



Germany's AfD on Foreign Policy

Competing visions and internal fragmentation

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Sammanfattning

Under det senaste decenniet har det högerpopulistiska partiet *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) utvecklats från att vara ett marginellt protestparti till att bli en dominerande oppositionskraft i tysk politik. I valet till den tyska förbundsdagen 2025 blev partiet det näst största. Emellertid utesluter samtliga etablerade samarbete med AfD.

Denna rapport analyserar AfD:s utrikespolitiska preferenser, vars ståndpunkter skiljer sig kraftigt från den etablerade tyska utrikespolitiken. Medlemskapen i EU och NATO samt den transatlantiska länken tas inte för givna, samtidigt som närmare band med Ryssland eftersträvas. Resultaten i denna rapport påvisar dock att partiet är internt splittrat mellan två fraktioner som tidvis förespråkar diametrala preferenser och visioner för den tyska utrikespolitiken.

Den ena fraktionen, bestående främst av representanter från de östliga förbunds-länderna, förespråkar en mer radikal och grundläggande omorientering mot Moskva och att avståndstagande från Väst. Den andra fraktionen, framförallt bestående av representanter i västliga förbundslander, har intagit ett mer taktiskt förhållningssätt med en ”Tyskland-först”-strategi där bibehållandet av de formella institutionella banden är en del. Båda fraktionerna delar emellertid suveränitets-centrerade åsikter och stöder ett upphörande av stödet till Ukraina, ett upphävande av sanktionerna mot Ryssland samt att energihandeln med Ryssland återupptas.

AfD:s möjligheter till att framgent ha mer inflytande över, eller förmåga att radikalt omforma, den tyska utrikespolitiken, kommer emellertid sannolikt bero på fler faktorer. Dessa innefattar bland annat dynamiken i en eventuell framtida regeringskoalition och inte minst partiets förmåga att hantera de interna splittringarna och åstadkomma en gemensam och samordnad utrikespolitisk linje.

Nyckelord: AfD, högerpopulism, tysk politik, Tyskland, transatlantiska relationer, Ryssland, utrikespolitik, säkerhetspolitik, Nato, EU.

Abstract

Over the past decade, the right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has evolved from being a marginal protest party into a dominant opposition force in German politics. In the 2025 German federal election, it became the second-largest party. However, all established parties rule out cooperation with the AfD.

This report analyses the AfD's foreign policy preferences, which differ sharply from established German foreign policy. EU and NATO membership and the transatlantic link are not taken for granted, while closer ties with Russia are sought. However, this study's findings show that the party is internally divided between two factions that at times advocate diametrically opposed preferences and visions for German foreign policy.

One faction, consisting primarily of representatives from the eastern federal states, advocates a more radical and fundamental reorientation toward Moscow and a distancing from the West. The other faction, mainly comprised of representatives from western federal states, has adopted a more tactical approach with a "Germany-first" strategy, which includes maintaining formal institutional ties. Both factions, however, share sovereignty-centred views and support ending aid to Ukraine, lifting sanctions against Russia and resuming energy trade with Russia.

The AfD's prospects for exerting greater influence over, or radically reshaping, German foreign policy in the future will likely depend on several factors, however, including the dynamics of a potential future governing coalition and, not least, the party's ability to manage internal divisions and establish a unified and coordinated foreign policy line.

Keywords: AfD, right-wing populism, German politics, Germany, transatlantic relations, Russia, foreign policy, security policy, NATO, EU, European defence.

Preface

Germany's role is central to European and international politics, and the country's choices reverberate widely. Amid the most significant European rearmament in several generations, the country's role has arguably become even more important, increasing the need to study its domestic politics.

This report analyses the debates and foreign policy stances of one of Germany's political parties, Alternative for Germany (AfD). Given the party's electoral successes in recent years and the possibility that it could gain power in the coming years, it has become increasingly important to understand the party's foreign policy stances.

The report finds that the AfD's leadership and representatives often hold contradictory views on Germany's role in the world, Russia policy, and US–Germany relations. These views may prove challenging to implement consistently if the party were to come to power.

The report is part of ongoing research on security and defence developments in Western countries and organisations that influence Swedish security, conducted by the Swedish Defence Research Agency's (FOI) programme on Northern European and Transatlantic Security (NOTS). It is commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Defence.

