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Germany's Memory Culture and the Alternative for Germany

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Has the rise of the AfD changed the discourse around memory politics and culture in Germany?

How does the easternization of the AfD affect its memory politics?

How does the AfD use memory politics to mobilize electoral support?

For decades, the dominant narrative about the evolution of collective memory in the Federal Republic of Germany has been that after several decades of silence, evasion, and amnesia, new generational actors (the student rebel generation or 68ers) as well as voices from abroad (U.S. government, Jewish communities in Israel and beyond) began to thematize and foreground the crimes of the Nazi past by the late 1960s forcing a confrontation with Nazi-era crimes. This Holocaust-centered memory slowly gained prominence (despite some conservative pushback) throughout the 1980s and then became highly institutionalized as a hegemonic memory after reunification.¹

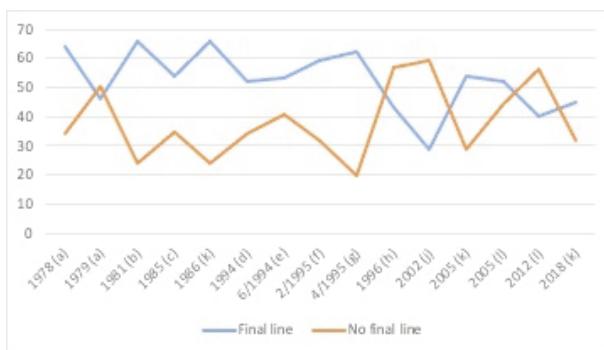
I have argued that this narrative needs to be partially modified.² First, some efforts to work through the Nazi past began rather early. For example, the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952 during the very first term of the Bundestag started the compensation and reparations process, which by the end of 2019 had amounted to approximately 78 billion euros.³ Second, the memory of German suffering (bombings, expulsion, division, POWs, mass rape) was rather hegemonic in the first postwar decades. A long competition between this memory of German suffering and the memory of German crimes was resolved in favor of Holocaust memory around the time of the Historians' Dispute (*Historikerstreit*) in the mid-1980s. Holocaust-centered memory has maintained its hegemony after reunification despite a temporary return of the memory of German suffering around the turn of the century, as well as new competitors such as memory of East Germany.⁴ Increasing distance to the events and changing demographics, given the rising share of Germans with a migration background, could erode this hegemony in the future.

Of course, Holocaust-centered memory—or better, the belief in the continued foregrounding of this memory—was never universally accepted in the populace. For decades, pollsters have asked Germans whether they support “drawing a final line over the (Nazi) past” (the *Schlussstrich*).⁵ The final line option indicates a desire to cease active discussions and debate about the Nazi past and crimes and to “move on.” This position does not necessarily advocate

forgetting, repressing, or revising the understanding of the past but can rather be a statement about how present the past and memories based on it should be.

Although much has evolved over the decades, the sampled Germans have rarely supported a continuation of debates. Indeed, a majority or plurality has almost always been for a *Schlussstrich*—whatever that means to the individual. Note also the massive generational replacement that has occurred between the 1970s or 1980s and the present. Few Germans are still alive who remember the Nazi period—and certainly only a handful are alive who were responsible and active perpetrators of Nazi crimes.⁶ Moreover, the composition of the German population has evolved considerably with over 25 percent now having a migration background (even larger proportions of younger Germans). They presumably have a less direct and more attenuated relationship to the Nazi past and more alienation from responsibility for the crimes committed. One final note: with the exception of 1979 (after the massive political-cultural impact of the NBC miniseries “Holocaust” that aired on public television that year), there was a clear majority for drawing a final line. This changed in the mid-1990s, perhaps coinciding with the increase in attention devoted to Holocaust-centered memory after reunification and especially the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. But, more recently, it seems that opinion is more volatile—with different majority preferences in various years:⁷

DRAWING A FINAL LINE OVER THE PAST



Clearly, the highly respected memory culture was never completely and irrevocably accepted by average Germans—even today. Things were different at the elite level where there has been near-universal consensus since the 1980s of the content and importance of Germany’s culture of memory centered around the Holocaust. Attesting to this elite consensus has been the sheer number of high-profile public commemorative and educational projects since reunification, including the Jewish Museum, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Topography of Terror, all in Berlin, as well as the “Brown House,” or former Nazi Party headquarters, in Munich, the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, and the

Memoriam of the Nuremberg Trials.

