

ALTERNATIVE FOR GERMANY (ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND/AfD)

IMPACT: Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland/AfD) is a far-right political party in Germany and the first far-right nationalist party to enter the German parliament since World War II. AfD is widely regarded as an anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, and racist political party.

- Founded in April 2013, the **AfD began as a Eurosceptic** (opposed to the European Union and supportive of greater national sovereignty) political party focused on “market-friendly interpretation of German ordo-liberalism” and limiting “immigration into the German welfare-state.” The party has been accused of being outright racist and anti-Semitic.
- In 2014, the party won seven seats in the parliamentary elections for the European Union. In the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, the party’s electoral support increased by 11 percent. Currently, the **AfD is Germany’s “biggest opposition party, with 89 seats in the 709-seat Bundestag (lower house),” and MPs in all 16 regional parliaments.**
- The **AfD entered the German Bundestag following the 2017 federal election, during which it won 94 seats and became the third-largest party in the country.** In October 2018, the AfD became the second strongest party in the eastern German state of Thuringia, winning 23.4% of the vote during the 2019 elections. Currently, the **AfD is represented in all state parliaments.** In some states such as Thuringia and Saxony, it has even become the second strongest force.
- **AfD's Members of the European Parliament (MEP) are part of the far-right parliamentary group ‘Identity and Democracy,’** which also includes individuals from France’s National Rally, Austria’s FPO, and Italy’s The League.
- The **AfD gained prominence following the 2015 refugee crisis,** during which Germany accepted over one million refugees, which led to an increase in populist sentiments. A 2019 article in *Spiegel* noted that **Björn Höcke, AfD party leader in the state of Thuringia, blamed what he called the ‘refugee invasion’ for the “aggressiveness of his own followers, because if nothing is done, Germans are faced with ‘the death of their race’ through ‘Africanization, orientalization and Islamization.’”** Höcke is a former history teacher and has previously called Berlin's Holocaust memorial a “monument of shame.”
- In 2014, Die Freiheit, the anti-Muslim regional political party in Bavaria, unilaterally pledged to support AfD in the year’s elections. This support was not fully welcomed by then-leader and co-founder of the AfD, Bernd Lucke, which resulted in internal fighting within the leadership of the AfD and led to Frauke Petry, a member of the national-conservative faction of the party, being chosen to lead the party.
- **Under Petry’s leadership the AfD adopted anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies, scapegoating migrants and Islam as sources of societal illnesses.** On 19 July 2015, Lucke resigned from the AfD, citing the rise of xenophobic and pro-Russian sentiments in the party. He had concerns that the party had become "Islamophobic and xenophobic".
- According to German political scientist Karsten Grabow, with “**the election of a new leadership of the AfD in the summer of 2015, one can observe signs of rapprochement between [...] the AfD and PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West)**”, which for him “are two sides of the same coin.” In 2016, the *Guardian* published an interview with Petry and asked her about the similarities in platforms between PEGIDA and AfD, to which Petry responded,

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"You're totally right about the overlap. Petry went on to describe PEGIDA as a movement "critical of asylum and immigration laws."

