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Calling the Ghost of Populism: The AfD's Strategic and Tactical Agendas until the EP Election 2014

SIMON T. FRANZMANN

Since the formation of the German AfD in spring 2013, political scientists have discussed whether the AfD can be classified as a populist party. Despite the split of the party in summer 2015 leading to this characterisation becoming uncontested, the question remains whether the AfD was populist from its inception. This article demonstrates that distinguishing between the tactical and strategic agendas of the party solves this conundrum. While the AfD seldom applied populist discourse in its official manifestos, its tactical agenda was undoubtedly framed by populism. Ironically, it has been the ideologically moderate economist wing that has applied populist discourse in combination with its critique of the euro.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, Germany has lacked either a relevant extreme right-wing party or a Eurosceptic party.¹ Since April 2013, Germany has witnessed the emergence of a growing Eurosceptic party. In the September 2013 federal election, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) garnered 4.7 per cent of the votes but failed to reach the electoral threshold. A few months later in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) election, the AfD garnered 7.1 per cent of the votes. In all of the subsequent state (Länder) elections, the AfD has been able to reach the 5 per cent threshold. As of March 2016, AfD was represented in eight of the 16 state parliaments, outperforming, for instance, the former long-term governing liberal party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The AfD has become the second largest party in Saxony-Anhalt and the third largest in both Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate.

Since its formation, political scientists have been discussing whether the AfD's Euroscepticism is the result of a right-wing populist attitude or a more technocratic economist view. The electoral potential of a Eurosceptic party became increasingly obvious during the 2009 election, in which such a party did not partake.² In essence, two camps exist concerning the question of whether the AfD is a populist party. The first perspective characterises the AfD as a populist party from its inception, referring to findings of electoral campaigns and personal links to right-wing extremists.³ The other view emphasises the rather technocratic and bourgeois character of the AfD during its founding period.⁴ How can we explain these contradictory findings? This article attempts to solve this conundrum by utilising three main arguments. First, I demonstrate that one has to distinguish between the tactical and the strategic agenda of a party. Populism was present in the tactical statements, but not in its strategic

statements. Second, I argue that the Eurozone crisis was the opportunity for, but not the cause of, the founding of AfD. The true cause was conservative discontent with Merkel's CDU programmatic turn. Third, I demonstrate that the two wings within the early AfD, namely those of national conservatives and of economists, behaved asymmetrically in their programmatic stances. The economists left the party after the intra-party defeat of their main protagonist Bernd Lucke in the summer of 2015. However, despite being currently characterised as the moderate side, the economists have been responsible for framing the AfD agenda using populist discourse.

This article uses a unique dataset comprising a full survey of all the AfD's press releases in the period from its official formation until the EP election and the publication of its *Politische Leitlinien* (Political Guidelines) in May 2014. The Political Guidelines are the first long-term ideological AfD programme. Thus, the analysed period covers the initial formation stage of the emerging AfD. The article shows that the AfD approached the 2013 German federal election with extensive populist appeals, but it abandoned them in its approach to the EP election. The technocratic-oriented economist wing tactically introduced the populist discourse into the AfD's rhetoric. As an unintended consequence, this attracted supporters of right-wing populism towards the AfD. This study provides a unique insight into the programmatic formation process of a new and emerging right-wing populist party.⁵ It shows that economic issues can be most decisive during the formation of a populist party, as Kitschelt has predicted.⁶

This article proceeds by conceptualising tactical and strategic agendas, in addition to the underlying understanding of populism.

LINKING THE TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC AGENDA WITH THE ANALYSIS OF POPULISM

Parties form their agendas driven by policy-, vote-, and office-seeking motives.⁷ The party's agenda pursues long-term and short-term considerations. Norris et al. identify long-term considerations with the strategic agenda.⁸ Another term for strategic agenda might be ideological agenda, which represents what a party defines as its overall long-term policy-seeking objective. Conversely, parties react to current events. For tactical vote- or office-seeking considerations, parties will deviate from their long-term strategic goals. For instance, the party elite will emphasise a current issue more intensively when they hope to gain additional votes from it in the next election. These short-term reactions are what Norris et al. termed the 'tactical agenda'.⁹ Through this deviation from the long-term strategic agenda, a party's tactical agenda contributes to the evolution of its strategic agenda. Such a programmatic evolution can theoretically also combine programmatic stances with populism: for example, a party representative may decide to use populist-style elements to attract broader public support, instead of publishing rather technocratic statements. Later, in the empirical analysis, I will demonstrate that this exact scenario occurred during the German AfD's founding period.

I rely on an ideational understanding of populism. As an element of discourse, populism is portrayed as a characteristic of a message: 'as a political communication

style of political actors that refers to the people'.¹⁰ The definition by Cas Mudde is here used as a guideline:

a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.¹¹

This definition comprises at least three elements valid for populist discourse either tactically or strategically: 'the pure people, the corrupt elite and the general will'.¹² The corrupt elite, with their moral deterioration, are accused of having caused the current crisis.¹³ Within populist discourse, moral disgust pervaded even rather technocratic issues. Because the populist claims that the will of the people knows the one and only answer to solving the current crises, the elite's moral deterioration is identified as hindering the resolution of the problem.

Mudde's definition borrows from Freedman the notion of the 'thin-centred ideology'.¹⁴ Such ideologies are not full ideologies. For instance, they do not cover questions of social welfare. Populism as a 'thin ideology' is not necessarily linked to either the political 'left' or the political 'right'.¹⁵ Consequently, I later measure populism independently from its reference to 'left' or 'right' political concepts or to particular issues. However, by applying an extended version of the Manifesto Research Group's (MRG) coding scheme, I am able to incorporate the measurement of populism with left and right concepts. If the AfD is a typical right-wing populist party, it should score highly in categories relating to the national way of life, law and order, and negative statements on multiculturalism.