The AfD and its Mnemonic Sentiments

The Alternative for Germany was founded in 2013 as an anti-Euro protest party, barely missing the 5 percent electoral threshold to enter the Bundestag that year. Languishing in the polls and beset by vicious internal fissures, the party moved to the xenophobic right and capitalized tremendously on the migration crisis of 2015 with the influx of a million refugees and migrants. In the 2017 Bundestag election, it garnered 12.6 percent of the vote, and after the grand coalition was reinstated in early 2018, it has become the Bundestag’s largest opposition party. It has also done very well at the state level, being represented in all sixteen *Länder* since 2018. A clear East-West gradient has emerged with the party gaining 27.5 percent in Saxony and 23.4 percent in Thuringia in 2019 state elections versus 10.2 percent in Bavaria in 2018 and 5.3 percent in Hamburg in state elections in 2020. Nationally, its support has hovered between 9 and 11 percent in recent *Sonntagsfrage* polling.⁸

There is a veritable cottage industry trying to define and assess the AfD. Is it “merely” a right-populist party or has it veered into right-wing extremism? Scholars like Frank Decker believe that it is clearly right-populist—with anti-elitist, anti-establishment rhetoric highly critical of immigration and espousing nativist views—that has been infiltrated by some right-wing extremists, who hold radical views about the “Other” and support violence to achieve their goals.⁹ The AfD’s stances include nativist, “traditional family” policies, criticism of the European Union and the euro, and above all anti-immigration positions.¹⁰ They support the welfare state but only for the in-group, which in their mind has been discriminated against. They also advocate for the greater use of direct forms of democracy. Few of these positions are well thought-through or detailed.

Like many other right-populist parties across the West, the AfD has a thin-centered ideology,¹¹ meaning that their platform can evolve fitfully and quickly, is incoherent, contradictory, and really a mish-mash of various ideological fragments. In fact, it might be even better to think of right-wing populism more as a method, an approach, or even a distinctive tone. This is reactive, negative (always against, rarely for something), shrill, aggressive, self-righteous, and Manichean. Like other populists, the AfD positions the clean, pure people against the corrupt, elite, or “Other” (LGBTQ people, non-white immigrants, Muslims, experts). There is a deep sense of grievance—real or imagined—over unfair treatment in which the “real” people have been exploited, manipulated, and duped. They are vehemently against the status quo and “the establishment,” especially current Chancellor Angela Merkel (a figure who has been deeply and misogynistically demonized by the AfD).

Indeed, the party’s shrill, vulgar, anti-elitist rhetoric is constant. Importantly, like similar parties and movements elsewhere,

there is a divergence between the official stances taken or written about and what sub-groups like the right radical group Der Flügel (“the wing”) or individuals like Thuringian leader Björn Höcke say. This allows for plausible deniability—especially when a handful of egregious offenders are purged from the party, such as Christian Lüth, who opined about “gassing migrants” in September 2020 and was fired as a party spokesperson.¹²

Turning to memory politics specifically, Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik’s typology of mnemonic actors is illuminating. The much-vaunted German memory culture can be considered an example of “mnemonic pluralists,” practicing respect for alternative views and actors, ready to discuss and negotiate—albeit based on the fundamental hegemony of Holocaust-centered memory. The AfD—like other right populists in Europe and globally, particularly the PiS in Poland or Donald Trump in the United States—are “mnemonic warriors,” believing that memory is non-negotiable because there is only one “true” vision of the past. Warriors do not want to accommodate alternative visions of the past, but rather to defeat and delegitimize them.¹³

