


## Book Review

*Radical Right Populism in Germany: AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement.* By Havertz Ralf. Abingdon, Oxon and New York, NY. Routledge Press, 2021; viii + 192 pp.: ISBN: 9780367372026, £96.00 (bbk) £27.99 (pbk, ebook)

**Reviewed by:** Michael A. Hansen , University of Turku/Turun Yliopisto, Turku, Finland  
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In comparison to most Western European countries, since World War II Germany's far-right political parties have been mainly fringe parties with extremely limited electoral success. For example, the far-right *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (National Democratic Party, founded in 1964) has never won a seat in the Bundestag. It has had sporadic electoral success at the sub-national level, and only once (2014) won a seat in the European Parliament. Similarly, *Die Republikaner* (The Republicans, founded in 1983) is a far-right party that never won a seat in the Bundestag, had minor regional success in the 1990s, and had its only real success in the 1989 European Parliament election (six seats).

This pattern changed with the populist radical right party the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The AfD was founded in 2013 in reaction to the Eurozone crisis and subsequent Eurozone policies (i.e., bailouts). As a Eurosceptic party, the AfD won just under 2% of the vote in its first contested federal election in 2013. However, in the 2017 federal election, the AfD was able to obtain 12.6% of the vote and 94 seats, making it the third largest political party in parliament. The AfD's achievement, in spite of longstanding historical trends of far-right political failure, has led to a massive proliferation of research on the party. Ralf Havertz seeks to contribute to this research agenda by providing a comprehensive analysis of the AfD's history and ideological elements, as well as hypotheses for explaining the AfD's success.

Havertz presents a thorough discussion of the debate between minimalist and maximalist definitions of populism as an entry point into an analysis of the AfD's ideology. In particular, the author provides a rich overview on [Mudde](#)

and [Kaltwasser's](#) (2017) discussion on definitions of populism, as well as [Mudde's](#) (2007) conceptual elements of populist radical right parties. Here, these definitions are contrasted with the more intricate ones of [Judis](#) (2016) and [Brubaker](#) (2017). Scholars seeking a nuanced review of the literature on the contested nature of the concept of populism will find this discussion useful. Havertz settles on Mudde and Kaltwasser's minimalist definition of populism, in combination with other ideological features recognized by Mudde, including authoritarianism and nativism.

In Chapters 2 and 3, the author provides a comprehensive historical discussion of far-right movements and political parties in Germany post-World War II. Within this historical discussion, the author firmly places comparable movements and political parties to the AfD further to the far-right side of the ideological spectrum. Havertz provides an argument that the AfD is a populist radical right party, while other comparable parties should be categorized as far-right or extreme right. The argument relies on the fact that comparable movements project a greater aversion to democratic institutions. In Chapter 3, Havertz presents a rich discussion of the history of the AfD. Scholars unfamiliar with the particular case of the AfD would gain a lot of insight into the party from this discussion. In particular, the section titled "A brief history of the AfD" is extensive in terms of conveying the trajectory of the AfD from a Eurosceptic party at the founding to the more nativist party we see today. The author also delivers a useful analysis of the debates that have occurred within the party, which have led to the evolution of the party since its inception.

In contrast, the content analysis (or discourse analysis—these terms appear to be used interchangeably) utilized in Chapters 6–10 does not leave as strong an impression. Content analysis is a difficult methodology to implement when studying a political party's ideological profile or electoral success. A scholar must carefully select their source material, develop a clear and concise approach/rules for assessing the source material, and, most crucially, provide a thorough defence of both of these choices. The content analysis framework in this text, however, is lacking in these areas.

The absence of methodological rigor, therefore, yields limited support for the author's claims and conclusions. Instead, Havertz relies on the sheer number of quotes at his

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disposal (from sources utilized interchangeably at times)—party programs, party member speeches, party member interviews, and party member articles—as evidence for claims about the AfD’s ideology and success. The most thorough attempt to systematically analyze the source material occurs in Chapter 10. Here, Havertz explores word counts for gender and sexuality contained in three programs of the AfD. However, this analysis, to my mind, remains quite surface level and consequently does not support the “anti-gender party” claim made in the chapter. Similarly, Havertz relies on an analysis comparing the percentage of men and women that voted for the AfD in different states as evidence for a gender gap. The analysis would have benefited from a multivariate analysis on vote choice to support this claim, which is common in studies exploring gender gaps in support for radical right parties. In fact, a greater engagement with the empirical literature on the AfD would have helped overall.

Finally, the author makes strong claims regarding the AfD’s success that are untested and which are widely debated in the literature. For example, Havertz asserts that there were three (or four) simultaneous changes that occurred to create an opportunity structure for the AfD’s success: (1) transformation into a neoliberal capitalist system, (2) liberal cultural change that has led to a backlash against minorities, (3) changes in the media landscape, and perhaps (4) a crisis of representation. A reader might interpret these as hypotheses, which are not tested and are only cursorily discussed throughout the book. Thus, they leave more questions than answers.

Overall, Havertz’s book will be useful to students at all levels of university education, as well as party scholars

who are unfamiliar with the AfD. The level of detail in the historical chapters delivers critical information that an individual would require to study the far-right in Germany, and the AfD as a case in particular. In comparison, scholars of radical right populist parties will be left unsatisfied with the analyses in the latter chapters. That being said, there is a lot of source material that Havertz points to in these chapters that could prove useful for motivating, guiding, or supporting future empirical analyses.

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