- In January 2016, Petry suggested as leader of AfD that German border police should shoot at refugees entering the country illegally. Further, a February 2016 article in the *EuObserver* noted that deputy AfD head and MEP Beatrix von Storch responded with a "yes" to a question on her public Facebook page, asking if "border police should use armed force to prevent women with children crossing the border illegally."
- At its annual conference in 2016, the party adopted a policy platform that included several anti-Muslim policies such as banning the burka, minarets, and the call to prayer, all aimed at stopping the so-called "Islamification" of Germany, and adopted a new manifesto that stated, "Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values." The manifesto also described minarets as a "symbol of Islamic supremacy," called for hijab to be banned for civil servants and in public education, for the face-veil to be banned in public, and stated that "Islamic theology at state universities have to be abolished." It also said that Germany's Muslims are "a big danger to our state, our society, and our system of values."
- A few weeks later, Germany's Central Council of Muslims (ZMD) compared the AfD to the Nazi party and its leader, Adolf Hitler. Following this comparison, Frauke Petry met with Ayman Mazyek, president of the ZMD, but broke up the meeting after an hour because Mazyek would not take back his statement. Mazyek had stated "that for the first time since Hitler's Germany there is a party that again discredits an entire religious community and threatens it existentially. We have to ascertain this and emphasize this."
- During the 2017 federal elections, the AfD ran a staunchly anti-Muslim campaign. The party's election posters presented Islam as a threat to German national identity. One poster included the belly of a pregnant white woman with the slogan, "New Germans? We'll make them ourselves." A 2017 article in *Vox* stated this was "reminiscent of Nazi-era propaganda encouraging German women to produce German children for the Fatherland." Another poster showed a piglet with the words: "Islam? It doesn't fit in with our cuisine." AfD also released another poster during the elections that included the words "Burkas? We prefer bikinis" with a picture of two women wearing bikinis on a beach.
- During Germany's 2017 federal elections, the AfD worked with the Texas-based agency Harris Media, which previously worked with the British UKIP party, the Israeli Likud Party, and Donald Trump in the United States. One video produced by Harris Media aimed at Trump supporters shows the Germany of the future as an Islamized state.
- In the 2017 federal elections, the AfD received over five million votes, earning 12.6% of the vote nationally and more than 90 seats in the German Bundestag. At the time, AfD's deputy, Albrecht Glaser, argued against freedom of religion for Muslims, stating: "Islam is a construction that does not even know about religious freedom and does not respect it. And where Islam has the say, it nips any kind of religious freedom in the bud. And whoever deals with a fundamental right in this way, one must have the fundamental right withdrawn."

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- Following the 2017 elections, Petry announced she would be leaving the party stating, "My decision is based exclusively on my not very optimistic view of how the AfD is likely to develop." Shortly thereafter, it was announced that Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland were elected as the AfD's parliamentary leaders with the support of 86 percent of the party.
- In **March 2018, Steve Bannon, former chief strategist for U.S. President Donald Trump, met with current AfD co-leader Alice Weidel in Zurich, Switzerland.** They discussed political strategies and alternative media channels. AfD also invited Bannon in May 2019 to speak at the "Conference for a free media" event in Berlin for right-wing journalists and bloggers.
- In **January 2019, Germany's domestic security agency, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), announced that it would be putting its AfD's youth wing "Junge Alternative" (Young Alternative, JA) and the party's leader in Thuringia, Björn Höcke and his supporters under surveillance.** The president of the BfV said that JA members showed "clear evidence of an anti-immigration and particularly anti-Muslim attitude."
- In January 2020, two AfD members were elected into the committee for the search of judges. One was Lena Duggen, a lawyer who had previously been a member of the Islamophobic party "Freedom," whose Bavarian state chapter was under observation by Germany's domestic intelligence service. Duggen has issued warnings about "the increasing influence of Islam" in Germany.
- In **February 2020, a gunman targeted shisha bars in the town of Hanau, and killed nine people**, most of whom were of Turkish, Afghan, and Bosnian origin. The **gunman left a manifesto which outlined his racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic views. Following the deadly attack, many German politicians and voters pointed to the AfD**, with Green Party politician Cem Ozdemir stating, "The AfD is the political arm of hate." While the AfD was quick to condemn the attack, an article in the *BBC* noted that the "leaders refuse to accept that the killing was motivated by a far-right ideology or that the attacker might have been influenced by racist rhetoric." A March 2020 article in the European Council on Foreign Relations observed that "**while the AfD cannot be held directly responsible for these deeds, many of their representatives have created fertile ground for hate.**"
- In March 2020, the **German secret service - Verfassungsschutz - described the right-wing camp of the AfD, led by Björn Höcke, as a "proven extremist endeavor,"** and stated it would be monitoring this group. According to the secret service, 7000 people belong to this wing of the party.