Thin-centered ideology and a shrill tone are especially apparent when analyzing the AfD’s memory politics. Their vague and inconsistent positions are best deemed “mnemonic sentiments” instead of memory politics per se. Nevertheless, several tendencies are salient. The classic right-radical, historical relativizing sentiments are common among AfD politicians and supporters. The sentiments expressed are provocative, but are also usually careful to avoid illegal formulations, for example, blatantly denying the Holocaust. For instance: “The ideology of multiculturalism is blind to history and puts on a par imported cultural trends with the indigenous culture, thereby degrading the value system of the latter. The AfD views this as a serious threat to social peace and the survival of the nation state as a cultural unit.” They also superficially support the memory consensus. For instance, the English translation of the program states rather benignly: “The current narrowing of the German culture of remembrance to the time of National Socialism should be opened in favour of a broader understanding of history, which also encompasses the positive, identity-establishing aspects of German history.”¹⁴

The speeches or various writings of party members, however, are more open and direct. Typical is party leader Alexander Gauland’s speech from June 2, 2018, in which he referred to Hitler and the Nazis as “bird shit” in the thousand years of German history. Actually, the entire speech to the AfD’s youth group (Junge Alternative) is noteworthy. Superficially, responsibility for the Nazi past is accepted, but Gauland does not mention the actual crimes. The emphasis is on much older history and traditions—incidentally, he refers to the famous Gothic Cathedrals of Bamberg and Naumburg (nationalists always thought that Gothic architecture was the most “German” style)—a dog-whistle perhaps?

“However, we do not want to be absorbed in the world or in Europe. We have a glorious history that lasted longer than twelve years. And only if we commit to this story, we have the strength to shape the future. Yes, we admit our responsibility for the twelve years. But, dear friends, Hitler and the Nazis are just bird shit in our over thousand-year history. And the great figures of the past, from Charlemagne to Charles V and Bismarck, are the yardstick by which we must direct our actions. Precisely because we have assumed the responsibility for the twelve years, we have every right to admire the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II, who rests in Palermo. The Bamberg Rider belongs to us like the founding figures of the Naumburg Cathedral. Dear friends, let us always remember that a German Jew, Ernst Kantorowicz, wrote about the famous Hohenstaufen Emperor. No, Islam does not belong us. Our ancestors defeated it in 1683 before Vienna. But the German Judaism of Ballin and Bleichröder on Rathenau and Kantorowicz was a part of heroic German history that Hitler wanted to destroy. Dear friends, you do not have to convince us of the unworthiness of National Socialism. We have this unworthiness in the blood. But, dear friends, whoever disposes of a Red Cross flag from the last day of the struggle for Berlin, has no respect for soldier traditions, which existed beyond the crimes in the Wehrmacht.”¹⁵

Equally infamous utterances hail from Björn Höcke, the fraction chief of the AfD in Thuringia, in particular a speech delivered in 2017 in Dresden. (Höcke’s grandparents were expellees from East Prussia, and he grew up in the West before moving to the East.) He utilizes all of the shrill, provocative rhetoric to rather forcefully call for a relativization of the Nazi past—without even really mentioning it. He portrays the culture of remembrance—in a classic example of right-wing cultural pessimism and Spenglerian decline—as an existential threat along with immigration and declining birthrates.

“We Germans, our people, are the only people in the world who have planted a monument of shame in the heart of their capital. And until today we are not able to mourn our own victims. Instead of bringing the younger generation into contact with the great benefactors, the well-known, world-shaking philosophers, the musicians, the ingenious discoverers and inventors of whom we have so many, ... perhaps more than any other people in the world ... and instead of bringing our students in the schools into contact with this story, history, German history, is made wretched and ridiculous. And this stupid (historical) coping policy, which paralyzes us today much more than Franz Josef Strauss’ times, we need nothing else than a 180 degree turn in memory policy. It can, it may and it will not continue like that, there is no moral obligation

to dissolve oneself. We need a culture of remembrance that brings us in touch first and foremost with the great achievements of our ancestors. Our dear people are deeply divided inside and threatened by the declining birth rate and mass immigration and are fundamentally threatened for the first time in its existence.”¹⁶

Although Höcke has been accused repeatedly of anti-Semitism, the AfD has not expelled him from the party. One politician who did have such problems with the party was Wolfgang Gedeon from Baden-Württemberg. Because of many anti-Semitic utterances and historical relativizing statements, including deeming Holocaust deniers “dissidents” and Judaism as the internal enemy of the Christian West (Islam the external enemy),¹⁷ he was forced to split from the Landtag fraction and lost his local leadership role in 2016. (There has been a degree of reconciliation with AfD colleagues since.) In 2018, he generated a controversy for questioning the Stolperstein (stumbling stones) memorial initiative,¹⁸ particularly one dedicated to murdered communist leader Ernst Thälmann, using the opportunity to attack the “moralists” who had transformed memory culture increasingly into a “memory-dictatorship” (*Erinnerungsdiktatur*).¹⁹