Understanding populism as a property of discourse has an important consequence, as Rooduijn et al. observe:

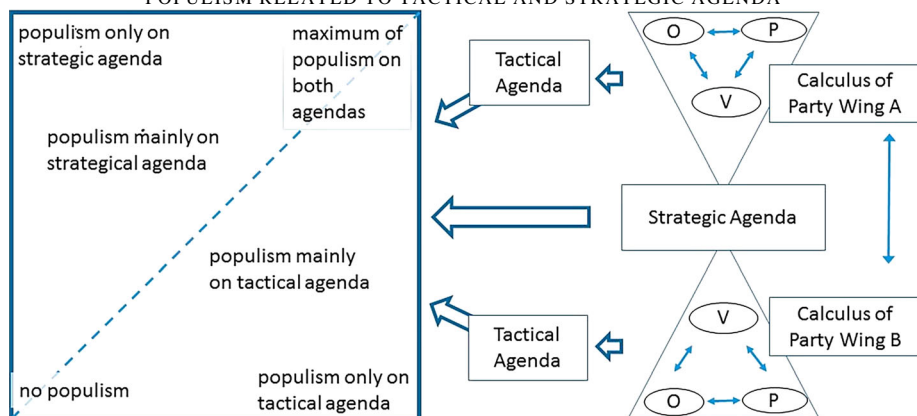
By conceptualising populism as a characteristic of a message, politicians, parties, newspaper articles, party programmes or speeches cannot be qualified as being either populist or not populist. Instead, populism then becomes a matter of degree. A politician who sends out many populist messages can thus be classified as more populist than a politician who sends out few such messages.¹⁶

Hence, different degrees of populism exist, expressed by the frequency and intensity of populist elements' use.¹⁷ In combination with differentiation of the tactical and strategic agendas, another important conceptual aspect follows. As it is a discourse element, an actor can use populist discourse within one arena and refrain from using it in another arena.

The left-hand box in Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical continuum along which different degrees of populism can be located regarding the different agendas. The upper right-hand corner indicates an actor employing a maximum of populist discourse in both agendas, while the lower left-hand corner indicates a non-populist actor. The upper left-hand space above the diagonal indicates a predominance of populism on the strategic agenda compared to the tactical agenda; the lower right-hand space indicates the opposite.

However, almost all parties are in reality not unitary actors. They comprise different party wings, or at least different prominent spokespersons with their own calculi

FIGURE 1
POPULISM RELATED TO TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC AGENDA



regarding policy-, office-, vote- and intraparty democracy-seeking strategies. This complicates matters. What we see in public as strategic and tactical agendas rely on these different intra-party calculi. The right-hand side of Figure 1 symbolises this process. A characteristic of the strategic agenda is its authoritative character. It is usually the result of an extensive intra-party process of formulating a party's ideology, or at least a party manifesto. In contrast to the short-term, tactical statements, I understand the strategic agenda to be built on programmatic documents being authoritatively decided by the party. Hence, the strategic agenda represents an intra-party compromise. The tactical agenda reveals more about the calculus of individual party wings. However, a party wing favouring a populist-framed strategic agenda might avoid using populism and instead borrow concepts and words of moderate ideology in fashioning the tactical agenda. Vote-maximising considerations might lead to such tactical behaviour where the populists fear that their anti-pluralistic character might dissuade people from voting for them; here, they apply blurring tactics. However, also for vote-maximising strategies, a party wing without a populist strategic agenda might favour populism in its tactical agenda. This might be a rational tactic to attract media attention. Nevertheless, the general intuition of my theoretical approach is that a party following a populist strategic agenda will exhibit a greater use of populism on the tactical agenda. The less populist the strategic agenda, the lower the probability that the tactical agenda is framed by populism – since long-term strategic documents are usually the result of intra-party discussions and are decided authoritatively, the costs of tactical deviations could be high due to the potential intra-party controversy and its negative impact on party popularity.

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO ANALYSIS OF THE AfD

What patterns do we expect for the AfD? The party's original core issue was criticism of euro currency politics and the European Stabilisation Mechanism (ESM). Decker and Lewandowsky highlight that Euroscepticism and the European integration project as a whole are especially well-suited to being combined with populism.¹⁸

European integration provokes conflicts about identity, and its reality unfolds within a system of multi-level governance characterised by a severe democratic deficit. Consequently, the AfD can be expected to apply populist discourse, and indeed there is some evidence of this.¹⁹

Two wings within the AfD emerged at an early stage. One is usually labelled the 'economist' wing: it especially emphasizes economic concerns over the euro. The other wing comprises of declared 'national conservatives' who focus greater attention on moral issues, migration policy, and law and order. During 2015, the clash between the two AfD wings escalated into a confrontation between the economist Bernd Lucke and a representative of the national-conservative wing, Frauke Petry. Lucke was defeated by Petry, and left the AfD to found a new party: Allianz für Fortschritt und Aufbruch (Alliance for Progress and Renewal), known as ALFA.²⁰ Five of AfD's seven members of parliament joined the new party. While ALFA's programme emulates Thatcherism and the British Conservatives, the remaining majority of the AfD are currently transforming into a right-wing populist party.²¹

The former two wings of the AfD represented the two main ideological sources within the party: one promulgated the economic-based critique of euro currency politics, while the other emphasised the conservative critique of CDU politics since Merkel became Chancellor. While the first initially experienced extensive media attention, the second was the real cause of the founding of the AfD. The Eurozone crisis opened a window of opportunity to temporarily draw the disparate unsatisfied people of the bourgeois camp to one party.²² Both ideological sources are built on a sophisticated analysis of society and economics respectively. Therefore, one would expect that the AfD should have been able to avoid presenting itself as a populist party. In fact, the AfD claims that it is not populist: it highlights its economic competence and its status as a collection of conservative intellectuals, representing a 'party of rationality'.²³ However, we will later observe that the AfD does use populist communication, at least for tactical reasons. From its launch until its internal schism in the summer of 2015, a scientific board of economists advised the AfD. These economists have all been advocates of a market-friendly interpretation of German ordoliberalism; they oppose the ESM for setting negative incentives for implementing austerity politics.²⁴ The original and most prominent spokesperson, Bernd Lucke, represents these economic concerns. Lucke initiated the Forum of Economists (*Plenum der Ökonomen*), a platform for German economists sceptical towards the current course of the European Monetary Union (EMU). The critique was mainly inspired by German ordoliberalism and alleged the surreptitious introduction of organised state insolvency.²⁵ In a newspaper contribution, Lucke himself builds a bridge between the protest note of the economists and the political sphere.²⁶ In this contribution, Lucke expressed his concern about the weakness of national and European institutions in solving the financial crisis. He saw the CDU losing its final unique selling point of economic competence as a result of euro currency politics. He argues that the CDU has already lost all other (conservative) core issues, such as democratic nationalism, religious attitudes, an anti-communist stance, Atlantic orientation, support for family and the educated bourgeoisie, and competence in environmental and energy politics.²⁷ These latter statements beyond the issue of the euro corroborate the AfD's claim to be the new

conservative party. Lucke's critique of the euro is formulated from a liberal-conservative perspective, but it also has much in common with the writings of many scientists.