Stockholm, June 2026

Albin Aronsson, Deputy programme manager, Northern European and Transatlantic Security (NOTS)

Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
BfV	Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
BSW	Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht
CAI	Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union
ESN	Europe of Sovereign Nations
EU	European Union
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei
ID	Identity and Democracy
MAGA	Make America Great Again
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Executive summary

Populist parties have increasingly gained political influence in Europe and the US over the course of the past decade. Germany, with its long and distinctive history, was an outlier in Europe, with right-wing voices less prevalent in politics, and, for decades, the steadfast “culture of remembrance” (Erinnerungskultur) has been the gold standard for critically confronting its dark past. In the past ten years, however, the emergence and rapid growth of populist parties has become a feature of German politics as well. Founded in the wake of the Eurozone Crisis in 2013, the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, hereafter AfD) has experienced both rapid growth and dramatic radicalisation, especially in the past few years. In 2025, the AfD became the second-largest party in Germany’s federal election.

As the political “firewall” against the radical right has weakened across Europe, Germany, however, has remained a notable exception. All parties in the political mainstream still reject any kind of cooperation with the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Notwithstanding this, the AfD has solidified its position as a major political opposition force that dominates the agenda on issues such as migration, the debt brake, and energy. It is therefore no longer a peripheral protest force in the German political system. The AfD party leadership has repeatedly stated its intention to assume government responsibility following the 2029 federal election.

Especially since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the party has also increasingly criticised the German government’s foreign policy, while formulating alternative approaches that are frequently diametrically opposed to the current course of action and often resemble Kremlin positions. The AfD’s foreign and security policy positions and worldview differ substantially from those of the political mainstream, particularly concerning relations with Russia, the broader transatlantic partnership, and Germany’s commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union’s (EU) defence cooperation.

Amid a deteriorating security environment and domestic political and economic challenges, the AfD has continued to gain support since the 2025 federal election, and the current government, led by Chancellor Friedrich Merz, is facing mounting political pressure from the opposition. These developments prompt questions about whether the AfD, in a future scenario of increased power and influence, would be willing and able to reshape German foreign policy in line with its preferences, for example, in the role of a coalition partner.

The report analyses the AfD’s preferences on key foreign policy issues. More specifically, it examines how the party perceives the international system and Germany’s role within it, its approach to Russia and the Russo-Ukrainian war, and its views on the US administration and transatlantic relations in the security

domain. It analyses the AfD's preferences on European security cooperation, with a primary focus on NATO given the party's broad rejection of deeper EU centralisation and thus common defence integration.

The study found that the AfD's foreign policy preferences are a work in progress, with its foreign policy still undefined on several fronts. This is mainly due to internal fragmentation and preference-based divisions between two main factions, comprising primarily the eastern and western state party associations, respectively. The former tends to be more radical and ideological in its foreign policy outlook, not shying away from expressing Russia-friendly stances, whereas the latter gives the impression of a more strategic and tactical stance, at least rhetorically, to avoid alienating centrist constituencies, particularly in the western parts of the country. The party's current co-leadership can be said to represent these two factions, with Tino Chrupalla representing the more radical faction and Alice Weidel the more tactical one.

The analysis found that the factions disagree on nearly all issues covered in this analysis, whether concerning Russia, the US, or European defence cooperation. The disagreements are mainly evident in public communications from the party leadership as well as from individual parliamentarians, spokespersons, or local representatives. Divisions that are visible in public communication concern, *inter alia*, the description of the threat posed by Russia and visions for Russian-German relations. Differences also concern how the party should position itself in relation to the US administration in light of Trump's increasingly interventionist foreign policy.

The more tactical faction attempts to avoid alienating centrist constituencies by adopting more moderate rhetoric, while still seeking renewed energy ties with Russia, an end to German support for Ukraine, and alignment with the Trump administration. Under the influence of this faction, the party is more likely to pursue an incremental "Germany first" policy, retaining institutional memberships, cooperating selectively, and subtly shaping policies from within. The more radical faction pushes for a fundamental reorientation of Germany's international partnerships, advocating closer ties with Russia, distancing Germany from the US and other Western partners, and potentially leaving key institutions. If this faction were dominant and in power, Germany could strive to challenge the core tenets of traditional German diplomacy. The potential trajectory of an AfD-driven foreign policy hinges on which faction that dominates.

Despite the internal differences, both factions share certain ideals. These include, for instance, a view of Germany as a sovereign power that, in a multipolar world, prioritises national economic interests over collective Western values. This signals a willingness to move away from Germany's post-Cold War tradition of adhering

to multilateralism, international rules, and alliance solidarity. Under AfD influence, this outlook could substantially alter Germany's cooperation patterns and weaken alignment with Western partners.