Indeed, the number of prominent AfD politicians making such statements is legion. Jens Maier is a former judge and founder (with Höcke) of Der Flügel, an umbrella group within the AfD with especially hard-right positions that has been criticized as having “extremist potential” along with the Junge Alternative, the youth group.²⁰ Also in Dresden in 2017, Maier called for the end of the “cult of guilt” (*Schuldkult*) and spoke positively about the right-radical NPD. Earlier he questioned considering the Red Army and the Americans as liberators of Germany.²¹ Frauke Petry, who left the party right after the 2017 election, has stated that World War II will one day be discussed in more “nuanced” terms.²²

But other aspects of the AfD’s memory politics do not quite fit into a classical right-radical historical conception. When the AfD youth leader in Lower Saxony, Lars Steinke, called Claus Graf von Stauffenberg, who tried to assassinate Hitler in 1944, a coward and traitor in 2018 (an old right-wing trope), the leadership responded with a forceful denunciation before eventually kicking him out of the party.²³

To reiterate, the AfD does officially support the memory consensus. On their website, one statement from 2019 reads: “74 years ago, the prisoners of the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau were liberated. Six million Jews fell victim to the Nazi regime of terror. This unprecedented crime is a stain on German history. Therefore, it is the job of all Germans to act against anti-Semitism so that hatred toward Jews does not stand a chance.”²⁴ Moreover, the AfD is pro-Israel (like many other European right-populist parties) as a forward bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism.²⁵ But Gauland and

others have questioned whether supporting Israel should be a “reason of state” (*Staatsraison*) that German soldiers would be willing to die to defend.²⁶

In terms of other memories, the AfD does not have too much to say about expellees. Yes, *Heimat* and the *Volksgemeinschaft* are themes but not extensively discussed. In 2018, the AfD regretted that expellees are not really remembered, adding a shout out to German emigrants from the former Soviet Union (*Russlanddeutsche*), a major constituency, and that the expulsion of the Germans had been “misused” to justify taking on migrants after 2015.²⁷ The working group of Bundestag deputies devoted to the concerns of the expellees (deemed *Heimatvertriebene* and not just *Vertriebene* in another older right-wing turn of phrase) worked the AfD’s current ideological and identity concerns into their statement. While seeming to support what has long been government policy, hints of irredentism are also apparent:

“Our central task is not to forget the cultural and spiritual heritage of the German East, but to preserve it. The cultural bearers of the former East German regions must not only be supported within Germany but should be an integral part of the cultural history of today’s Eastern European countries. Only in this way is a peaceful and sustainable international understanding possible. The expellees and repatriates are a great asset to our society. That is why we are committed to the sustainable promotion of the organizations that carry on the traditions of these groups. We see ourselves as a strong cultural link between expellees, German minorities, Eastern European states and the Federal Republic of Germany. We campaign for German minorities, those damaged by war and flight and their descendants in the Eastern European countries and CIS countries, so that they can continue to cultivate their cultural heritage in the countries of origin under the protection of the Federal Republic of Germany. German nationals abroad are part of our people, as such, they must have a preferred immigration law compared to non-German immigrants. We are representatives of the German people, chosen to serve the well-being of our people. We perform this task for all Germans inside and outside Germany.”²⁸

There have been some tensions between the AfD and the leader of the League of Expellees interest group (*Bund der Vertriebene*), Bernd Fabritius, who counseled members in 2017 not to support the excessively rightist AfD. And this is despite the fact that the long-standing head of the League (1998-2014), right-wing CDU politician Erika Steinbach, runs the AfD’s Desiderius Erasmus Foundation, founded in 2015.²⁹ Actually, the programming of the Foundation across the country (particularly in Saxony) is fascinating.³⁰