In contrast to the public perception, the AfD's executive board was *not* initially dominated by economists.²⁸ In fact, Konrad Adam and Frau Petry, two of the three elected spokespersons, represented the national conservative party ideology. The most important vice-spokesperson was Alexander Gauland, a former CDU politician. After his unsuccessful attempt to establish a more conservative group (*Berliner Kreis*) within the CDU, he joined the AfD. Originally, his critique on Merkel was not inspired by euro currency politics: he complained that the CDU was losing its conservative programmatic core,²⁹ and was especially critical of the CDU's changing position on education politics, gender politics, suspension of compulsory military service, and nuclear phase-out. However, approaching the foundation of the AfD, he also temporarily supported critique of the euro.³⁰ The common denominator between these two protagonists, Gauland and Lucke, and the party wings they represented, has been conservatism, rather than the economic liberal critique of the euro. Both wings relied on protagonists with a 'thick' ideology, who had not previously been considered populist. Thus, individuals in their domain of expertise should exhibit a lower probability of using populist discourse. However, the following analysis demonstrates that the economist wing specifically framed its critique of the euro with populist discourse.

DEFINING THE UNITS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

The following empirical analysis is founded on an extensive content analysis of the AfD's programmatic agenda. Within a media democracy, parties have different channels to communicate their agendas to the public. Traditional forms include speeches at party conventions and campaign speeches to the wider public. However, parties also seek to directly address the media on its own terms. A common way of achieving this is through press releases, enabling a party to directly address a current event or react to an electoral opponent.³¹

Regarding empirical analysis, press releases have two interesting properties. First, since press releases are meant to present the statements of a particular person, or the entire party organization, analysing them enables us to identify who emphasises which topics to the public. Often parties are portrayed as unitary actors, but in fact, almost invariably, different factions with different ideological backgrounds exist within each party. Second, press releases are official party statements with the clearly defined purpose of appealing to the public. As written and consciously published documents, they provide a reliable and comparable data source.

Concerning strategic documents, the AfD began federal campaigning with a very short manifesto written more or less solely by one of the party's elected spokespersons, Bernd Lucke. In May 2014 the AfD determined and published its 'Political Guidelines'. This document is clearly a long-term strategic party statement, revealing the AfD's core ideology. Together with the EP election, the publication of the Political Guidelines in May 2014 marked the end of the initial AfD formation period. Hence, I analyse the Manifesto and the Political Guidelines as representing the development

of the AfD's strategic agenda and providing a natural endpoint for the period of my analysis.

An alternative source would have been to use keynote speeches. While speeches usually occur occasionally, relying on press releases enables us to construct a time series. The AfD include in its press releases the most important speeches during electoral campaigns. Hence, those statements are also included in the later analysis of the tactical agenda. Since each party in Germany is required to supply a complete manifesto to qualify for participating in elections, the programmatic keynote speeches at party conventions are more or less the same as the later-decided party programme.

Overall, the empirical analysis is based on a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of: (1) the AfD's federal electoral manifesto in 2013 ('the Manifesto'), (2) the Political Guidelines (decided by a party assembly of the AfD in May 2014), and (3) a full survey of the AfD's press releases.

In general, the coding procedure is almost identical to that of the MRG. MRG codes manifestos manually and records them statistically.³² Recording units are called 'quasi-sentences'. Each quasi-sentence equals a statement in favour of a particular policy goal. After identification, each of these quasi-sentences is classified into one of 57 predefined issue categories (e.g. 'European integration: positive', 'Multiculturalism: negative', 'Free enterprise: positive'). The results are reported in percentage share of each coding category of the whole manifesto. For example, when 10 out of 100 quasi-sentences are devoted to 'European integration: positive', the particular party has a value of $100/10 = 10$ in this category, indicating that a 10 per cent share of the party manifesto is devoted to positive references to the European integration project.

I rely on the MRG's extended coding scheme for two reasons. First, when seeking a comparison of ideal and tactical agendas,³³ one can easily compare press release positions to those of manifestos. Second, since the MRG provides rich data covering a wide range of countries and periods, the case study findings can be put into a broader context to draw generalisable conclusions.

The basis of the content analysis of the tactical agenda is a unique database covering all AfD press releases from its founding until the date of the most recent European Parliament election (20 May 2014).³⁴ Press releases were continuously taken from the AfD's website (<http://www.alternativefuer.de>). Each document published within the rubric '*Pressemitteilung*' has been downloaded. Constitutive elements of a political party's press release are identified as: (1) an *internal actor*, e.g. a politician of the AfD, addressing or reacting to a current event, (2) an *external actor*, e.g. the current federal government, and (3) a *policy statement* expressed by the internal actor. The central recording unit is the whole press release. Typically, a single press release promotes one central policy objective. Hence, not every sentence or quasi-sentence is coded, but the argument within the press release and its relation to an internal and an external actor is coded. Provided the same internal actor or a group of internal actors address the same external actor or a group of external actors with the same evaluation and statements, a press release equals one recording unit. However, sometimes internal and/or external actors change depending on the subject of their evaluations and policy statements. In such cases, a second coding unit is identified within a press release when either (1) a second internal actor makes a different policy

statement or (2) a different external actor is addressed by the same internal actor with a different policy statement. For each recording unit, up to three internal actors, external actors, and policy goals are coded.

The content units concerning the issues and policy goals are derived from the Manifesto Coding Instructions.³⁵ Extensions are made both deductively and inductively. First, according to the theoretical considerations above, critiques of the euro based on economic and currency policy are coded with new categories within the subdomain ‘economic’. Second, regarding the Manifesto, some categories are added inductively because these programmatic stances were not covered by the original Manifesto Coding Instructions: these were negative mentions of environmentalism and claims for transparency. Finally, a new subdomain was invented covering internal party affairs.

Whenever possible, new coding categories were defined as subcategories of the standard scheme in order to guarantee comparability with this scheme. In general, it is the same procedure applied by MRG for the CEE countries,³⁶ where the four-digit special CEE countries’ coding categories can be incorporated up to the three-digit standard scheme. Table 1 summarises all categories devoted to European Politics. My revision is the reservation of the economic domain categories for criticising European economic and currency politics. Because of the European integration process, these policies address both the national and the European level concurrently. Hence, a classification under the subdomain ‘external relations’ does not seem to be an adequate solution. Within the economic domain, all statements were coded as part of economic orthodoxy because the AfD’s critique of the euro is inspired by ‘*Ordnungspolitik*’, or traditional German economic orthodox thought.

The new subcategories in the external relations domain for ‘European integration: positive (negative)’ are introduced to obtain a complete picture of which elements of the European integration process are especially promoted or criticised.

