums (a total of 2 trillion dollars, the country's largest investment to date) into integrating East Germany into the FRG due to a perceived "historical responsibility."[142] To understand why Easterners might not feel a similar responsibility towards migrants seeking help from Germany today, it is important to remember how reunification played out in the East. The problem is not that Easterners have forgotten the past; on the contrary, they are still haunted by it. Some may find it difficult to sympathize with today's refugees when they feel that their own needs still have not been met, three decades after they were promised integration into the FRG.

15. Evaluating concerns of AfD voters

Rhetoric and image aside, the AfD also appeals to some very real concerns, specifically in the East. In the city of Cottbus, many jobs are being threatened by the establishment's liberal

[141] Ralph Bollmann, "Migranten im eigenen Land," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 3, 2017.
[142] Bollman, "Migranten im Eigenen Land."

climate-focused agenda. The jobs in question are in the nuclear and coal industry sectors, both of which the government is trying to phase out for environmental safety reasons. Feeling neglected by the Brandenburg state as well as by the federal government, many people are attracted to the right-wing agenda which demonizes Merkel and scapegoats immigrants. Today, the Cottbus governor reports that the city has "one of the best-organized neo-Nazi scenes in the East."[143] At a far-right rally, where signs like "Invasion disguised as migration" and "Lying press" abounded, several participants insisted that they were not neo-Nazis—that they used to belong to left-wing parties, as a matter of fact—but that they switched to the AfD because they saw no other alternative.[144]

While both West and East are home to all shades of the political spectrum, it seems that Easterners are more likely to accept right-wing extremism or even neo-Nazi-like rhetoric due to a higher level of dissatisfaction with their lot and the government. Though it is just as imprudent and dismissive to call racism an East German problem as it is to call crime an immigrant problem, it is clear that Easterners are more likely to feel like victims and to stay silent about racist acts, if not commit them themselves. Thus, the regions where blooming landscapes were promised have become fertile grounds for hate to sprout.

Similar viewpoints exist among the citizens of Görlitz, another former GDR town right on the Polish border, where some feel unfairly vilified for their support of a right-wing party. Görlitz resident Eleni Ioannidou cited the AfD's determination to crack down on refugee crime as the reason she supported the party. She admits, however, that some friends have cut ties with her for her political stance. Ioannidou is a relatively moderate AfD supporter; she acknowledges the sometimes extreme views of the AfD and disapproves of its increasing radicalization.

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[143] Schultheis, "Germany's Populists Push Boundaries."
[144] Schultheis, "Germany's Populists Push Boundaries."

However, where Ioannidou seems to have fallen into the AfD's rhetorical trap is her suggestion that the problem is that the party needs to be led by more well-educated people. She thinks the root of extremism is a lack of education, a notion which statistics on AfD votership clearly disprove. As discussed in chapter 11, their leadership already includes "educated" Germans. Thus, Ioannidou's suggestion reveals the effectiveness of the AfD's self-portrayal as a populist party.[145] The AfD leadership is by no means uneducated, nor is the proliferation of xenophobic rhetoric limited to the working class. Furthermore, the AfD is unlikely to take a moderate approach, as much as some of its voters wish it would. The unexpected success of the AfD so far shows that its politicians do not need to tone down their rhetoric or become more moderate. Indeed, they are deliberately tapping into the xenophobia and conservatism that they know existed both in the former GDR and in the pre-reunification FRG. Voting results—and votership maps showing their popularity in the East—indicate that the AfD's continued success can be assured by appealing to these voters, likely even more than it would be by appealing to moderates.

Some of the people interviewed in Görlitz echo Ioannidou, citing the standard reasons for supporting the AfD: wanting to see some kind of change, mistrusting the CDU and Merkel's establishment politics. While some acknowledge the extremism and alienating nature of the AfD and yearn to see a more moderate approach from the party, others see no issue with how the AfD galvanizes its audience. Görlitz resident Helga Thielsch believes that the AfD cannot possibly be extreme if so many of her friends and family support it. She, too, has gripes about immigration, and her words reflect the theory of relative deprivation discussed in the previous chapter. Discussing why she and her husband, in their sixties, vote for the AfD, she explained, "All our

[145] Emily Schultheis, "Has Germany's AfD Hit a Ceiling?" *Institute of Current World Affairs,* 2019.

lives, we've had to work hard and both only have a small pension that's not enough to live on. And then others come to this country and there's money for them?"[146] Thielsch's concerns about her financial situation are certainly legitimate, and although she is likely better off than many refugees seeking asylum in Germany, this does not invalidate her own fears and frustrations. The issue is not Thielsch's anger about her small pension—it is that the AfD capitalizes on Germans' personal problems and convinces them that the refugee influx is the root cause of these problems. It is a highly effective tactic, hence the AfD's platform particularly resonates with those who live in former East Germany.

Pensions are a particularly sore spot for Germans living in the so-called "new states," the states incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany after the collapse of the GDR. Data show that Germans in the West have long enjoyed higher pensions than those in the East, although the differences have shrunk dramatically. A study published in August 2019 by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, for instance, revealed the average monthly pension payments by state. Citizens in the southwestern state of Saarland received the highest pensions, at around 1343€ per month, followed by North-Rhine Westphalia at 1323€. The rest of the former West German states follow in the 1200€ - 1275€ range. The former GDR states come last, almost all of them under 1200€. East Berlin is listed as the single anomaly; it has some relatively high-earning pensioners, presumably people who had well-paying jobs with the GDR government.

The state of Thuringia, whose AfD branch is run by none other than Björn Höcke, has the lowest pensions of all, at 1102€.[147] It is also worth keeping in mind that these are the remaining inequalities after almost 30 years of a reunified Germany. Immediately following the

[146] Schultheis, "AfD Hit a Ceiling?"
[147] Kerstin Schwenn, "Rentenzahlungen im Vergleich: Hier sind die Renten am höchsten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 9, 2019.

incorporation of the "new states" into the FRG, pensions in the East were only 40 percent of the value of pensions in the West. According to the German Pension Insurance, over the years, this has increased to 97 percent, and the government plans to close the gap completely by 2025.[148] Although this pension gap is beginning to close, it has taken decades for this to occur—decades in which Easterners have felt that their labor is worth less than that of their Western counterparts. For these reasons, we can interpret Helga Thielsch's resentment of immigrants as misdirected anger about her insufficient pension that resulted from reunification.

How justified are concerns about financial inequalities between East and West today? It cannot be ignored that the East still trails behind the West in various ways, from gross domestic product per capita, to unemployment, to home ownership. In fact, one of the only areas in which the East statistically exceeds the West is in hours worked per week (an average of 5 hours more per week).[149] It is important to acknowledge that though these gaps may be small, they are perceived by Easterners to be a lasting detriment that was not part of "Blooming landscapes" rhetoric or any reunification-era promises. Indeed, some feel that downplaying these economic inequalities is just a way for Westerners to paint right-wing enthusiasm as endemic to the East and not as a natural consequence of thirty years of feeling economically and politically behind. Christian Hönicke, journalist for the newspaper *Tagesspiegel* compares this to telling a woman to "stop nagging" about the gender gap and reminding her, "You're already doing better than you were 40 years ago." He deems the ignorance of Eastern financial inequality to be a symptom of "Ossism," or prejudice and discrimination against Eastern Germans.

Hönicke's indication of a new system of oppression may not sit well with some in the scholarly sense, but the idea of disciminration against Easterners is valid. Since the early days of

[148] Deutsche Rentenversicherung, "Rentenangleichung Ost-West," Accessed November 17, 2020.
[149] Christian Hönicke, "30 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall: Der Ossismus muss Aufhören!" *Tagesspiegel,* January 24, 2019.

reunification, Eastern Germans have had their degrees and qualifications devalued if not outright rejected in the West. I spoke with Greta*, who grew up in the GDR who is today a language teacher in Berlin. Greta was part of the Free German Youth socialist organization as a child. Today, she likes to watch tapings of old Rolling Stones concerts that she was forbidden from watching when they happened, as the GDR prohibited the broadcasting and proliferation of Western media. Greta earned her PhD in East Germany, but once the Wall fell, her career prospects imploded. Her doctorate was considered invalid and she would have been fired had she not by chance become pregnant at the same time. “It was actually pretty sad,” she remembers. “Because I was extremely well educated and had also written a very good doctoral thesis, and it was suddenly worth nothing. Simply worth nothing.”

She knew many people who, for decades, could not find a stable job; their skill set was deemed insufficient, their work unworthy of the FRG. “There was this feeling of, ‘They don’t need me.’ We felt superfluous.” Today, her daughter works at a university in West Berlin, and Greta works in East Berlin. With humor and slight bitterness, Greta adds that her daughter is being paid higher wages, “Western wages.” She is convinced she will end her career as an Easterner and will receive “Eastern pensions,” no matter her degree or title or place of residence. While the differences are not great, it is disturbing to Greta on principle, thirty years after reunification. For such differences, however slight, reinforce the notion that Easterners are a perpetual ‘other,’ foreigners in their own land.