Additional issues on which there is factional agreement concern Germany's approach to Ukraine and energy policy. There is also cross-factional agreement on recommencing energy trade with Russia and lifting EU sanctions, while ceasing all assistance to Ukraine and preventing Ukraine's membership of European institutions. Under AfD influence, a dramatic pivot from current policy on Ukraine, institutional enlargement, sanctions, and energy trade is undoubtedly a given.

Whether the AfD, in a scenario of increased power and influence, would actually be able to change either the style or content of German foreign policy in one of the above-mentioned ways would, however, depend on several factors. These include, notably, the role it would play within a potential coalition and the nature of such a coalition. The party's size would also matter, for example, whether the AfD was the largest party in a coalition or a large junior partner, as this would influence portfolio allocation, negotiation fallout, and subsequent opportunities to exercise vetoes.

Lastly, one can speculate whether the AfD would be more interested in using foreign policy for political marketing and domestic mobilisation than in striving for change. Should the party strive for change, the competing visions and internal fragmentation, as depicted above, could, if not resolved, make it difficult for the party to turn its preferences into actionable policy and limit the extent to which it can change Germany's foreign relations in a fundamental way.

1 Introduction

Populist parties have increasingly gained political influence in Europe and the United States (US) over the course of the past decade. They hold executive roles, are part of coalition governments or support minority governments in several countries. In addition, several populist parties are in opposition and have substantial representation in numerous parliaments. Against this background, several major European populist parties have the opportunity to influence the foreign policy of their respective states in various ways, whether in opposition or in government. This is especially true with regard to the international issues that are usually central to these parties' rhetoric, such as migration, international trade, and regional integration, but also with regard to relations with Russia, China, and the US.

Germany, given its special history, was long an outlier in Europe, with only a limited presence of right-wing voices in politics. For decades, the steadfast "culture of remembrance" (*Erinnerungskultur*) has been the gold standard for dealing critically with its dark past. In the past ten years, however, the emergence and rapid growth of populist parties has also become a feature of German politics. Founded in the wake of the Eurocrisis in 2013, the radical right-wing party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, hereafter AfD) has experienced both rapid growth and dramatic radicalisation, especially in the past few years. With its growing numbers and entry into the German Bundestag, or parliament, in 2017, the AfD has become a loud voice of opposition. Especially since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the party has been increasingly criticising the German government's foreign policy, while formulating alternative proposals that are frequently diametrically opposed to the current course of action and often similar to Kremlin positions.

Whilst the metaphorical "firewall" against the radical-right has gradually come down in most of Europe, the conservative right in Germany, comprising the Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) has thus far avoided cooperation with the AfD. This makes Germany a notable exception on the continent. The current government, led by Chancellor Friedrich Merz of the CDU, is, however, facing significant challenges both within the coalition and in relation to the opposition. At the time of writing, the AfD has experienced additional growth since the 2025 federal elections, with numbers equivalent to, or slightly above, those of the governing CDU/CSU parties.¹ In parallel, in July 2025, the AfD parliamentary faction proposed a strategy on how

¹ In opinion polls from April 2026, the AfD polled at 25 per cent whereas the governing Christian Democratic Union polled at 24 per cent. See 'Sonntagsfrage – aktuelle Umfrageergebnisse zum Wahlrend. Aktualisiert am 1. April 2026', April 2026, *Ipsos*, <https://www.ipsos.com/de-de/meinungsumfragen/sonntagsfrage> (Retrieved 5.5.2026)

to achieve “an end to the firewall and pave the way for government responsibility.”² The AfD party leadership has repeatedly stated its intention to assume such responsibility following the 2029 federal election.

The AfD has a view of Germany and its role in the world that differs significantly from that of the parties at the centre of the German political spectrum. The latter view Russia as an imminent threat to European security while considering membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), as well as the transatlantic relationship, as cornerstones of German foreign and security policy. Broadly speaking, the AfD intends to pursue a foreign policy in which Germany’s relations with the great powers are reshaped. In addition, Germany’s membership of NATO and the EU is not a given.

Given Germany’s enormous weight both within the EU and NATO, a pivot from Germany’s current approach towards both friends and foes would have a tremendous impact on European cohesion, decision-making, and, ultimately, on the ability to act collectively on the international scene. As the largest economy in the EU, diminished German contributions to the Union’s common funding would have an immense impact, not least on the financing of assistance to Ukraine. As a logistics hub within NATO, calls for a withdrawal of US allied troops from German soil, or the promotion of closer ties to Russia, would undeniably be detrimental for the Alliance’s deterrence and defence. In other words, if Germany were to turn away from, or undermine from within, the foundational European institutions, the prospects for Europe taking more responsibility for its own security would be severely damaged or even made impossible.