I also integrate a particular measurement on populism. Regarding the press releases, each identified recording unit is assigned one code, signalling whether the particular issue is framed by populist discourse. This is similar to the holistic grading proposed by Hawkins in analysing the speeches of Hugo Chavez.³⁷ In the first step, the coder simply identifies whether a press release contains populism as

TABLE 1
CATEGORIES DEVOTED TO ECONOMIC POLICY WITHIN THE EU

Original Categories	Additional Subcategories
Per 108: European integration: positive	1081 EU: positive 1082 Monetary Union of the EU: positive 1083 Other EU institution: positive
Per 110: European integration: negative	1101 EU: negative 1102 Monetary Union of the EU: negative 1103 Other EU institution: negative
Per 414: Economic orthodoxy	4141 Anti-inflation policy 4142 Austerity 4143 Currency policy 4144 Concrete critique of euro rescue (economic)

defined above. The populist appeal to the ‘people’, asserting an identity of party leadership and the common people as ‘we’, fighting together against the corrupt others, is coded with a dummy for occurrence. In the second step, this code was controlled and differentiated.³⁸ Where an undifferentiated party critique occurs but a further constituent element of the people–elite antagonism is missing, such a statement is coded with an extra category for anti-party sentiment.³⁹ The score of the populism measurement is then set to zero when, beyond the anti-party sentiment, no populist appeal occurs. In the case of doubt, the coder should inspect the headline of the press release for the presence of populist tendency. The grade of populism is also differentiated. As proposed by Hawkins, a full populist press release identifying the political opponent as ‘pure evil’ is given the score 2, while addressing the will of the people as antagonism to the party elite is given a score of 1.⁴⁰ However, the highest score was only given twice. With this two-step measurement approach, we achieve a Krippendorff’s alpha of 0.8227, indicating a good reliability for measuring populism. Concerning anti-party sentiment, almost perfect reliability was realised.

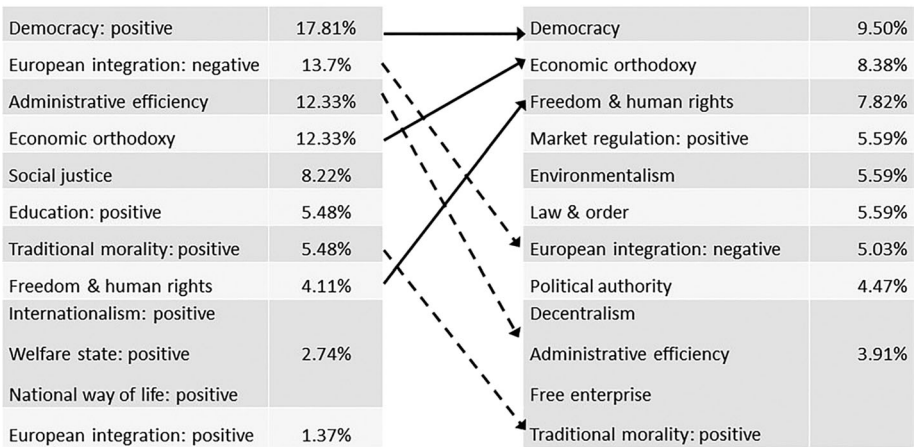
Approximately half of the press releases were coded by two coders separately; these results were then compared. Deviating coding decisions were discussed intensively until an agreement was achieved. From the other half of the press releases, we draw 26 statements to calculate Krippendorff’s alpha: we achieve reliability scores guaranteeing valid inferences, although the results are not perfect. For coding internal actors, we get an alpha of 0.7698, for external actors an alpha of 0.7488, and for the modified manifesto-based topic scheme an alpha of 0.7679. Considering the complexity of the coding scheme, this represents a statistically sufficient result.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE AfD’S AGENDA

How can the AfD, during its formation period, be best characterised based on its strategic ideal statements? Figure 2 illustrates its programmatic change from April 2013 to May 2014. Both the Manifesto and Political Guidelines emphasise the topic of ‘democracy’ most frequently and ‘economic orthodoxy’ very often. However, there are remarkable differences between the two documents. First, as expected, the guidelines address a greater number of topics than the Manifesto. In addition the guidelines contain some new topics that were not so prominently addressed, or as important, for the Manifesto: market regulation, environmentalism, law and order, political authority, decentralism, and free enterprise.

In both documents, efficiency, freedom and human rights, as well as traditional morality, are important. European integration is more important but not the main topic in any of the documents. Nevertheless, within the guidelines, the Eurozone crisis is the central starting point for the party’s line of argumentation. Almost all of the opening sections are introduced with ‘In the Eurozone crisis’ (*‘In der Eurokrise’*). Therefore, the formulated policy goals are not directly devoted to the process of European integration, but rather to those listed in Figure 2 as highly emphasised topics. This clearly indicates that the AfD’s main concern is not the European integration process itself but rather its socio-economic consequences. The profile of the guidelines fulfils the expectation formulated above. First, there is a strong component favouring the German ordoliberal-inspired *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* (Social Market Economy). It is

FIGURE 2
SALIENCES OF AFD'S FEDERAL MANIFESTO AND AFD'S POLITICAL GUIDELINES



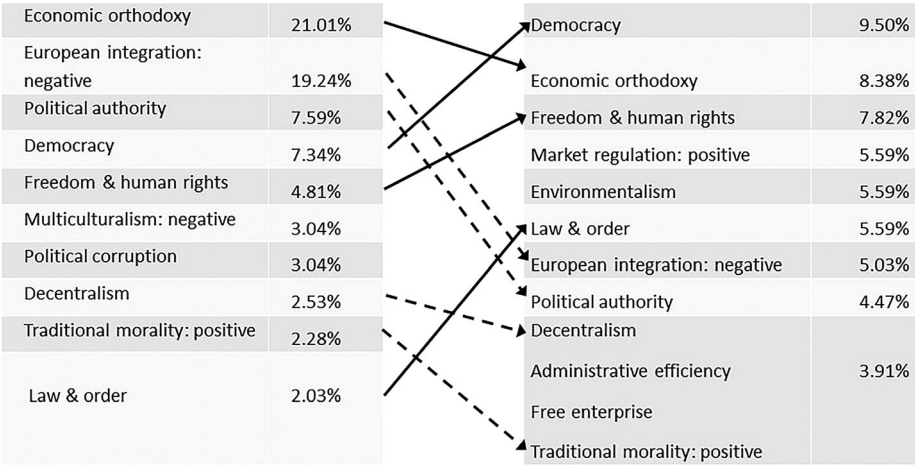
represented by the category on market regulation, and partly by economic orthodoxy. Second, the conservative profile is not just represented by traditional morality and law and order. The AfD directly addresses Christianity by citing ‘Man does not live by bread alone’⁴¹ to justify restrictions on economic interests.⁴² In a similar vein, the AfD’s environmentalism is the result of respect for the integrity of creatures. Finally, both the Manifesto and the Political Guidelines express concern about democracy deteriorating because of European multi-level governance. Direct democracy is seen as a suitable tool to reactivate democracy.