Greta does reminisce about the “enrichment” she got through reunification: being able to travel and work worldwide, meet people from other countries—communication with capitalist nations was strictly forbidden under the GDR. She also recalled a new feeling of “freedom and openness.” Nevertheless, she speaks of the GDR as a system she would change but not condemn.

She maintains that it gave her "a left heart" and is grateful for the education she received under it. To her, the recent resurgence of the right wing is alarming, and an affront to the harmonious, socialist mindset cultivated through her youth in the GDR. Ultimately, the feelings of devaluation and alienation she experienced when East joined West were greater than any unhappiness she felt under the GDR. This is not made up for by any benefits or any economic equalities she notices today. She believes that reunification left people in the lurch and made them targets for extremist ideology. "People not only lost jobs," she says, "they lost perspective. They lost their values. They lost social standing. They were suddenly second-class citizens. They were easy for right-wing groups to catch and take in."

Therefore, while the economic situation of eastern Germany today is not so dire as to warrant such fervent right-wing enthusiasm and xenophobic scapegoating, it did lay the foundation for cultural and atittudinal divides that have, over time, becomes progressively more pronounced. On the whole, pension levels are creeping closer together with time. Income gaps between East and West are also closing, although at the time of this writing there is still a difference of a bit less than 4,000 euros between the average per capita income in former West and East Germany.[150] Without a doubt, there is much left to be accomplished in order to call the two halves equal. This thesis is not meant to negate or trivialize the economic and political disparities that remain between Germany's former halves. However, it seems that the strongest and most lasting divide is attitudinal. Certainly these attitudes stem from the economic resentments Hönicke describes, but over time they have become an entity of their own.

Let us take the example of the state of Saxony. Saxony has featured several times in this thesis already; it is home to Hoyerswerda, the site of shocking anti-immigrant violence in 1991,

[150] John Gramlich, "East Germany Has Narrowed Economic Gap With West Germany Since Fall of Communism, But Still Lags," *Pew Research Center,* November 6, 2019.

it is the brithplace of HooNaRa and other proud neo-Nazi groups, and it had the highest AfD voter percentages in 2019, a full three percent more than any other eastern state. Saxony is pervaded by right-wing influence, whether in the form of established neo-Nazi groups or in layman approval of conservative and radical right politics.[151] Saxony embodies the spirit of the disillusioned and deprived Easterner, yet its unemployment rates are barely higher than any Western ones and it has a labor force participation rate of 80.5 percent, the highest in Germany. While it does have a proportionately very small Muslim population, it is also home to Dresden, the birthplace of PEGIDA (see chapter 16). So, Hans-Georg Betz of the Carr Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right asks, "What's the matter with Saxony?" His research supports the core argument of this thesis, which is that the answer lies in a deep and historically rooted sense of dissatisfaction among Easterners. The AfD's nativist rhetoric, invoking the purported threat of "demographic replacement" by Muslims, as well as its claim to a revolutionary Eastern identity resonate with voters because the East is already saddled with such deep-rooted feelings of being neglected and underappreciated. Betz also cites studies that examine the sentiments driving AfD protestors. These studies reveal that it was "not the question of Islam, but a profoud sense of political disenchantment" that led people to join AfD demonstrations.[152]

While the studies consulted by Betz reveal that one in four Saxons feels optimistic about the future, a study by the Pew Research Center think tank in October 2019 revealed that the general outlook of Easterners is, on the whole, more negative and distrustful than that of West Germans. According to the Pew poll data, West Germans proved to be more likely to view the EU favorably, more optimistic about their futures, more satisfied with German democracy, and more religious. Where did the East win out over the West? In the polls that asked about negative

[151] Manthe, "Scenes of 'Civil War'?"
[152] Hans-Georg Betz, "What's the Matter with Saxony?" *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,* June 21, 2018.

views towards minority groups and likelihood to vote for the AfD. To be more precise, the Eastern Germans were twice as likely to vote AfD than their Western counterparts.[153] Considering that this is three decades after reunification, with considerable improvement in equalizing the two former halves of the country, it becomes clear that the seeds of resentment had been sown for years. The AfD is simply reaping the results.

16. PEGIDA: taking AfD ideas to the streets

On the cold, rainy night of October 20, 2020, an audience congregates in a town square of Cottbus, a city in the northeastern state of Brandenburg. They belong to Germany's most well-known far-right movement outside of Parliament: PEGIDA, or Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident. It is not Monday, the day they usually gather. It is Friday, and this special rally is being held to protest the German government's COVID-19 lockdown regulations. The audience is lectured with galvanizing rhetoric by the AfD's Alexander Gauland—a significant point of intersection between the AfD and its rogue younger sibling—and responds with chants of "Resistance! Resistance!" Other speakers appear, but the crowd waits most enthusiastically for Björn Höcke, controversial poster boy of the AfD, to emerge and speak to their concerns. It is worth noting that, even at this rally, which is held to denounce the "virocracy" of Merkel's government (which, at the time of this writing, has just

[153] John Gramlich, "How the Attitudes of West and East Germans Compare, 30 Years After Fall of Berlin Wall," *Pew Research Center,* October 18, 2019.

announced a second lockdown to quell the aggressive spread of the COVID-19 pandemic) Höcke makes a guest appearance to reaffirm the evils of Islam.[154]

Höcke makes a disclaimer that no, he does not think *all* Muslims are a threat. He speaks highly of his few "intelligent and educated" Muslim friends, describing them like a rare species compared to the majority of "terror-charged" Muslims. Höcke goes on to cry that "Islam and Europe do not fit together. They must and will go separate ways!" Höcke condemns the German government, denouncing the "established powers" led by Merkel as an unconstitutional despotic regime that has allowed its own people to fall by the wayside in favor of immigrants. In a climactic moment toward the end of his speech, a forcefully gesticulating Höcke shouts, "Germany is not negotiable!" The crowd cheers, reassured and comforted by a man who speaks passionately against foreign encroachment and promises to protect them and their common identity. A self-labeled "freedom-loving" man, Höcke refers to every political dissent as a "Revolution 2.0" which will only be completed "once the West wakes up." A man who claims not to see politics as left and right, but as pro- or anti- freedom of press and speech. It is no accident that freedom of religion is missing from his speech. Freedom of beliefs and actions is acceptable only as long as they do not threaten the perceived purity of German culture. Herein lies the essence of the Eastern affinity for right-wing politics. The AfD and PEGIDA both capture a feeling of neglect and resentment, as well as regional superiority, that have been brewing in Eastern Germany since it was reincorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990.

Islamophobia is PEGIDA's guiding principle, and they promote this ideology in starker terms than AfD tends to do, presumably because they have no voters to lose. While the AfD

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[154] "30.10.2020 Kundgebung mit Höcke, Gauland, C. Berndt, Sigi, Wofgang uvm. in COTTBUS," *Youtube*, uploaded by LUTZiges Lutz Bachmann, October 30, 2020.

officially distances itself from extremists, its individual members, such as Höcke, maintain close ties to PEGIDA. The AfD and PEGIDA seem to have formed a symbiotic relationship; PEGIDA gives the AfD a platform to rally voters and have its messages spread through the streets, while the AfD is PEGIDA's greatest chance at having their racist and revisionist agenda promoted at high levels in government. PEGIDA has even sought an official alliance with the AfD.[155]

In 2014, publicity agent and graphic designer Lutz Bachmann founded PEGIDA in Dresden. Much of his past remains unknown. Bachmann grew up in a working class family in the GDR and amassed a hefty criminal record of burglaries and cocaine deals over the years.[156] PEGIDA first became well known among Germans after the refugee influx. Before the refugee influx hit its peak, however, the group was already rallying against Europe's support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in their military engagement with the Islamic State (ISIS, or ISIL) in 2014.[157] Essentially, any German intervention in non-German affairs is perceived by members of PEGIDA as an insult to Germans; an intervention in what are considered to be Muslim affairs is an even greater slight.

Bachmann now holds evening gatherings, which can be described as a cross between political conventions and right-wing extremist rallies, each Monday night in Dresden's city center. Livestreams of the Monday demonstrations are available on Youtube, so that even those who cannot attend the rally can watch and absorb the ideology from anywhere on the globe. These meetings are called "Monday demonstrations," a deliberate reference to the 1980s protests against the oppressive GDR regime in the lead-up to its collapse. PEGIDA exemplifies the success of the right-wing resurgence in the East; the group views itself as a movement to liberate

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[155] Deutsche Welle, "PEGIDA Leader Seeks Political Alliance with Germany's AfD," March 1, 2016.
[156] Alison Smale, "In German City Rich with History and Tragedy, Tide Rises Against Immigration," *New York Times,* December 7, 2014.
[157] Thran, Boehnke, "The Value-Based Nationalism."

Germans from Merkel and foreign incursion, invoking the revolutionary Eastern spirit that brought down the Berlin Wall. Remarkably, some PEGIDA members were marching for the end of the GDR back in 1989; today, their target is the perceived Islamization of Germany.[158]

Indeed, now the 1989 chant for unity and freedom "*Wir sind das Volk*"— "we are the people"— can be heard during PEGIDA rallies, although in this context, Volk has taken on the notorious and sinister connotation of racial purity that it had during the Hitler regime. The concept of Volk as used by PEGIDA is somewhat contradictory, because the group is hardly meant to represent all of the German people. Instead, the way they use the term is more reminiscent of the Nazi usage of the word, which was meant to differentiate Jews from Germans and justify racist policies.[159] In this way, PEGIDA creates its own ideal Volk, a White, born-and-raised German group whose purity is threatened by the existence of foreigners.