Considering the deteriorating security landscape, a turbulent domestic political climate, and a challenging economic situation in Germany, it is quite possible that either the internal or external context could change, and that the AfD, in turn, may gain increased power and influence before the 2029 federal election. This raises the question as to whether the AfD, in a future scenario of increased power and influence, possibly in the role of a coalition partner, would be able (and willing) to implement its foreign policy preferences and in turn change German foreign policy.

1.1 Research question and methodology

This study analyses the AfD’s preferences regarding key foreign policy issues. Its guiding research question is:

- What are the AfD’s preferences regarding key foreign policy issues?

² AfD Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag, *Deutschland politisch gestalten – Das Ende der Brandmauer und der Weg in die Regierungsverantwortung. Ideen und Vorschläge zum Strategieprozess der AfD-Bundestagsfraktion*, 1 Fraktionsklausur, 4.7.-6.7.2025.

The resulting selection of the party's key foreign policy preferences is grounded in the potentially far-reaching implications these preferences could have for Germany's security and defence policy and, if they were to change either incrementally or dramatically, for the country's role in European security. The key foreign policy topics analysed in the study are worldview, Russia, the US, and European security cooperation. This entails, more specifically, how the party perceives the world and Germany's role in it; how the relationship with Russia should be formed; and its view on the Russo-Ukrainian war and how Germany should manage it. As for the US, the study examines how the party perceives the current US administration and the party's view of German–American relations, specifically in the security and defence realm. The preferences regarding European security cooperation involve the party's view of the main institutions, NATO and the EU. The focus, however, is more on NATO since the AfD rejects centralisation at EU level and therefore also common EU defence more broadly.

The topics migration and trade are excluded from the study, although a departure from the current policies in these areas is clearly advocated by the AfD. However, the issue of trade is discussed in the sections below where there is an obvious connection to the key issue under discussion. Also excluded is the issue of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Moreover, the study does not discuss the feasibility of the centrist parties ending the firewall towards the AfD, nor does it examine the AfD's willingness or ability to become a governing party.

The methodology employed to address the research question is a content analysis of the AfD's manifestos from the 2025 federal election and the 2024 European Parliament election, as well as interviews of, and speeches by, party leaders and the spokespersons for foreign and defence policy. When necessary and if appropriate, statements from other key party representatives with known leverage within the party will be considered. In addition, the AfD's parliamentary motions ("Antrag"), minor and major parliamentary questions ("Kleine Anfrage" and "Große Anfrage"), and contributions to the debate in the German parliament (the Bundestag) are analysed.

1.2 Outline

The study is structured as follows. It begins with a short contextual background depicting the main characteristics of the German mainstream parties' foreign policy. This is followed by a discussion of AfD's emergence, growth, and position within the German party landscape. Thereafter, it outlines the party's core issues and leadership, as well as significant factions that bear relevance for the foreign policy domain. The second part of the study analyses the preferences of the AfD regarding the key foreign policy issues pertaining to the research question and aim of the study. The section that follows is dedicated to a discussion of how the AfD, in a situation of increased power and influence, could affect Germany's foreign

policy. The discussion addresses aspects such as the difference between the preferences of the AfD and those of the parties at the centre of the political spectrum, and which preconditions could influence the party's ability to have an impact within the German system. This is not, however, an exhaustive discussion, as this would demand a thorough examination of several factors pertaining to the German system of governance and bureaucracy. Lastly, the concluding section debates what implications a changed foreign policy, according to AfD's preferences, could have for Germany's role in Europe and the world.

2 AfD in context

Over the past decade, the right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) has evolved from being a marginal protest party into a dominant opposition force in German politics. In the 2025 German federal election, it became the second-largest party. However, all established parties rule out cooperation with the AfD. AfD's foreign policy preferences differ sharply from established German foreign policy.

This chapter depicts the main characteristics of the German mainstream parties' foreign policy as it has evolved in particular since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It moreover provides a background of the AfD's emergence and radicalization, its leadership, as well as the significant factions that bear relevance for the foreign policy domain.