Figure 3 summarises the main topics within the press releases in the period from April 2013 to May 2014, indicating the tactical agenda within the analysed period until the Political Guidelines were determined. Economic orthodox and negative stances on European integration dominate the tactical agenda. Thus, the AfD itself focused its public-oriented statements on the euro. Other important issues have been direct democracy, quite conservative statements on political authority, multiculturalism, traditional morality, and law and order. Environmentalism is only important in the strategic agenda, yet it is not prominently addressed in any press release.

To further compare the tactical with the strategic agenda, similarity scores were calculated. For this purpose, the issue emphasis of press releases is accumulated for different time periods. The analysis disregards un-coded press releases and all statements solely concerning internal party affairs. This guarantees a sufficient amount of comparability. All subcategories are included with their scores in the standard Manifesto Project categories. Since both the manifesto and press release saliences are measured in percentages, it is possible to calculate the percentage similarity of saliences between the two document types. Sigelman and Buell applied such a formula to analysing US presidential campaigns,⁴³ and it can be easily transferred to analysis of manifesto data.⁴⁴

Table 2 summarises the similarity scores of the press releases compared to both the Manifesto and the Political Guidelines. The similarities with the Manifesto are quite

FIGURE 3
SALIENCES OF AFD'S PRESS RELEASES AND AFD'S POLITICAL GUIDELINE
Tactical Agenda based on Press Releases **Political Guidelines 2014**

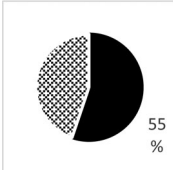
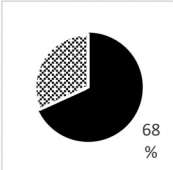
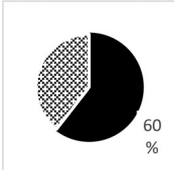
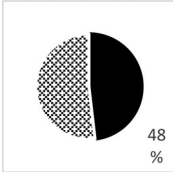
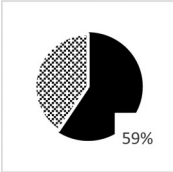
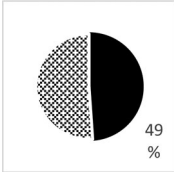
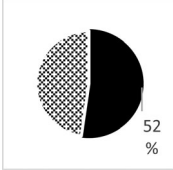
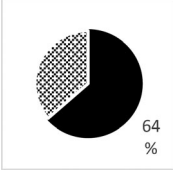
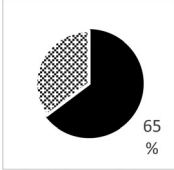


low, with an average score of approximately 55 per cent over the entire analysed period. As reported in Figure 3, the cause of this difference is a stronger focus on negative statements on European integration and favouring economic orthodoxy. The latter category was extended by a subcategory for concrete critique of euro rescue politics. As this was the central innovation to disaggregate the anti-European integration category, the AfD manifesto was coded a second time using the extended codebook for press releases. Indeed, the similarity rises to above 68 per cent for the entire period. Nevertheless, the pattern of vicissitudes in similarity during the period remains approximately equivalent. The lowest similarity is revealed in the very first period after party formation. Similarity increases in the months before the federal election in September 2013, but it becomes even higher in the phase from January to March 2014. Regardless of which measurement one takes, the relatively low similarity indicates that the AfD used its press releases differently to party manifestos. As the higher scores for the whole time period indicate, the number of press releases included is positively related to the value of the similarity scores. Because of the cycles of the issue agenda, single scores for part periods are lower than the overall score. The similarity pattern compared to the Political Guidelines differs remarkably. During the period before the federal election, it is rather low, whereas in the period after the federal election it is rather high and at the same level as shown for the manifesto coding with the adapted Manifesto Coding Instructions. Tactical and strategic statements become increasingly aligned.

TACTICAL AGENDA IN DETAIL

Finally, based on press releases, the use of populist-style elements is further analysed. Are there topics the AfD uses in combination with populist appeal and undifferentiated

TABLE 2
SIMILARITY SCORES OF AfD’S MANIFESTO AND POLITICAL GUIDELINE SALIENCES WITH
THOSE OF THE PRESS RELEASES.

		Similarity in % to official Manifesto Coding	Similarity in % Manifesto Coding with adapted Codebook	Similarity in % to Political Guidelines
The whole period	April 2013– May 2014	 55 %	 68 %	 60 %
Period until the federal election	April 2013– September 2013	 48 %	 59 %	 49 %
Period from federal election until EP election	October 2013– May 2014	 52 %	 64 %	 65 %

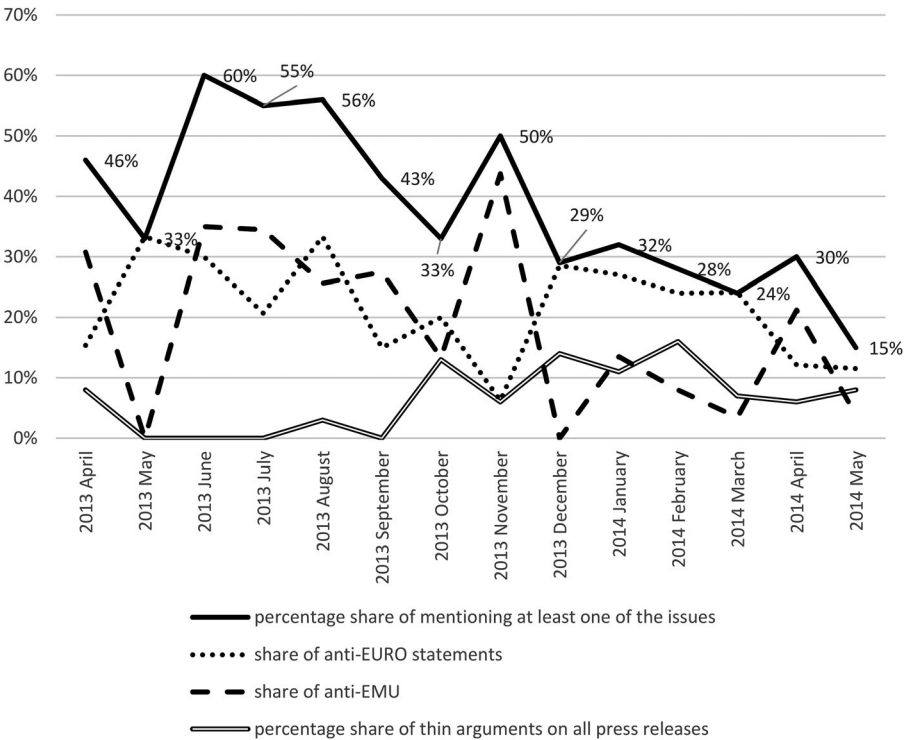
Note: Own calculations based on Simon T. Franzmann, ‘Chapter 12: From Data to Inference and Back Again: Perspectives on the Manifesto Project from the General Content Analysis’, in Andrea Volkens, Judith Bara, Ian Budge, Michael D. McDonald and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (eds), *Mapping Policy Preferences from Party Manifestos: Measurement Solutions for Users, Analytic Strategies for Public Representation: 51 Countries, 1945–2010* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 210–35.