PEGIDA's main rallying points parrot the AFD's agenda, often in stronger terms than the AfD dares to use. Specifically, PEGIDA warns against a conspiratorial religious takeover, a Muslim crusade of sorts. The aforementioned Monday demonstrations have included banners such as "Peaceful and united against religious wars on German soil," solidifying the idea that Christianity and the German culture built around it are under siege.[160] PEGIDA is also vehemently opposed to the multiculturalism that many would argue enriches a society like Germany when a significant portion of its population has a "migrant background." PEGIDA views what many Germans have accepted as part of their twenty-first century world—hearing several languages on the street, walking past religious houses of all faiths, eating some of the

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[158] Julian Gopffarth, "The Far Right Imagines a Totalitarian Other," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,* December 1, 2018.
[159] BBC, "'Nazi Word' Revived by German AfD Chief," September 12, 2016.
[160] Jörg Dostal, "The Pegida Movement and German Political Culture: Is Right-Wing Populism Here to Stay?" *Political Quarterly,* 86.4, October 2015: 523-31.

best Turkish food outside Turkey—as a "totalitarian other."[161] In other words, the multiculturalism that many Germans celebrate is condemned as a foreign takeover. PEGIDA is anti-diversity and anti-pluralism, and they believe that is a cause worth staging a revolution over.

PEGIDA claims to hate not ethnic minorities, but "parallel societies," meaning societies in which Sharia law and "hate preachers" supposedly would govern the populace.[162] Similarly to how the AfD warns of a Merkel dictatorship, PEGIDA raises the spectre of an Islam-ruled Germany. In one Monday demonstration, Lutz Bachmann arranged for an Egyptian man to speak, a token Muslim speaker that PEGIDA used to give their ideas credence. The man lamented his past as a "victim of Islam," assuring the audience that "Islam is a virus." He was met with cheers.[163] The people watching felt vindicated in their desire for cultural purity and their mistrust of Muslims. Here, we see PEGIDA outsourcing its frustrations to a religion rather than an ethnic group, so as to defend itself from accusations of racism. This both reflects the tactic employed in the AfD manifesto and allows PEGIDA to make its agenda more palatable to everyday Germans; after all, nobody wants to think of themselves as racist, but people will gladly say they are against a repressive religious regime.

Like the AfD, PEGIDA tries to present itself as a legitimate group of concerned citizens. As stated by Dr. Sabine Volk in the journal *German Politics*, its goal is to appear "*bürgerlich*"—civic—rather than extreme.[164] The group officially denounces the swastika and the symbols of ISIS, as well as the symbol of the Antifaschistische Aktion, founded by the German Communist party in the 1920s.[165] PEGIDA claims to represent the middle of society in

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[161] Dostal, "The PEGIDA Movement."
[162] Ibid.
[163] "29.02.2016 PEGIDA live vom Neumarkt," *Youtube*, uploaded by LUTZiges Lutz Bachmann, February 29, 2016.
[164] Sabine Dorothea Volk, "'Wir sind das Volk!' Representative Claim-Making and Populist Style in the PEGIDA Movement's Discourse," *German Politics,* 2020.
[165] Dostal, "The Pegida Movement."

both class and politics, when in reality it is mostly composed of moderate right-wingers and receives about one-third of its membership from the far right.[166] Part of PEGIDA's success lies in its ability to appeal to more moderate citizens as well, citizens who feel threatened by change and social progress and fear that their own ability to advance professionally or socioeconomically is impeded by multiculturalism. PEGIDA ostensibly supports some traditionally "liberal" agendas such as sexual freedom and granting asylum to refugees— "war refugees and politically or religiously persecuted people."[167] However, its vehement opposition to the refugees of 2015 directly contradicts this claim.

PEGIDA also mirrors the AfD in its underdog posturing—although the AfD's is fabricated. It portrays itself as an anti-establishment and populist organization made up of law-abiding non-elites to appeal to nationalism and populism and garner support from the everyday German. After all, videos of PEGIDA rallies do not show hordes of skinhead Neo-Nazis storming government buildings; they show groups of warmly dressed, middle-aged or older Germans, people one might encounter in line at the bakery or buying Christmas gifts for their grandchildren. And thus, the extremist nature of PEGIDA is just barely concealed by its non-extremist appearance. As it happens, appearances only hold up so long.

Like the AfD, their sphere of influence is wider than the former borders of the GDR; offshoots of PEGIDA exist in the West, such as WüGida, FraGida, NüGida and BoGida in Würzburg, Frankfurt, Nuremberg and Bonn, respectively. As it turns out, these PEGIDA affiliates tend to act the most radically and/or violently. In 2015, police uncovered a plot to bomb a refugee shelter and attack its inhabitants with knives in the Bavarian town of Bamberg, in the

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[166] Ibid.
[167] Winfried Schenk, "Die Auseinandersetzung um PEGIDA und die 19 Thesen - eine Auswahl," *Menschen in Dresden,* December 21, 2014.

vicinity of Nuremberg, and several of the assailants were affiliated with Nügida.[168] Be that as it may, the discontent PEGIDA members feel, and the common identity they create around these feelings, are phenomena rooted in the East.

Though the main PEGIDA branch in Dresden seems to renounce responsibility for the violent acts of the offshoot groups, violence has erupted at several of its home-base marches in Dresden as well. The same year of the Nügida plot, *Deutsche Welle* journalist Jaafar Abdul Karim attended PEGIDA's one-year celebratory demonstration in Dresden. The night was ablaze with German flags and ominous orchestral music. 15,000 people were in attendance. Karim, who was born in Liberia and raised in Lebanon and Switzerland, had been to Dresden in years prior and experienced it as a "cosmopolitan" and "liberal-minded" city, was verbally and physically attacked as he made his way around the crowd to ask participants questions. Karim filmed this encounter, which is available for public viewing. After Karim told two women attending that he had suffered a blow to the neck, the women talked over him and eventually walked away, one of them telling him, "I don't believe you, sorry." The other woman, angrier, just said, "That is not okay. That is definitely not okay."[169] This was not in reference to Karim's injury, but to his being a journalist and infiltrating the rally. From Karim's footage, we can see the guiding tenets of PEGIDA: mistrust and resentment of journalists, hatred of Merkel, and instant disdain and hostility towards a person who has the physical appearance of a perceived non-German. A similar thing happened, once again in Dresden, in 2019, except this time the victim was not a journalist.[170] His only crime, which earned him a beating, was being of Indian descent.

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[168] Lizzie Dearden, "'Neo-Nazi Plot to Attack Refugee Centre with Explosives and Knives' Foiled by Police in Germany" *Independent News* (October 23, 2015)
[169] Christoph Jumpelt, "Dresden: DW-Reporter von 'PEGIDA'-demonstranten angegriffen" *Deutsche Welle* (October 20, 2015)
[170] Alexander Nabert, Linda Peikert, "Radikale Rentner" *Tageszeitung* (July 30, 2019)

PEGIDA, like the AfD, tends to reappropriate symbols and phrases to advance their own agenda. For example, the Wirmer Flag, which was flown at a PEGIDA rally next to a poster showing Merkel as "Mother Terroresia" (Image 7), was originally designed as an emblem of the anti-Hitler resistance movement in 1944.[171] When it is waved at right-wing rallies today, the intended implication is clear. Styling themselves as leaders of an oppressed populace, PEGIDA claims to be fighting against a fascist regime. The irony of the fact that PEGIDA promotes its own brand of fascist ideology seems to be lost on its members. Through the use of this flag, PEGIDA also furthers its secondary cause, which is their constant fight to dispel accusations that the group itself is fascist.

When accused of promoting fascism, founder Lutz Bachmann simply replies that his objectors are "leftist fascists."[172] Even this statement has its rhetorical roots in the era of reunification. Having grown up in the GDR, Bachmann here attempts to strike a note with fellow Easterners. By dismissing his detractors as left-wing fascists Bachmann invokes the left-wing dictatorship of the GDR. Like the AfD, Bachmann's strategic word choice skillfully exploits Easterners' complex feelings towards their past; by drawing parallels between the GDR and Merkel's government he denigrates Merkel's liberal politics and her welcoming immigration policies.