- Effective Rhetorical Techniques: Lecture: Current Topics: Migration as Security Risk?
- Lecture: Family politics: early sexualization or raising an open-minded child?
- Lecture: Current Topics: mass immigration, asylum in law and practice
- Seminar: Introduction: Public Relations - Focus on press releases and Facebook pictures
- Lecture: Current Topics: Are the media living up to their responsibilities?
- Seminar: Local Policy Issues: Introduction to Local Budget Policy
- Seminar: Germany in the field of conflict between geopolitics and globalization
- Seminar: Right-wing populism as a political concept?
- Lecture: Political Dialogue: "Prepared - And Now?"
- Lecture: Current Topics: Political debate: What does bourgeois mean?
- Lecture: Current Topics: "The expulsion of the Germans under international law"
- Seminar: One-day seminar: Equal living conditions in Germany and Saxony: Utopia or realistic goal?
- Lecture: Current Topics: Inexhaustible energy under our feet – the future of geothermal energy
- Lecture: Current Topics: Political opinion research - reflecting reality, be it convenient or inconvenient.
- Lecture: Current Topics: World system crash and corona shock: What's next?
- Lecture: Current Topics: "Rainer Maria Rilke - our cultural heritage from the areas of expulsion"

Even in Steinbach's foundation, the memory of German suffering just does not get too much traction these days. This might change with the opening of the Documentation Center for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation (*Dokumentationszentrum Flucht, Vertreibung, und Versöhnung*) in Berlin presumably in summer 2021, a version of an initiative long advocated by Steinbach and the League.³¹

As for East Germany, the AfD says little. There have been some references to East Germans not being second-class citizens and that victims of the GDR should be recognized and compensated. Indeed, some representatives of the human rights community have become strong AfD supporters.³² At times, AfD politicians use the GDR as a negative contrast to current events. For example, one politician wrote that Merkel's tight security for events in the East reminds him of the GDR. Others say that a given undesirable policy is reminiscent of the GDR.

The Easternization of the AfD

Even though the AfD was founded by westerners, it has found its greatest success in the east. As mentioned above, in the west, the party has gained 5-10 percent of the vote, whereas in the east it gets 20-30 percent. Thus, the party is increasingly becoming "easternized." Moreover, there is a marked

gender dimension. A survey in summer 2020 noted that the party is supported by 27 percent of eastern men (13 percent of western men) versus 12 percent of eastern women (5 percent in the west).³³

What does "easternization" mean? At its core, it means that the party is adopting and representing various particular aspects of eastern German political and memory culture, specifically feelings of outrage and grievance. A sense of victimization has long characterized many in this region since 1990, purported victimization by the westerners (*Besserwessis*) who completely took over, marginalizing easterners even to this day (leaders in almost all sectors—including business and academia—are still dominated by westerners). The AfD has eagerly tapped into these sentiments. For instance, in conjunction with the Linke (also long an eastern identity party), they have called for a governmental investigative committee to delve into the workings of the *Treuhändanstalt*, the holding company in charge of privatizing East German state-owned assets in the 1990s. This entity has been deeply and persistently criticized for poor decisions that enriched western investors at the cost of eastern prosperity and life chances.³⁴ Many in the East (and West for that matter) also feel victimized by migration—in the sense of having more competition for jobs, utilizing ever-scarce taxpayer euros to sustain the newcomers, or more generally that their conception of German culture is being threatened and eroded.

But there is also a fascinating memory-politics angle. Many have noted that it is not coincidental that the party has some of its strongest support in Saxony and even in the capital city of Dresden. Pegida ("Patriotic Europeans against the Islamicization of the Occident," a political movement independent from but deeply connected to the AfD) and its anti-migration and Islamophobic protests since the migration crisis of 2015 are cases in point. Much of the current right-populist mobilization taps into the collective memory specific to Dresden and the region, in particular, memory of the air raids of February 13 and 14, 1945. As the narrative goes, Dresden, the Florence on the Elbe, was a city of art and culture, not of munitions and war. The almost complete destruction (and many deaths—although not as many as people and the GDR government long asserted) of such an "innocent" city was not just unwarranted, but a borderline war crime.