party critics? Do the economists or the conservatives use this kind of populism more often? Preparing a logistic regression with populist appeal as a dependent dummy variable, we begin discussing the variables reconsidered in the regression analysis. The dependent variable is the occurrence of either populist appeal or populist anti-party sentiment.

Figure 4 summarises the use of the AfD’s most important core themes: anti-European integration statements, and precise statements against euro rescue politics. In total, 38 per cent of the 343 AfD press releases analysed were devoted to at least one of these two issues. The concrete critiques of the euro are combined with negative mentions of the European integration process only eight times. This result underlines the importance of carefully distinguishing concrete, policy-oriented critiques from any general scepticism towards the European integration project.

While immediately following the party’s formation the euro and European integration were included in up to 60 per cent of AfD press releases, the importance of both topics decreased in 2014. In 2013, concrete critiques of euro rescue politics dominated; in 2014 both issues were mentioned less frequently, but general statements

FIGURE 4
CRITICAL STATEMENTS REGARDING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND EURO RESCUE POLITICS

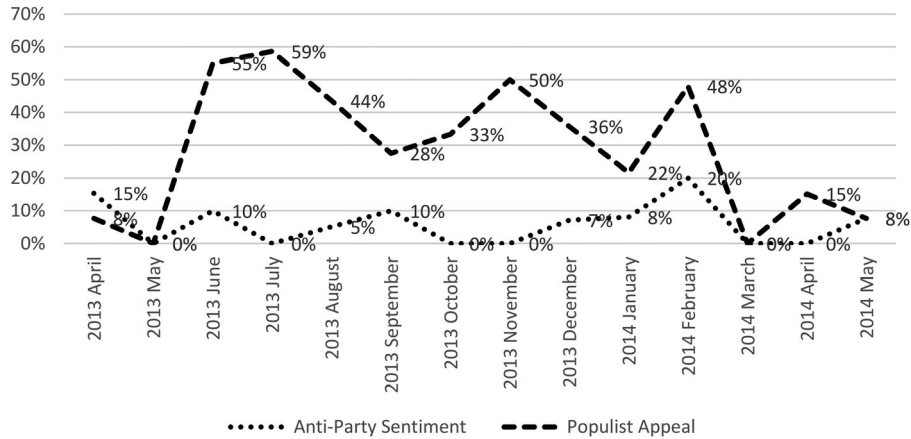


against the European integration project were published in greater numbers. In 2013 the concrete critiques of euro rescue were mostly directed against the government. This was the AfD’s major topic in the federal election campaign and its official reason for the party’s formation. Approaching the EP election in May 2014, both issues remained important, but AfD press releases were not so strongly focused on these topics as before. Simple statements against European integration were rare, while sophisticated contentions also dominated the tactical agenda.

Regarding the dependent variable, the use of populist-style elements, a similar pattern occurs. Figure 5 summarises both the use of populist appeals, such as ‘we the people against the other’, and undifferentiated critique of all established parties indicating anti-party sentiment: 29 per cent of the analysed press releases included populist appeals. Especially in the period from June to November 2013, sometimes more than half of the press releases used this particular populist style. Anti-party sentiment occurred during the period approaching the 2013 federal election and then again in early 2014. However, from March 2014 onwards, both anti-party sentiment and populist-style elements vanished almost completely.

In the first half of 2014, the AfD party elite tried to reduce populism and broaden the programme. Beyond criticism of the euro and concrete euro rescue politics, issues

FIGURE 5
POPULIST STYLE ELEMENTS IN AfD PRESS RELEASES



normally related to conservative parties, such as traditional values and family politics, have been emphasised.

The expectation, as formulated above, was that the experts in their respective fields would rely on a rationalist style, while those who are not experts would tend toward populist elements. However, this pattern cannot be found in AfD’s use of press releases. Instead, a clear link to special issues exists. Critiques of the euro and state affairs are connected with populism, while societal affairs are not. Table 3 summarises the results of the logistic regression. In general, topics were assigned to domains as proposed by the MRG.⁴⁵ Because of its frequency as well as importance for the AfD ideology, European integration and critique of the euro have been included as separate categories. To limit biasing in the frequency distribution, the content-related domains of ‘freedom and democracy’ and ‘political systems’ have been combined as ‘state affairs’, and ‘welfare and quality of life’ has been combined with ‘social groups’ in one category.⁴⁶ Finally, ‘fabric of society’ includes categories referring to typical right-wing populist issues, such as the ‘national way of life’ and ‘multiculturalism’.