Just as the AfD draws boundaries at a certain point, there are also people who are too extreme even for PEGIDA. Tatjana Festerling, a member who was kicked out of the AfD for being part of the violent far-right group HoGeSa, was eventually also kicked out of PEGIDA for saying that asylum seekers should be shot for trying to cross the German border.[173] On the one

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[171] Ned Richardson-Little, "From Stauffenberg to PEGIDA: How the Far Right Adopted the Flag of Anti-Hitler Resistance," *History Ned,* July 20, 2017.
[172] "01.10.2018 Rede von Lutz Bachmann," *Youtube*, uploaded by LUTZiges Lutz Bachmann (October 3, 2018).
[173] Thran, Boehnke, "Value-Based Nationalism."

hand, PEGIDA seems to try to shed accusations of extremism—or, in the words of interior minister Ralf Jäger, the title of "neo -Nazis in pinstripes."[174] On the other hand, protestors march with signs saying "Islam is cancer" and holding a prop gallows meant for Merkel's Vice Chancellor and supporter of her immigration and asylum policies, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel.[175] In addition, PEGIDA does have affiliations with outright neo-Nazis, such as rapper MaKss Damage, who distributed illegal neo-Nazi tapes to minors in Berlin in 2009 and released an album titled "2033," which is underground Nazi shorthand for Hitler's birthday.[176] Like the AfD, PEGIDA does not officially endorse violence or neo-Nazism, but its affiliations and individual members indicate otherwise.

At a livestreamed PEGIDA rally in Dresden in December 2018, we see Lutz Bachmann on stage again, this time fomenting hostility towards Muslims by decrying the murder of a German girl by a man with an immigrant background. This accusation, it was later revealed, was an unfounded rumor which earned him a police probe for spreading "libel, misinformation and incitement."[177] Incidentally, this was not the first time Bachmann was charged with inciting hatred through PEGIDA, and it will probably not be the last.[178] Misinformation or not, Bachmann told his audience that the girl's murderer was a Muslim of East Asian descent, yet another perpetrator in a series of violent attacks signaling the iminent threat of an Islamic takeover of Germany. "I don't know how many more murders need to happen," Bachmann laments, "before West Germany finally wakes up."[179] His words, echoing Höcke's similar

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[174] Deutsche Welle, "State Interior Ministers Debate Anti-Islamization Group PEGIDA," *News,* December 12, 2014.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Helga Druxes, "'Montag ist wieder Pegida-Tag!' Pegida's Community Building and Discursive Strategies," 17-33.
[177] Deutsche Welle*,* "Berlin Police Probe PEGIDA Leader Over Teen Murder Tweet," March 14, 2018.
[178] Katie Brady, "PEGIDA Founder Lutz Bachmann Found Guilty of Inciting Hatred," *Deutsche Welle,* May 3, 2016.
[179] "03.12.2018 Lutz über Berlin, den Widerstand, AfD und den neuesten Mord," *Youtube*, uploaded by LUTZiges Lutz Bachmann, December 3, 2018.

statement in his October 20 speech, reveal the looming presence of the East-West divide, a wound that is still fresh three decades after reunification. The rise and persistence of PEGIDA illuminates another dimension of the AfD's power, which is to empower even further right groups to assemble. PEGIDA's existence is a testament to the AfD's success in galvanizing Easterners with its rhetoric to gain support for its xenophobic party platform.

17. "A speck of bird shit": Historical revisionism and the burden of memory

As we have seen, memory and rhetoric play a major role in East-West relations. Today, the right wing tries to shift the narrative around Germany's complicated past, at times engaging in outright historical revisionism, at other times trivializing atrocities in the interest of reviving national pride. As seen by the AfD's skillful use of rhetoric regarding the GDR, the party understands all too well the difficult relationship Germans, especially Eastern Germans, have with their past. Since its rhetoric invoking the GDR has proven to be effective, the AfD has been emboldened to push the boundaries of acceptability and ask Germans to reevaluate the way they remember the most shameful chapter in their history. The GDR was one thing, but AfD members are also on record for invoking the Third Reich and encouraging Germans to move beyond the past, to see Adolf Hitler's atrocities as just a blip in an otherwise spotless record.

Historical revisionism is nothing new in Germany. A prominent wave of revisionists emerged in the 1970s, characterized by flat-out Holocaust denial. Some created an even further removed alternate reality, blaming the Jews for the German plight in World War II.[180] At that

[180] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 178.

time, the seeds of historical revisionism and selective memory were planted in West Germany, as people began to want to overcome their shameful national past. For instance, Franz Josef Strauß, the chairman of the Bavarian CSU party from 1961 until 1988, urged coming out of the "dark shadow of the Third Reich." In this way, decades before the AfD was born, the West was home to individuals and groups promoting the agendas and ideals for which it chastises the East today.[181] The AfD's revisionism is significantly more palatable at first glance. It takes on a savior role of sorts, promising absolution for Germans and a future in which they can finally shed their guilt and shame about Nazism and begin to take more pride in their country. By espousing such a "positive" message, the AfD has been able to gain even more traction among the general public; it is rhetoric not merely reserved for neo-Nazis and anti-Semites. When the AfD emerges promising to pull Germans out from their "cult of guilt" and restore national pride, it is perceived as a welcome change from the decades of atonement Germans have undergone.[182]

The tale of right-wing historical revisionism would not be complete without a reappearance from Alexander Gauland, tweed-coated grandfather of the AfD. At a conference of the AfD's youth division in Thuringia, Gauland stressed the importance of acknowledging history in order to "have the strength to shape the future." His speech had a conciliatory tone and seemed to be a gesture of acknowledgment of Germany's past atrocities. Until, that is, he said that "Hitler and the Nazis are just a speck of bird shit in more than 1,000 years of successful German history."[183] For one thing, Germany as the entity it is today (the Germany unified by Otto von Bismarck, led into World War II by Adolf Hitler, split into four in the 1940s, into two in the 1950s and reunified as a single democratic country in 1990) is barely 150 years old.

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[181] Bangel, "Auch euer Höcke."
[182] Jefferson Chase, "Bundestag Slams Far-Right AfD, Reaffirms Holocaust Remembrance," *Deutsche Welle,* February 23, 2018.
[183] Deutsche Welle, "AfD's Gauland Plays Down Nazi Era as 'Bird Shit' in German History," June 2, 2018.

Whatever mythical "glorious history" Gauland is referring to, be it ethnic or geographical, is not one that most Germans can relate to today. Thus, the "damn 12 years" of the Third Reich, which Gauland dismisses as a mere anomaly, do constitute a significant portion of Germany's history, not only time-wise but in terms of their lasting impact on German culture, politics and identity.

Many laws and social norms in Germany exist as a result of the Nazi era and the Holocaust. For example, displaying Nazi symbols or proclaiming "Heil Hitler" can result in a multiple-year prison sentence.[184] The German government as well as museums, schools, and media are on the whole very open about acknowledging the darkest period of recent German history. Memorials and remembrance sites can be found around the country. German city sidewalks are home to thousands of *Stolpersteine* ("stumbling stones"), brass cobble stones bearing the names and birth and death dates of people displaced or murdered during the Holocaust. This project, designed and executed by Cologne artist Gunter Demnig, began in 1992, using funds from historical societies, archives and personal donations.[185] Today, strolling on a sidewalk in Berlin one might come across a few stumbling stones in front of an old apartment building that today houses a doctor's office or bakery. Germans encounter these little gleaming reminders of the Holocaust every single day. For better or for worse, they force residents to confront their ancestors' actions and ideologies and thus continue to shoulder a historical burden.

Such practices, social norms, and laws were created to atone for this past. As a country, Germany has been committed to, if not atoning for it almost a century later, at least maintaining awareness about that time period and ensuring that such atrocities never happen again. All things considered, the 1930s and 40s were no mere speck of "bird shit" but a deep stain that Germans

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[184] Mara Bierbach, Karsten Kaminski, "Germany's Confusing Rules on Swastikas and Nazi Symbols," *Deutsche Welle,* August 14, 2018.
[185] Norddeutscher Rundfunk, "How the Stumbling Blocks Remind of Nazi Victims," *NDR Story,* November 4, 2019.

have still not managed to remove, decades later. To many, removal of this stain is not the point, in fact it is counterintuitive. The prevailing sentiment in Germany's process of reckoning with its past has been that the only way to work through its national shame and trauma is to fully acknowledge it and demonstrably rise above it. Dismissing the Third Reich as an anomaly, or an unfortunate mistake even, is not consistent with this national endeavor.

While the AfD may not officially justify Nazi actions and try to change the narrative around the Holocaust, some of its more extreme members do. In 2018, Lars Steinke, the leader of the AfD's youth organization, claimed in a privately recorded conversation that Hitler was "forced" to invade Poland, and that "any politician would have acted just like Hitler."[186] Both Steinke and the AfD refused to comment on this recording after its leak, and its exposure did not stop Steinke from continuing to make inflammatory comments regarding the Third Reich, this time openly. Only in June 2019 was Steinke finally pushed to resign after calling Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg—the man who attempted to assassinate Hitler and was later executed—a traitor and a coward. Apparently, the AfD does have a breaking point, requiring it to disavow its more extreme members' personal convictions and statements that cast the party in too openly negative a light.