This narrative was greatly reinforced over the years of the GDR when annual marches and candlelight vigils took place. Cold War propaganda blamed "*Anglo-amerikanische Terrorangriffe*." Importantly, Dresden's symbolic importance resonated across the GDR—as well as abroad through texts like *Slaughterhouse 5*. Such commemorative and memory practices were maintained and strengthened after reunification. Pegida, the AfD, and the even more noxious extremists congregating in the city consciously adopted such marches and vigils—also reminiscent of the mobilization of fall 1989. Politicians in Dresden have even declared a "Nazi emergency."³⁵

The point is that the AfD is both contributing to and benefiting from these discourses. They are using this particular memory of innocence and victimization to strengthen the more general sense of victimization that fuels their support. Simultaneously, the AfD's more general sense of victimization also reinforces the specific memory discourse in Dresden, as well as Saxony and eastern Germany more generally. The hegemonic Dresden memory sees the British and Americans as the victimizers—not the Soviets/Russians, who are much more associated with the older memory of German suffering regarding the expellees and the mass rapes of German women at the end and in the aftermath of World War II. The AfD—like other right populist parties—has close ties with the Russian government.³⁶ One might also add that Russian-Germans disproportionately support the AfD.³⁷ Demonization of the Western powers likely feeds and reinforces the AfD's anti-cosmopolitan, anti-globalization tendency.

Conclusion: Backlash to the AfD's Memory Politics

In light of these many provocative positions, the allegations of dog-whistling and the fact that the AfD has attracted a wide array of right-wing and right radical individuals (even if the party officially can claim plausible deniability), there has been substantial pushback from many non-AfD quarters across Germany. One of the most notable instances was in 2017 when the Berlin artist collective Center for Political Beauty (*Zentrum für politische Schönheit*) erected a small-scale replica of Berlin's Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe on a property adjacent to and highly visible from Höcke's house in Thuringia. This was a protest against his aforementioned speech.³⁸

In February 2018, one of the bitterest debates in memory occurred in the Bundestag about Germany's culture of memory. Politicians from other parties accused the AfD of racism, using Nazi vocabulary daily, "unspeakably breaking taboos" and historical revisionism. The AfD responded by criticizing the moralistic preaching and hounding (*Hetze*) against them.³⁹ Cem Özdemir's passionate takedown of the AfD was later deemed the best political speech of 2018: "You despise everything for which this country is held in esteem and respected throughout the world. This includes, for example, our culture of remembrance, of which I am proud as a citizen of this country."⁴⁰

All of the criticisms and allegations against the AfD led the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesverfassungsschutz*) to secretly investigate whether the AfD was a threat to the liberal democratic constitutional order of the Federal Republic. The report was leaked to the public in late January 2019. Overall, the authorities found no evidence for historical revisionism in the party's program and other official documents. "The emphasis on right-wing extremist aspirations for German history and the simultaneous motivation to

suppress or even downplay National Socialism cannot be recognized in the present policy program of the AfD."⁴¹ But several individual politicians and subgroups within the AfD's umbrella, such as the right-wing Flügel, are singled out. "The relativization of historical National Socialism also runs like a red thread through the statements of the 'wing' representatives," as well as parts of the Junge Alternative. Clearly, there is a marked divergence between official stances and what subgroups or individuals say, apparently independently of any official positions. This allows for plausible deniability (especially when a handful of offenders are purged from the party), a Boris Johnson-esque "have cake and eat it to-ism." Nevertheless, official scrutiny of the party continues and might be widened in 2021.

In sum, the AfD's memory and history politics are all over the place. They are an oftentimes unexpected collection of positions that do not hang together or cohere as we have come to expect on the right-hand side of the political spectrum. They acknowledge the continuing legacy of the "twelve years," but dislike the cult of guilt. They want to open up historical consciousness to the thousand years of German history yet are rather fixated on the Nazi period. They support Israel and German Jews yet will not always strongly condemn party members who make anti-Semitic statements. There are ideological inconsistencies and mishmashes of rightist positions from very different eras.