The pattern for populism-associated topics is much clearer. First, in all models, critique of the euro increases populism significantly. Critique of the European integration project is only weakly significant. Nevertheless, this association is stable in all models. Model 1 tests personal background and both contra-euro and contra-European integration as predictors. Model 2 adds the full range of topic domains. Model 3 includes dummies for the different periods. As demonstrated above, the use of populist-style elements dramatically decreased leading up to the EP election. The reference categories were chosen to represent the lowest impact on using populism: local or regional politicians talking about internal party affairs. Model 4 and Model 5 inspect the use of populist-style elements in press releases formulated by declared economists and declared conservatives respectively. All reported models reveal an acceptable amount of explained variance and successfully satisfy the Hosmer-Lemeshow criteria. Those models displaying interaction effects do not meet the criteria and hence they are

TABLE 3
PREDICTING THE USE OF POPULIST STYLE IN AfD PRESS RELEASES

	Model 1 (n = 343) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 2 (n = 343) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 3 (n = 343) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 4 (n = 150) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 5 (n = 129) B <i>Exp (B)</i>
PERSONAL BACKGROUND: reference: state and regional level politicians					
Economists at the federal level	0.213 (0.291) 1.238	0.273 (0.301) 1.313	0.174 (0.309) 1.191	<i>Only Economists Model</i>	<i>Only Conservatives Model</i>
Conservatives at the federal level	0.489* (0.293) 1.63	0.542* (0.303) 1.719	0.381 (0.313) 1.464		
Lucke (dummy)	X	X	X	0.869 (0.643) 2.384	X
Gauland (dummy)	X	X	X	X	-0.26 (0.442) 0.771
Contra European integration	0.538*(0.283) 1.713	0.569*(0.293) 1.767	0.520* (0.299) 1.682	0.703 (0.433) 2.020	0.369 (0.577) 1.446
Contra euro	1.136*** (0.290) 3.113	1.195*** (0.309) 3.304	1.130*** (0.318) 3.097	1.439 (0.433)*** 4.215	0.116 (0.677) 1.123
TOPICS: reference: party affairs					
External affairs	X	-1.037 (0.654) 0.355	-0.92 (0.667) 0.398	0.988 (1.566) 2.686	-1.498 (0.857)* 0.224
State affairs	X	0.744** (0.301) 2.105	0.894*** (0.313) 2.445	1.106 (0.573)* 3.023	0.431 (0.526) 1.538
Economy	X	0.233 (0.488) 1.262	0.259 (0.488) 1.296	0.638 (0.694) 1.894	0.419 (0.928) 1.520
Welfare and social groups	X	0.17 (0.444) 1.186	0.368 (0.368) 1.444	-0.526 (1.101) 0.591	0.062 (0.686) 1.064
Fabric of society	X	-1.617*** (0.593) 0.199	-1.634*** (0.630) 0.195	-1.602 (1.267) 0.202	-1.401 (0.778)* 0.246

(Continued)

TABLE 3
CONTINUED.

	Model 1 (n = 343) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 2 (n = 343) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 3 (n = 343) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 4 (n = 150) B <i>Exp (B)</i>	Model 5 (n = 129) B <i>Exp (B)</i>
Intercept	−1.306*** (0.262) <i>0.271</i>	−1.421*** (0.299) <i>0</i>	−2.420*** (0.479) <i>0.089</i>	−3.04*** (0.871) <i>0.048</i>	−1.625 (0.816)** <i>0.197</i>
Time period dummy	No	No	YES	YES	YES
−2 log-likelihood	420.183	398.884	385.206	169.693	151.568
Pseudo-R ² Nagelkerke	0.079	0.157	0.205	0.221	0.184
Hosmer-Lemeshow	2.725	11.398	10.599	6.660	10.262
(Chi-square-sign)	(0.742)	(0.122)	(−0.255)	(0.574)	(0.247)

Logistic regression. Dependent variable: Press release with populist style element (=1) or without (=0). Reported level of significance: ***: 0.001; **:0.05; *0.1.

not reported. Model 1 and Model 2 show the slight impact of conservatives using populist-style elements on a low 10 per cent level of significance. Nevertheless, including the time dummies, this effect vanishes in Model 3. Beyond the stable pattern concerning critique of the euro and European integration, which show highly significant effects on the probability of using populism, two effects are striking. First, state affairs also increase the probability of using populism; second, topics related to ‘fabric of society’, such as law and order and traditional morality, decrease the use of populism. Model 4 demonstrates that the declared economists mainly drive this pattern. The economists especially combine critique of the euro currency with populism and, to a smaller degree, state affairs with populism. Overall, the economists are tactically populist in those areas in which they are specialists. Model 5 reports the same only for those press releases formulated by declared conservatives. Contrary to the economists, the conservatives do not combine their field of expertise with populism. Regarding external affairs and the fabric of society, the probability of using populism decreases. Including dummy variables for Lucke and Gauland respectively show that these most prominent party spokespeople did not deviate from their particular wings regarding populist discourse.

DISCUSSION

Considering the overall results, the AfD appears to be a party that has strategically formulated a balanced ‘thick programme’ based on economic libertarian and ordoliberal ideas and classical conservatism. In both its founding programme and Political Guidelines, the Eurozone crisis is simultaneously portrayed as a crisis of the political order. In view of the AfD,⁴⁷ the crisis has violated democracy, trust in the rule of law, separation of powers, the principle of subsidiarity, social market economy, and the idea of European integration itself. In addition, political leadership concerning German energy, the labour market, the family, and migration politics has failed.⁴⁸ The Eurozone crisis is seen as the crystallisation of political and ethical deterioration. Taking the statements of the AfD seriously, the Eurozone crisis may have presented a historical opportunity for the formation of the AfD. The main cause for the party’s formation seems to have been the absence of established parties expressing traditionally conservative sentiments towards political deterioration.

Tactically the AfD acted until the EP election as essentially a single-issue party that consciously varied its degree of populism in public. It focused on the Eurozone crisis and critique of the European Union and the ESM. This critique relied on populist-style elements. Interestingly, approaching the EP election, the AfD decreased its use of populist appeals. In an expert interview concerning its EP campaigning, an AfD spokesperson declared that the focus on the euro was also media-driven. The media have shown no interest in other topics.⁴⁹ This interview further revealed that the AfD considers politics a ‘zero-sum game’.⁵⁰ This idea of the zero-sum game is linked to the populist friend–foe antagonism of people vs. the elite.

Remarkably, the economists within the AfD specifically combined the euro critique with populism. In light of subsequent developments, this is not without irony: while the national-conservative wing refrained from using populist discourse in promoting their positions, all of the AfD politicians who left the party in the summer of

2015 (arguing it had become too extremist and populist in its actions) had themselves used populism in the first 12 months of the AfD's existence. The former spokesperson Bernd Lucke published the most press releases, and he was one of the AfD representatives applying populism in his field of economic expertise. In accordance with an earlier study by Arzheimer,⁵¹ it is hard to characterise the AfD in its initial months as an ideologically populist party. Focusing on tactical statements, the AfD extensively used populist discourse during 2013.