Perhaps because of his seniority, however, Alexander Gauland does get away with this. For instance, Gauland refuses to celebrate May 8, known as Victory in Europe Day, which commemorates Nazi Germany's official capitulation to the Allied powers in 1945. By contrast, Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, during a speech given during the 2020 celebration of 75 years since May 8, 1945, characterized that day in history as a liberation from the Nazis, not a

[186] Daniel Bellut, "Hitler 'Forced' to Invade Poland, AfD Youth Leader Claims," *Deutsche Welle,* October 5, 2018.

defeat for Germany as a whole.[187] Steinmeier's statement was perhaps a bit dismissive of the national trauma that millions of Germans experienced both during and after the war. Many were unaffiliated with the Nazis and still suffered the consequences, struggling to rebuild their country and recover from the past decade. Others, if they lived in the Eastern part of the country, were thrown into a new dictatorship. However, Steinmeier's labelling May 8 as a cause of celebration and a positive turning point for the country reinforced the "never again" or "lesson learned" narrative that dominates German historical memory of the war. Gauland, by contrast, insists that May 8 should be viewed as an "ambivalent day," perhaps even a negative moment because it involved Germany's defeat—no matter that it was the Nazis who were defeated. There are numerous AfD statements in the same vein; some members, for example, believe that May 8 should be a day for commemorating the loss of historical eastern homelands like Danzig (Gdansk, in Poland) and Königsberg (Kaliningrad, a federal subject of Russia).[188]

Officially, the AfD acknowledges the Holocaust but aims to shift the historical emphasis from guilt to innocence. After the war, East Germans were not able to enjoy the freedoms that the newly liberated West Germans did. The AfD points this out, but uses the GDR dictatorship to support Gauland's assertion that Germany's situation worsened after May 8, 1945. Here, the AfD's revisionist claims lose some traction. Equalizing the GDR to the Third Reich is not very convincing against the prevailing narrative that the Third Reich destroyed Germany and must be prevented from ever re-emerging, in whatever form. The GDR is not comparable to Hitler's Third Reich in terms of ideology, *modus operandi*, goals, or scale of destruction and devastation. The GDR was dictatorial, had a secret police, and restricted freedom of speech; that is where the

[187] Frank-Walter Steinmeier, "On the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation from National Socialism and the End of the Second World War in Europe at the Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Victims of War and Tyranny (Neue Wache) in Berlin," *Bundespräsidialamt,* May 8, 2020.
[188] Sophie Schmalenberger, "An 'Ambivalent Day': How the AfD Attempts to Re-Frame the 8th May as Day to Commemorate German Victimhood," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,* June 1, 2020.

comparisons just about end. It was no genocidal fascist regime. However, the AfD's tactic of relativizing the Holocaust (while never outright denying it) makes their rhetoric and platform more palatable to Easterners in particular. Though it can be considered a radical right-wing group, its success lies in its ability to garner support among the non-radical. Manipulating memory is a particularly effective strategy for the AfD because it can resonate with any German, not just an Easterner. In fact, Germans who grew up under the GDR, where the Soviet Union was regarded in a positive light, may be more likely to view May 8 as an occasion for celebration than Westerners.

German memories surrounding the war are far more complex than simply being ashamed about Hitler. There is no single monolithic sentiment regarding the war; feelings vary greatly by age and experience. While young Germans are detached from Germany's wartime history, the Germans who witnessed the war firsthand have a complicated relationship to that time period. For instance, Elsa*, the 93-year-old Frankfurt woman interviewed in Chapter 7, still has very painful memories of the war. When asked about the 2015 refugee influx, she relates the topic to her own experiences and the memory of her war-torn country being occupied by Soviet forces while its leader, Adolf Hitler, hid in his bunker. With bitterness in her voice seventy-five years later, Elsa says, "we had refugees too, and they had to stay here in this land. They couldn't flee anywhere. No other country would have taken them in, since we were the ones who started the war. People today have it very differently." Elsa's life spans Weimar Germany, the Third Reich, divided Germany, and reunified Germany. She views today's refugee influx through a historical lens, and while she is an ardent Merkel supporter, she thinks that ultimately, Merkel's acceptance of over a million refugees was "too much." While Elsa sympathizes with today's refugees, as she sympathized with the Easterners at the time of reunification, she seems to still feel a sense of

neglect and abandonment that has lasted since Hitler's suicide. It stands to reason that a German who lived through Germany's devastation might feel that they never received the attention, resources, and sympathy that today's refugees do. These feelings are prevalent across Germany.

However, the right-wing in the East takes Germany's difficult past one step further and actively tries to revise the narrative to one of victimhood. Saxony is home to some of the most fervent right-wing activity and ideology—it is the birthplace of PEGIDA, in Dresden, and is also home to Chemnitz, where the crowd of 6,000 gathered in a xenophobic demonstration in 2018. According to political scientist Hans Vorländer, there exists a very specific "victim narrative" among Saxons, "rooted in the myth of the innocent, beautiful, baroque city of Dresden, which was laid to ruins by British and American bombers" during World War II. The city's annual commemoration of its decimation of February 12, 1945, further entrenches this moment in the city's memory and collective culture. Any German who lived through World War II would likely remember the Dresden firebombing with sadness—Elsa was moved to tears when she spoke about it—but the Eastern invasion mythos includes a second perceived offense: the encroachment of the *Wessis*, or Westerners, on Eastern territories and way of life after the fall of Communism. Vorländer points out that with this perceived invasion, the feeling of being exploited and disrespected spreads through the whole of Saxony and is not exclusive to Dresden. Following this line of reasoning, the 2015 migrant influx becomes the third so-called invasion, the third affront in a series of injustices that the East has had to endure. The Saxons to whom Germany signifies a monoethnic, homogenous society perceive this sudden increase in Germany's multiculturalism as a threat to German culture.

While resentment and bitterness were already present in East German society since the end of World War II, the 2015 changes brought out xenophobic and racist tendencies to a degree

and with a ferocity that might have continued to lay dormant otherwise. As Vorländer puts it, "this marked the final collapse of a world that had defined itself as Saxon."[189] It is what alienated many Germans from Merkel's government and pushed those who were hanging on to the CDU over the edge and into the hands of the AfD. The Saxon invasion mythos is not direct historical revisionism. However, the equation of events like the Dresden bombing—described by the right-wing German League for Nation and Homeland as "the greatest and perhaps most obscene act of genocide in the history of humanity in terms of time, area covered, and suffering"—to the ethnic cleansing of the Holocaust is inaccurate. It is motivated by a desire to switch Germany's role as aggressor to one predominantly of victimhood, and trivializes the plight of those who suffered at the hands of the Third Reich.[190]

The idea that "foreign equals bad" is also connected to the GDR's non-handling of right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis. As mentioned in chapter 4, the GDR either covered up xenophobic and anti-semitic incidents or outsourced the blame to the West, characterizing racism and hate as Western imports.[191] This allowed East Germans to imagine themselves on a moral high ground in comparison to the West, a sentiment which lasted into the post-reunification era. This narrative has only changed in recent years, once the East became associated with racism and xenophobic ideology. The continued denial of the existence of radical right activity in the East is perhaps best evidenced by Saxon Minister-President Kurt Biedenkopf, who held his office from 1990 to 2002 and in 1998 insisted that "Saxons are immune to right-wing extremism." As the GDR had done, Biedenkopf denied extremism in the East until it was undeniable, and then outsourced the blame to the federal, Wessi-dominated government.

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[189]Spiegel International, "Return of the Ugly German?"
[190] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 161.
[191] Ibid, 12

In 2017, Biedenkopf was forced to publicly acknowledge right-wing extremism after migrants were attacked in Saxon cities such as Clausnitz and Heidenau. At that point, an average of ten attacks on migrants were recorded per day, and the AfD had overtaken the CDU, to which Biedenkopf had belonged, in multiple Saxon regional elections.[192] Biedenkopf replied that "this has nothing to do with neo-Nazis, but with dissatisfaction and lack of leadership in the country," meaning Merkel and her supporters. For Biedenkopf and some other prideful Eastern leaders, denial is clearly still a preferred response, which ensures that the root causes of the issue are not addressed. [193] While this is not outright historical revisionism as practiced by neo-Nazis, it amounts to both a denial of the present situation and the neglect of the past that allowed it to happen.

18. Attempts (and failures) to address right-wing extremism

After the riots and attacks of the early 1990s (most famously in Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln, and Solingen) the German government finally seemed motivated to act. Instead of enacting specific policies to put an end to right-wing violence—or perhaps in an attempt to do so—the German government amended the Basic Law or constitution, specifically its asylum provisions. Paragraph 1 of Article 16 of the FRG's constitution had guaranteed the right to asylum for all. Now, however, politicians advocated a proposed amendment stating that:

[192] BBC, "Germany Hate Crime."
[193] Steven Geyer, "Rechtsextreme in Chemnitz: Die Folgen der Ignoranz," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 29, 2018.

> Paragraph 1 may not be invoked by anybody who enters the country from a member state of the European Communities or another third country where the application of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is assured.[194]

Essentially, this amendment denied asylum to anyone who came from a country which was not deemed dangerous enough to justify fleeing it. Sociologist Hermann Kurthen argues that Chancellor Helmut Kohl showed strong leadership with the above measures, but he also acknowledges that the government essentially gave in to the extremists by altering the asylum law.[195] Considering the continuation—and recent resurgence—of xenophobic activity, these early attempts to stifle the radical right clearly failed.