Most noteworthy, however, is the shrill tone. The memory politics all play into the most salient aspect of the AfD and right-populism more generally—the sense of victimization. They believe that foreigners are treated better than the native-born by the welfare state. They believe that corrupt elites are exploiting the pure people for the former's benefit. They believe that the hegemonic Holocaust-centered memory crowds out other legitimate memories. The impossibility of true national pride or patriotism—the lack of normality—in the face of this memory regime is another bum deal, yet another form of victimization. This defensive-aggressive, self-righteous tone (the *Wutbürger der Erinnerungspolitik*) also taps into similar sentiments in the eastern states, perhaps partially explaining the disproportionate level of support for the AfD in that region. All of the party's positions have a facile anti-elitism.

In short, the party is simply against what "elites" (however defined) have been for—including the culture of memory. One of the most important questions going forward is if the AfD's mnemonic sentiments will resonate more broadly with the German mainstream outside of its eastern bastions. And recall that many Germans already support drawing a final line over the past. If so, such changes will further erode German memory culture and all of the positive attitudinal, behavioral, and policy effects that it has had over many decades.

NOTES

- 1 See for instance David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 2 Eric Langenbacher, "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?", *German Politics and Society*, vol. 21, no. 2, Summer 2003, pp. 46-68.
- 3 "Entschädigung Von NS-Unrecht: Regelungen Zur Wiedergutmachung," Federal Ministry of Finance, May 2020. https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/Broschueren_Bestellservice/2018-03-05-entschaedigung-ns-unrecht.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=8, p. 29.
- 4 Hope M. Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany 1989 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
- 5 "Gauland Provoziert Mit Äußerung Zur Nazizeit," *ZEIT ONLINE*, September 14, 2017. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-09/afd-alexander-gauland-nazi-zeit-neubewertung>.
- 6 Eric Langenbacher, "On the Passing of a German Generation," AICGS, December 14, 2020. <https://www.aicgs.org/2020/12/on-the-passing-of-a-german-generation/>.
- 7 Of course, different question wording and the vagaries of survey sampling from the various companies conducting the research may also play a role. Sources: (a) Mushaben 1998, 58; (b) Köcher 1985, 76; (c) Institut für angewandte Politik 1985; (d) Golub 1994, 13, (e) "Hitler und die Deutschen," 1994; (f) Noelle Neumann 1997, 516; (g) EMNID 1995; (h) FORSA 1996, 4; (i) "Die Kraft des Grauens," 2001; (j) AJC 2002; (k) Allensbach, 2009. (l) FORSA <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/216870/umfrage/meinung-zum-schlussstrich-unter-die-deutsche-vergangenheit-bis-1945>
Full sources available from the author upon request.
- 8 "Wahlumfragen Zur Bundestagswahl 2021," *Wahlrecht.de*. Accessed February 11, 2021. <https://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/>.
- 9 "The Evolution of the German Party System since 1990," AICGS, September 30, 2020. <https://www.aicgs.org/video/the-evolution-of-the-german-party-system-since-1990/>. See also the two special issues in 2020 from *German Politics and Society*.
- 10 <https://www.afd.de/>
- 11 Jan Werner Mueller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
- 12 Kay-Alexander Scholz, "AfD feuert Ex-Pressesteller nun wirklich," Deutsche Welle, September 9, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/de/afd-feuert-ex-pressesteller-nun-wirklich/a-55081902>.
- 13 Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 15.
- 14 "Manifesto for Germany: The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany," Approved at the Federal Party Congress held in Stuttgart, 30th April to 1st May, 2016. https://www_afd_de/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf, pp. 45-46
- 15 "Wortlaut Der Umstrittenen Passage Der Rede Von Alexander Gauland," AfD-Fraktion Im Deutschen Bundestag, June 4, 2018. https://www_afdbundestag_de/wortlaut-der-umstrittenen-passage-der-rede-von-alexander-gauland.
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Germany's Holocaust-centered approach to memory has been the consensus among the political elite for decades. The right-populist party Alternative for Germany has pushed anti-establishment rhetoric since forming in 2013, and this anti-elitism extends to the AfD's memory politics. In this AICGS Issue Brief, Dr. Eric Langenbacher examines the memory politics of the party and politicians, how mnemonic sentiments are expressed and mobilized, and how even incoherent and inconsistent politics could impact or possibly erode Germany's culture of memory.

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Germany's Memory Culture and the Alternative for Building a Stronger German-American Partnership

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