Was the use of populism in 2013 the result of vote-seeking considerations, or was the absence of populism approaching the EP election a kind of blurring of its populist position? Analysing speeches, Pieper et al. find a similar pattern of populist elements in campaign speeches concerning Euroscepticism.⁵² They draw the conclusion that the AfD is a hard Eurosceptic and populist-party. The more moderate manifestos and guidelines would only hide this attitude. My analysis suggests the opposite conclusion, namely that the speeches contribute to a temporarily populist tactical agenda. Considering additional evidence, the best explanation is that the economists applied a naive electoral political strategy. Gauland and Lucke referred to Martin Luther in justifying people-oriented narrative.⁵³ The German newsmagazine *Spiegel* revealed that Lucke himself encouraged party members to use populist appeal in order to attract media attention.⁵⁴ Later, when the AfD's relationship with the populist Pegida movement was internally debated in the autumn of 2014, the economist wing rejected any kind of cooperation with Pegida. They fought against a populist strategic alliance, lost the intra-party struggle, and consequently left the AfD.⁵⁵ As a result, there has clearly been a tactical use of populism by Lucke and the economists. Two interconnected causes presumably led to the sudden reduction in the tactical use of populism. One was the rising influence of right-wing populists within the AfD who increasingly opposed Lucke's economic agenda; the other was the declared aim of Lucke and the economist wing to become a member of the European Conservatives and Reformists faction within the EP. His intra-party opponents preferred to seek an alliance with UKIP.⁵⁶ One might also argue that the economist wing has had a populist ideology and that it blurred its populism approaching the EP election. However, this could not explain why so many people left the AfD as populism became dominant within the party. Perhaps, using populist discourse approaching the federal election might have been a blurring strategy. With its populism, the economist wing concealed its neo-liberal economic agenda. Moreover, it attracted applause for its anti-party sentiment and for populism itself.

A few examples illustrate how the AfD tactically used populism. On 1 July 2013, the AfD directly linked the ESM with moral deterioration. The occasion for this press release was a phone call between two Irish bankers deriding Germany and especially German bank depositors. Alexander Gauland and Bernd Lucke did not target the Irish banker but rather criticised the German government, contending that the Irish bankers' immoral behaviour was the consequence of the bad politics of saving the euro. Lucke argued that this immorality and cynicism would result in the euro currency giving rise to the 'horsemen of the Apocalypse'.⁵⁷ Although the AfD has a profound grasp of why the ESM is problematic, moral indignation overlays it here. Second, even in press releases which are at first sight dominated by economic analysis, populist elements feature. On 20 August 2013, Lucke criticised the third bailout package for Greece.

The press release was titled ‘Salami Slices’ (*‘Salamitaktik’*) and referred in its subtitle to the AfD slogan: ‘Courage to Tell the Truth’ (*‘Mut zur Wahrheit’*). Lucke accused Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble of disguising the real costs of the Greek bailout, telling the public only part of the truth about the costs that would arise after the federal election. In the final sentences, Lucke claims that all established parties, including those in opposition, have systematically lied since the introduction of the euro.

The third example contrasts these populist press releases with the more technical style adopted approaching the EP election. For instance, on 3 April 2014, Bernd Lucke expressed his concern about Greece’s return to the international bond market. He fiercely criticised the European Commission for being too optimistic about potential economic growth in Greece. Furthermore, Lucke predicted that people would only buy Greek bonds in the knowledge that the EU and ECB would bail out Greece. This critique was based on economic reasoning; it was not combined with a populist appeal.

Analysing the press releases reveals that the programmatic distance between the AfD’s two intra-party wings was not originally as deep as the later schism suggests. In January 2014, the former soccer player Thomas Hitzelsperger came out as a homosexual. Bernd Lucke criticised the media for praising Hitzelsperger’s courage in outing himself. Lucke claimed that today – given that Berlin had a gay mayor and there is an openly gay former secretary of state – not much courage is needed to come out as gay. On the contrary, today courage is needed to stand for family values and marriage. Lucke took the opportunity to signal his conservative position on family policy, beyond his known position on economics and the euro. He expressed moral disgust and anti-media sentiment. This latter statement exemplified that the core issues of populist right-wing parties are those belonging to the social dimension rather than to the economic dimension.⁵⁸ However, as demonstrated above, the German case of the AfD reveals that economic issues are those that introduce populism to the agenda in the formation process of such a party. As Kitschelt noted, it is a combination of neo-liberalism with authoritarianism that characterise the emergence of the AfD.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The AfD uses press releases and long-term programmatic papers very differently. Within its press releases, the AfD concentrates on general critiques of the ESM and EMU. The AfD used populist-style elements tactically during its founding months, but when approaching the 2014 EP election, largely refrained from doing so.

The AfD party elite relies on economists and conservative intellectuals with a profound, ‘thick’ ideology. However, tactically it concentrates its public appeals on Euro-scepticism and populism for electoral reasons. The decline in populism approaching the EP election, in contrast to the high level in 2013, hints that the AfD consciously uses press releases for campaigning. An alternative explanation for different degrees of populism over time might simply be a professionalisation effect. Since the AfD is a newly formed party, the high degree of populism during its early months might be an expression of inexperience rather than a profound populist attitude. However, the difference between the federal campaign phase and that for the EP is too huge to be explained solely by professionalisation.

The populism of the AfD is clearly related to state affairs and the euro. Its origin has been the economist wing. To a certain extent, the populist style blurs the AfD's economic far-right positions. Contrary to the AfD's expectations and claims, even the specialists in its field use populist elements. This indicates that the vicissitudes of populist rhetoric happened not accidentally but consciously. Ironically, the analysis demonstrates that it has been the former spokesperson Bernd Lucke himself who used populist rhetoric to attract support. Speaking metaphorically, he called it the ghost of populism, which later contributed to his own intra-party defeat.

Concerning the study of populism, my analysis corroborates the view that populism is not a constant characteristic of an actor. The AfD's populism not only exists in different degrees but also varies over time and circumstances. The differentiation between a tactical and a strategic agenda, introduced by Norris et al.,⁶⁰ seems to be very productive in facilitating deeper understanding of the phenomenon of populism. The question remains whether the AfD tactically addresses other issues and uses different degrees on the state (Länder) level than on the federal and European levels. At the federal level, there must be further analysis of whether the AfD returns, beyond the EP election, to a higher degree of populism and changes its agenda towards the issues of nationalism. Finally, the German case illustrates the interplay of the two main axes of political contestation within Europe, namely the economic and the social dimensions. The economic issues, and in this case even economists, open the door for a relevant, overtly populist party to achieve some degree of electoral success in the future.

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also published in journals such as *West European Politics*, the *Journal of Theoretical Politics* and *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*.

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