Kurthen's point about the amendment being perceived as a right-wing victory, furthermore, is sound. Limiting refugee entry rather than controlling extreme reactions to it was a point of appeasement, even capitulation. The government had chosen a path of least resistance, and at least initially, it seemed to work. In 1993, after the constitution was amended, there was a notable recorded decrease in right-wing crime, which can be attributed to strong government responses: banning hate groups, enacting harsher criminal prosecution, and the tighter asylum laws to curb.[196] But, while the Basic Law amendment did have noticeable effects in curbing immigration to Germany, it did not permanently reduce neo-Nazi activity. Overwhelming numbers of attacks continued to be reported over the years. Right-wing forces kept cropping up, from the National Socialist Underground in 1998, to racist extremists uncovered in Germany's

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[194] Kay Hailbronner, "Asylum Law Reform in the German Constitution," *American University International Law Review* Volume 9 Issue 4, 1994, Article 9.
[195] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia,* 155.
[196] Ibid, 7.

military and police forces.[197] For that reason, Kohl's failure to smother the ever-growing flame of right-wing extremism are among the scars left on the German public by its division and reunification.

In 2000, after an African man was murdered in the eastern town of Halle, ABC news reported that the German government had approved a budget of $35 million "to fight racism and the roots of hate crime."[198] Though certainly a step in the right direction, the AfD's success and PEGIDA's persistence today underscore the fact that these efforts were simply not enough. The scars Germany bore from its past—the difficulties of their decades divided as well as the atrocities of the Third Reich—were too deep to be smoothed over with government funds or task forces.

Germany's mainstream parties are vocal in condemning the AfD. Members from the CDU and SPD, for example, can be heard booing and jeering when AfD members take the podium. However, the general consensus still seems to be that reforming immigration is the answer. Addressing the consequences of reunification—the lasting economic inequalities, the East-West tensions, the lack of jobs in the East—is not being considered as a way of combating extremism. It seems that government policies against the far-right always address the symptoms of extremism rather than the cause. For instance, CDU member Stanlislaw Tillich acknowledged in 2016 that Saxony has an issue with right-wing extremism.[199] However, in practically the same breath, Tillich advocated the tightening of asylum laws as a solution to this growing issue.[200] The idea that curbing immigration will save Germany is echoed not only by the AfD but by relatively

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[197] AP News, "A Brief History of German Neo-Nazi Group NSU," *Associated Press*, July 10, 2018. Laetitia Vancon, "As Neo-Nazis Seed Military Ranks, Germany Confronts an 'Enemy Within'" *New York Times* (July 3, 2020).
[198] Sue Masterman, "Germany Battles Neo-Nazi Wave," *ABC News,* August 23, 2000.
[199] Stefan Locke, "Stanislaw Tillich: Ja, es stimmt: Sachsen hat ein Problem mit Rechtsextremismus" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (February 29, 2016).
[200] Geyer, "Rechtsextreme in Chemnitz."

moderate politicians too. For instance, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, also a CDU member, remarked in 2018 that "Islam does not belong in Germany."[201] This was a jab at Merkel's immigration policy, at the agreed-upon course that Seehofer's CDU party had taken. It was also an unfortunate political blunder because the AfD's manifesto has a chapter of the same name. Merkel spoke out against his statement and insisted that "Muslims also belong in Germany, and their religion also belongs in Germany, therefore Islam belongs."[202] Despite her attempt to correct the situation and set her party straight, the message was clear: even the CDU, the champion of refugees during the 2015 crisis, was fragmented over the issue.

While Merkel has fought against suggestions to further amend the constitutional asylum provisions, and has assured the public that Germany is capable of handling a large and sudden volume of immigrants, we know that after the asylum laws were tightened in the early 1990s, there was a noticeable dip in anti-migrant crime. This begs the question: would curbing immigration officially and strictly in 2020 and beyond make a difference in unifying German politics and reducing right-wing extremism, or would it simply hand a victory to the extremists?

For every federal or regional politician in the SPD and CDU who promotes the admission of refugees and advocates cultural acceptance (receiving death threats or even being physically attacked for doing so) there are just as many politicians who lean in the opposite direction.[203] These politicians focus their efforts on regulating Islam in Germany, through registering mosques, banning niqabs and burkas, and financing the education of Imams with German tax money rather than letting Turkey, for instance have financial and religious influence in

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[201] Der Spiegel, "Geschichte eines Satzes: 'Islam gehört nicht zu Deutschland," *Spiegel Politik,* March 16, 2018.
[202] Reuters, "Merkel widerspricht Seehofer - 'Islam gehört zu Deutschland'," March 16, 2018.
[203] Rebecca Staudenmeier, "Death Threats Sent to Pro-Refugee Politicians," *Deutsche Welle,* June 20, 2019.

Germany.[204] For the CDU, the real obstacle to condemning and weakening the AfD lies in its own past. From Helmut Kohl's insistence that Germany is not an immigration country, to Merkel's own past lamentations that multiculturalism and integration have failed, the party has hindered itself in putting together a consistent and convincing case for cultural tolerance and pluralism today.[205] Perhaps CDU politicians are also trying to appeal to more centrist or right-wing ideology as a survival mechanism, to regain support lost to the AfD. However, in this way they inevitably promulgate some of the AfD's very same xenophobic rhetoric and lose support among their current constituents. Most troubling of all, in terms of the results of inaction, is the inadvertent acceptance of the AfD and their agenda into mainstream politics, something that alarms Germans who just a few years ago dismissed it as a right-wing fringe party. And, of course,we cannot forget that some of the CDU's members hold xenophobic views; after all, the AfD itself is very young, and much of its votership and leadership once belonged to the CDU.

Some politicians do offer alternative suggestions, and there seems to be an inkling of recognition for how Eastern grievances fed into the AfD's rise. For instance, Gregory Gysi is an MP who had been part of the reformist wing of the GDR's Socialist Unity Party at the time of the democratic transitions inspired by Mikhail Gorbachev. In a March 2019 debate in the Bundestag, he suggested that a quota be put in place to ensure that the East German voice is proportionally represented in Parliament. He cited Article 36 of the Basic Law, which requires civil servants from all the states to be accurately represented in the Parliament. He argued that Germany is violating the Basic Law by functioning with such a disproportionately low number of Eastern voices in the Bundestag. Gysi explicitly connected his suggestion to lingering East-West tensions regarding reunification, telling his fellow MPs, "if you want inner unity, you have to finally

[204] Deutsche Welle, "Ausbildung von Imamen: CDU-Politiker Spahn: 'Wir brauchen ein Islamgesetz'," March 30, 2017.
[205] BBC, "Merkel Says German Multicultural Society Has Failed," October 17, 2010.

create equal opportunities and living conditions in East and West."[206] His proposal did not go through in the Bundestag, however. Many Westerners have denounced it as legally impossible, and some Easterners view it as damaging in the sense that it implies that Easterners need handouts to achieve representation in government.[207] It is worth noting that the AfD representatives voted against Gysi's suggestion, and that in such debates, the AfD does not advocate East-oriented quotas that might help balance the inequalities between East and West. After all, much of their top leadership comes from the former West, and the party capitalizes on Eastern dissatisfaction.

Left party MP Ulla Jelpke has proposed another solution. In 2019, in the wake of an attack in the Western city of Hanau where a racially motivated gunman killed five people of foreign origin, Jelpke commented that in today's Germany, "refugees can expect to be attacked verbally and physically at any time."[208] Instead of curbing immigration, Jelpke has suggested other government initiatives that address the concerns of immigrants themselves as well as actively fight against extremism. She imagines a "cabinet committee against right-wing extremism" which, if "cemented by legislation" and implemented in conjunction with "permanent counseling and prevention projects for the victims of racism," would promote the German ideal of gradual national healing and improve the lot of immigrants who bear the brunt of right-wing spikes of violence.[209] So far, the government has not yet struck a balance between regulating immigration and directly addressing extremism that might yield more significant improvements. Ideas like Schäuble's and Jelpke's, perhaps if combined and synthesized in

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[206] Deutscher Bundestag, "Parlament berät über Ost-Quote in Bundesbehörden," *Textarchiv*, 2019.
[207] Thorsten Metzner, "Ost-West Debatte: Gysi für bundesweite Ost-Quote bei Besetzung von Chefetagen", *Der Tagesspiegel,* October 26, 2018.
[208] Deutsche Welle, "Germany: More than 1,600 Crimes 'Targeted Refugees and Aslyum-Seekers," March 27, 2020.
[209] Ibid.

various areas of German society (not just in a top-down governmental approach), do have the potential to bring about change.

Where the government may sometimes fall short, citizens eagerly pick up the slack. From artists to activists to political satirists, there is no shortage of Germans who are alarmed by the current state of affairs and fight against neo-Nazism and the far right in their own ways. For example, Rammstein, a Berlin heavy metal band (arguably as well known as Brahms across Germany), creates music that is openly against xenophobia and the right wing. Its members grew up in the GDR and Rammstein's lyrics, rife with references to fire, death, cannibalism, incest and horror—all violent themes that neo-Nazis rally around—attract an audience with no shortage of Skinheads. However, they repeatedly distance themselves from the right wing and, though their music has shock value, it is staunchly against xenophobia. For example, one song called "*Mein Land*" or "My Country" parodies the right's frequent insistence that Germany does not have space for foreigners.

In their controversial 2019 song "Deutschland," frontman Till Lindemann's characteristic growling voice reveals his torn feelings about Germany, feelings that likely rang familiar to many Germans. Lamenting the fact that he wants to be proud of Germany for all of its achievements but is so deeply ashamed of it for its history, he sings "*Deutschland, mein Herz in Flammen, will dich lieben und dich verdammen"* ("Germany, my heart in flames, I want to love you and to damn you"). The song also includes the lyrics "*Deutschland über allen,"* a slightly different spelling of the Nazi anthem "Deutschland über alles" (Germany above all). The music video for *Deutschland* offers a brief journey through German history, from battles between Germanic people and Romans around 13 CE, to the economic instability of the Weimar Republic that lasted through Germany's interwar period, to the killing of Jews during the Holocaust—with

the band members dressed in concentration camp uniforms and bearing upside down pink triangles and yellow stars of David, the characteristic symbols people were forced to wear if they were homosexual and/or Jewish—to the GDR regime. Scenes of bloodshed, excess and chaos combined with Rammstein's lyrics convey a clear message: Germany (portrayed by actress Ruby Commey as an attractive woman) is hard to love. For while she may be awe-inspiring in some ways, her past is terrible and inescapable.[210] Rammstein expresses sympathy for the duality of emotions that Germans feel about their nation and identity, with the tentative pride, lasting shame, and even self-loathing that, for some, define with the German identity. Nonetheless, they refuse to become radicalized or veer to the political right as a result of these conflicting feelings, and use their music to speak out against xenophobia and the glorification of Germany's past.

Museums likewise shape Germany's memory politics and help Germans address their past. At the Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial and museum, former prisoners of the GDR regime now lead tours around the eponymous prison and recount their life stories to visitors. Hohenschönhausen was run by the GDR's secret police, the Stasi, and housed people who were political prisoners, had actively resisted the regime, or had attempted to leave East Germany. The latter applies to Gerhard Schmidt, who was imprisoned several times throughout his life for helping others to flee and fleeing the GDR himself. Schmidt now leads tours at Hohenschönhausen in a thick Berlin accent, sharing personal and sobering anecdotes. He speaks with a resigned smile and surprising humor of the cruelties he endured, showing each audience one swollen knuckle on his hand, significantly larger than the rest, the bodily reminder of countless months spent knocking on the walls of his cell in an effort to communicate in code. The complex included rooms dedicated to both physical and psychological torture and

[210] Alexandra Lloyd, "Rammstein Deutschland: The Song and Video Explained," *Metal Hammer,* May 18, 2020.

interrogration.[211] The tours at Hohenschönhausen act as a living reminder of the dangers of extremism and authoritarianism, be it right-wing or left-wing.

One final response is to "laugh away the right," or to ridicule neo-Nazis into obsoletion. In 2004, the satirical organization *Front Deutscher Äpfel* (Front of German Apples) was founded in Leipzig, after the far-right extremist National Democratic Party won 9 percent of the overall vote in the Saxon regional election.[212] The Front of German Apples is is elaborately designed to parody Hitler's Nazi party as well as today's far-right groups. It advertises a fictional youth group called the National Fresh Fruit of Germany, and a fictional women's suborganization parodying the Nazi girls' organization, the *Bund Deutscher Mädchen*—here known as the League of Soft Pears. In German, having a soft pear is incidentally a way of saying that someone is stupid. The organization's website banner reads that the group is a "national initiative against the foreign infiltration of the German fruit inventory and the loitering of windfallen fruit." The Front Deutscher Äpfel metaphorically mocks the xenophobic agenda of the far right, an agenda which certainly existed in 2004 and became even more prevalent in 2015. The AfD tends to characterize immigrants as loafers who mooch off the government, so to mock them, the Front Deutscher Äpfel uses the word *faul* to mean "loitering." Cleverly, *faul* also means rotten, as pertaining to rotten fruit. The rotten fruit they aim to eradicate symbolizes the perceived lazy, exploitative migrants that the AfD wants to ban from Germany.[213]

The activist spirit is especially strong in certain parts of Germany. In Berlin, for example, dedicated and consistent efforts on the part of the activist group Berlin Against Nazis to quash Bärgida—the Berlin branch of PEGIDA—have been largely successful. At a weekly Bärgida

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[211] Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, "Stasi-Gefängnis," Accessed January 13, 2021.
[212] Michael C. Zeller, "How to Laugh Away the Far Right: Lessons from Germany," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,* August 6, 2020.
[213] "Front Deutscher Äpfel: Nationale Initiative gegen die Überfremdung des deutschen Obstbestandes und gegen faul herumliegendes Obst" (Accessed February 3, 2020).

march in 2015, reportedly five thousand Berliners showed up to counter-protest, overwhelming the few hundred Bärgida participants. Berlin Against Nazis showed up at march after march, so that the numbers of Bärgida members began to dwindle. During 2019, police began sending Bärgida marchers home, and eventually the Monday marches for the rest of the year were cancelled.[214] This was a victorious moment for those who were concerned and agitated by the sight of the far right marching through the Berlin city center. This tactic of civil suppression is also used by Antifa, whose members run several Facebook pages essentially mocking and condemning the AfD and PEGIDA. The very usage of the internet by the AfD and PEGIDA is oftened termed "trolling," as they provoke and agitate using misleading wording and information. As counter-trolls, several Antifa members have created social media pages that bear the name AfD or PEGIDA but are satirical or criticize the groups. One member hijacked an actual PEGIDA page for that purpose.[215]

Reflecting on the various political initiatives that have been crafted to confront Germany's complicated past, Historian Hope M. Harrison points out areas in memory politics where progress has been made, as well as places where the government has erred. She points out that the government has certainly made some efforts to unify the country further in spirit, such as the Bundestag's establishment in 2007 of the Freedom and Unity Movement to commemorate those who rose up in opposition to the GDR and strove for reunification. Harrison also notes key shifts in the official language used to refer to reunification before and after 2009. Since 2009, politicians have made speeches acknowledging the East Germans as "heroes who demanded freedom and democracy" in the peaceful revolution of 1989, and not just as "a nation of Nazis and then communist perpetrators and victims" as they had often been described in the West. The

[214] Berlin Gegen Nazis, "The End of Bärgida? A Review," Accessed December 30, 2020.
[215] PEGIDA's (@pegidaevdresden) Facebook Page, accessed December 30, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/pegidaevdresden/.

year 2009 thus bore a "new founding myth" for all Germans unite around.[216] In a speech given that same year by the then president of Germany, Horst Köhler talked about Eastern Germans and the GDR as two separate entities, no longer ascribing the crimes of the communist state to the entire Eastern population.[217] At that moment, the German government deliberately changed its narrative around reunification to include East German experiences. Hopefully, the narrative around the rise of right-wing extremism since 2015 will also eventually change, and the focus will broaden to acknowledge the deep-rooted, underlying tensions, not merely the trigger that the refugee influx became, to explain the emergence of PEGIDA and the rapid rise of the AfD's power.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that the AfD's exclusion from memory politics might also be deepening East-West divides and diminishing the chances of reconciliation and collaboration between Germany's political parties. For instance, they were not invited to join in planning the festivities commemorating the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall. The government's decision is understandable, considering the AfD's continuous record of revisionism, fear-mongering and divisiveness. However, others might argue that it might be politically prudent for more mainstream political parties to, to an extent, overlook or tolerate the AfD's opinions in the name of collective healing. Perhaps with the institutions and laws Germany has put into place since the fall of the Third Reich, it can allow more collaboration across the political spectrum without normalizing the AfD's agenda or endangering the constitution. Would it be dangerous to give the AfD a sense of legitimacy or might such an action entice the AfD to be more collaborative and less inflammatory? It is still possible for the

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[216] Hope M. Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present* (Cambridge University Printing Press, 2019), 308, 347, 388, 393.
[217] "Rede von Bundespräsident Horst Köhler bei der Veranstaltung '20 Jahre Mauerfall: Der Sieg der Freiheit'" *Der Bundespräsident: Reden* (October 31, 2009).

AfD to mellow as the refugee crisis slowly dies down, but it is equally possible that they will be emboldened and seize on other issues to radicalize further.

19. Hoyerswerda revisited

Returning to Hoyerswerda, our starting point in this discussion of Germany's right-wing resurgence, we encounter Germans still coping and reckoning with events that happened thirty years prior. In 2015, *Der Spiegel* reporters visited the town to assess its progress since the 1991 xenophobic riots rendered it a symbol of "post-Communist hate."[218] Today, the community is vastly more diverse. Post-reunification, the city's population shrunk by half and its barren landscape is slowly being reclaimed by nature like the towns around Chernobyl. The city hospital is one of Hoyerswerda's last thriving institutions, where doctors from Sudan, Lebanon, and the Czech republic all work together. One third of the hospital's employees are not German-born. The city's population, one of the most elderly in Germany after an exodus of young people, seems to be wasting away along with the infrastructure and some of the Communist-era buildings. Nevertheless, the hospital has maintained its life with the arrival of foreign doctors, who also seem to be contributing to a greater acceptance of foreigners in the still highly xenophobic town.

One doctor mentions receiving a variety of racist comments from parents who bring in their children. However, he remains optimistic and explains that this is why he chose to work as a pediatrician. Children can still change, and if exposed to tolerant attitudes, they will not

[218] Fiona Ehlers, "Hospital of Hope: City Marred by Xenophobia Seeks to Reinvent Itself," *Der Spiegel*, January 14, 2015.

necessarily adopt the xenophobic attitudes of their parents. The director of the hospital, Andreas Grahlemann, oversaw its revitalization through the hiring of foreign doctors, revealing that due to Hoyerswerda's history of xenophobia, most ethnic German doctors turned down opportunities to work there. Grahlemann had to rename the hospital and exclude the city's name, but even then, once doctors saw the name "Hoyerswerda" in fine print on the address they withdrew their applications. Thus, the arrival of doctors from other countries has more or less saved the hospital. In turn, the doctors receive better work than they did in their home countries. This case is an example of the symbiotic nature of immigration into Germany, which AfD supporters so vehemently deny.

While racism and neo-Nazis still maintain a presence in Hoyerswerda, today there are also citizens dedicated to fighting hate and xenophobia. Forty-four-year-old Grit Maroske was born and raised in Hoyerswerda and leads a local initiative called Hoyerswerda Helps With Its Heart. Maroske recalls standing by passively as her husband took part in verbal attacks on foreigners in 1991; those who did not participate in physical violence against the refugees in 1991 joined in with "*Heil Hitler"* and various other hateful chants. Now, Maroske works to make up for it. Her organization is able to mobilize at least fifty members at a time in response to neo-Nazi incidents that take place at the infamous hostel where the 1991 riots occurred. Maroske firmly believes that, "through better prevention, clarification and dialogue," there is hope of subduing and ending neo-Nazi activity in Hoyerwerda.[219]

Clearly, even though thirty years have passed, the town is still tainted by the events of 1991. Its mayor finds himself having to explain each September that Hoyerswerda is not "bad," and in a recent article predicted that this will have to continue being done for the next twenty

[219] Ehlers, "Hospital of Hope."

years at least.[220] Certainly, an overall sense of normalcy has been restored to the city. Nevertheless, it is haunted not only by its past but by people who continue to spread hate and threatening messages, performing the Hitler salute with little to no police intervention. According to Pastor Jörg Michel of "Civil Courage," another civilian initiative to combat xenophobia in the community, there remain twenty to thirty "unreformable ones." Though those neo-Nazis are few in number, he observes that "people only hear the loud ones." Thus, the tarnished image of Hoyerswerda prevails despite civilian efforts to fight neo-Nazism.[221] The difference between today and 1991, however, is the determination to craft a brighter future for the town. As evidenced by Maroske, even those who condoned violence against refugees during the post-reunification riots are now actively working to eradicate neo-Nazism like the seemingly incurable virus it has been for the last thirty years in Hoyerswerda.

20. Conclusion

On October 3, 2018, as part of the celebrations on the 28th anniversary of German reunification, Bundestag president Wolfgang Schäuble addressed a nation still reeling in the first couple of years after the massive refugee influx that defined Merkel's chancellorship. Schäuble characterized the day as a moment of celebration, but also stressed the remembrance of the "multifaceted and contradictory," "successful and tortuous" experiences of Germans

[220] Deutsche Welle, "Hoyerswerda im Schatten der Vergangenheit," September 18, 2011.
[221] Berliner Morgenpost, "Ausschreitungen: In Hoyerswerda gibt es nach 25 Jahren noch Unverbesserliche," September 17, 2016.

post-reunification. He urged acceptance of diversity and change. He reiterated Germany's major role in European politics and on the world stage, reminding Germans that "in these times of globalization, we cannot keep the world at bay."[222] Schäuble felt that Germans needed to hear that they did not have the option of shedding responsibility for the refugees. No matter how great the burden, Germany was capable of and morally obligated to bear it. He echoed Merkel's rhetoric about moral duty and her confidence in Germany's ability to shelter people in need.

Perhaps most poignantly, however, he emphasized that reunification was a "second chance" at unity, the implication being that the Nazis had wrecked Germany's first chance.[223] The post-reunification period has been compared to the post-war years before, as in both cases, Germany reckoned with national trauma and engaged in a stage of rebuilding. It is also a thought-provoking coincidence that November 9th is both the date of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the date of *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass in 1938, when the Nazi paramilitary forces and civilians carried out a pogrom against Jews and the police stood idly by. This date represents the duality of German history and exemplifies the reason Germans find it so difficult to celebrate the joyous occasions in their past. It seems that for every moment worth celebrating, there is a moment of deep shame and suffering. Part of Germany's ideological and mental struggle has been to find both pride and repentance, to acknowledge but also to reinvent and move forward. While Germans have excelled technologically, economically, diplomatically, in terms of art and music, and in acknowledging and reckoning with their past, the dregs of Nazism have not been eliminated and true national unity not yet been achieved.

As the situation in the East and all across Germany seemingly changes by the day, it is difficult to say what course the AfD, PEGIDA and general right-wing activity will take. Some

[222] Deutscher Bundestag, "Rede von Bundespräsident Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble am 'Tag der deutschen Einheit' in Berlin," *Parlament, Präsidium, Reden und Beiträge des Präsidenten,* October 3, 2018.
[223] Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall*, 403.

predict that the AfD will suffer from internal party divisions, which they certainly already did experience in the past. Perhaps they will eventually reach a point that leads to irreparable fracture.[224] Others give a more pessimistic prognosis: that the AfD will only radicalize further and poach more voters from the establishment parties, gaining the level of power that the Nazis gained in the 1932 election that enabled Hitler to become Chancellor. Still others might share Hermann Kurthen's belief that the AfD's rise not be as worrisome as it might seem, as "xenophobic and antisemitic attitudes are far more widespread than an inclination toward violence, which in turn is more widespread than actual violent attacks."[225] This may be true, but it would be a grave mistake to forget that the Nazi party was democratically elected. It was at one point less niche than the AfD, and dominated the Bundestag before Hitler used it to take control of the country and demolish its democratic institutions.[226] Not everyone who was part of the Nazi party committed violent acts themselves, yet they condoned them and were even enthusiastically complicit in them.

What must not be overlooked is the fact that the majority of participants condoning the AfD's xenophobia and racism are not Swastika-donning Nazis, but everyday Germans. The people walking on the streets who fling racist comments at people of color in passing. The people who will snarl some variation of, "Go back to your country" to a hijab-wearing woman who was born in Germany and has lived there all her life. Often, they are world-weary civilians who are quietly sick and tired of repenting for a past they were not alive to witness and who wish they could shed their national guilt, though they dare not say so in public. Understanding the far reach of the right wing in Germany, whose ideologies and rhetoric can permeate moderate or

[224] Downes, Wiebrecht, "East v. West?"
[225] Kurthen et al., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia*, 32.
[226] Spencer Kimball, "Fact or fiction: Adolf Hitler Won an Election in 1932," *Deutsche Welle,* August 29, 2015.

left-leaning households just as easily as they reverberate in the right-wing echo chamber, is paramount to properly addressing it. Whether the solution will lie in collaboration across party lines, fixing inequality and poverty among Germans before offering welfare benefits to asylum seekers, adopting stricter legal measures against right-wing activity, or some combination thereof, remains to be seen. Currently, Germany is quite strongly polarized, and the polarizing ideologies are deeply entrenched and rooted in a history of reunification that is gravely under-acknowledged in politics. Without acknowledging the role that East-West divisions still play, it seems unlikely that the situation will substantially improve anytime soon.

If Germany's history offers one lesson to the government, it is that this happened once before. Democracy is vulnerable all around the world, as evidenced by Jair Bolsonaro's blatantly anti-democratic presidency of Brazil which began in 2018, and Donald Trump's legal and rhetorical fight against the duly registered election results that declared him the loser in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Even if democratic institutions in Germany are not threatened, the safety of millions of people is. Those endangered include not only the newly arrived refugees, but the Gastarbeiter generations, the economic migrants and expats. In other words, at risk is the safety of those who do not look ethnically German.

We have established that reunification was imperfectly executed at best, and catastrophic for East Germans at worst. While the economic disparities between Eastern and Western Germans have, for the most part, been evened out, and continue to shrink as the new country still settles three decades later, the resentments between East and West show no sign of vanishing. No financial support or central government has succeeded as of yet in smoothing over the waves of discontent that still arise. And so, the AfD has found a place where its platform is met with enthusiasm. Brilliantly and insidiously, as the party radicalizes, it exploits aspects of German

history and caters to deep-seated frustrations and the attitudinal divides between East and West, in order to promote its own agenda of Islamophobia and xenophobia. Though in the popular narrative it is cited as the main reason for this wave, the 2015 migrant "crisis" was simply the final straw in at least twenty-five years of dissatisfaction, combined with four previous decades of Eastern trauma. Together, these set up the East in particular to be a petri dish for the rapid and virulent growth of xenophobia and racism.

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