2.1 An evolving foreign policy

Germany, given its special history, was long an outlier in Europe with only a limited presence of right-wing voices in politics. For decades, the steadfast "culture of remembrance" (*Erinnerungskultur*) has been the gold standard for dealing critically with its dark past, especially Nazi crimes, and how to commemorate the victims of tyranny. The dark history of nationalism, militarism, and Nazism, as well as its lack of full sovereignty during the Cold War, has likewise characterised German security policy. With the principles of "never alone" and "never again," the consecutive governments in the unified federal republic have had a clear preference for multilateral action and alliance solidarity, as well as a culture of military constraint. Germany has also been reluctant to formulate national interests and to take on a leadership role in security affairs on the European stage. These principles have been unifying across the centre of the German political spectrum over the past decades, although dissimilarities have prevailed on certain aspects of foreign, and in turn, security policy.

The main parties at the centre of the German party landscape that usually form either the government or the main oppositional force, the Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), as well as the Social Democratic Party (SPD), have historically not advocated similar positions on German foreign policy. For instance, parts of the SPD have been sceptical of the US in some respects while promoting close trade and energy ties to Russia in the tradition of *Ostpolitik*. Meanwhile, the CDU have a strong transatlantic orientation with a tradition of championing US presence in Europe and Germany's NATO membership. Nevertheless, several of the grand coalitions comprising both parties in the past two decades have followed the approach of "change through trade" (*Wandel durch Handel*) and later "change through rapprochement" (*Wandel durch*

Annäherung) in the relationship with Russia. Despite these differences, however, the parties have had a shared view of the abovementioned principles of German security policy, hence the clear preference for multilateral action and solidarity with their allies, as well as the culture of military constraint.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resulted in a fundamental shift, a *Zeitenwende*, in previous policies. Moreover, the dissimilarities between the main centre parties have decreased and Germany's foreign, security, and defence policy is now utterly different, and the country is seeking to assume a stronger leadership role in European security. Germany has introduced sanctions against Russia within the EU framework, is the main provider of arms deliveries to Ukraine, and has commenced a massive buildup of its own defence forces. In addition, Germany began to disentangle its energy relationship with Russia and stopped the opening of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Germany is thus undergoing a review of not only its Russia policy but of its entire security and defence policy since the end of the Cold War.³ The SPD and CDU/CSU, together with the other parties in the political centre, the Greens and FDP, agree on this course of action. Moreover, the widespread perception of Russia is that it is an imminent threat to German and European security.

2.2 Emergence and radicalisation

The German political party AfD was founded in 2013 in the wake of the eurozone debt crisis. Broadly speaking, it was a reaction to the policies and course of action under former Chancellor Angela Merkel. Several members of Merkel's bloc were among the founders of the AfD. They rejected bailouts of EU member states, protested the Euro as the sole currency, and criticised the Christian Democratic Union's socio-political modernisation course. Especially in the run-up to the 2013 federal election, AfD attracted several professors, lawyers, and doctors. At that point, the party was not a radical right party, but instead held positions that combined soft euroscepticism with economic liberalism and socially conservative policies.⁴

In 2014, a dispute over the party's ideological orientation emerged, as a group representing the more right-wing stance within the party began calling for a more anti-immigrant course. In 2015, the right-wing protagonists founded a right-wing faction named "Der Flügel" ("the Wing"), primarily with the aim of preventing the AfD from becoming too technocratic and willing to compromise. That same year, the party split internally and numerous members of the economists' wing,

³ Engström, Alina, 'Germany' in Ottosson, Björn and Krister Pallin (Eds.) *Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023. Part I: National Capabilities*. (pp. 137-156), FOI Reports FOI-R--5527—SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency), p. 137.

⁴ Arzheimer, Kai. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" *West European Politics* 38, No 3 (2015): 535–556.

including its prior leader, left the party. Now, the party began adopting a populist stance and focused on the new core issues of immigration, refugees, and Islam. The party's earlier eurozone policies had receded into the background.⁵ Notwithstanding this, the party leadership continued to consist of spokespersons from the two factions, respectively. In the years that followed, the different factions would continue to argue about the party's course.⁶

2.2.1 Right-wing radicalisation

In the German party landscape, the AfD positions itself as an alternative to the established parties, focusing on anti-immigration stances, Euroscepticism, and national identity. Its main issues include migration and opposition to gender-related policies, as well as economic and energy policy. The party also maintains stances on various foreign policy issues and frequently comments on international affairs, where it is considered receptive to Russian propaganda. Since its founding in 2013, the AfD has been subject to several controversies, not least regarding foreign policy. Besides having downplayed Nazi crimes, AfD politicians have been suspected of links to both the Russian and Chinese regimes.

Throughout the past decade, the party has gone through a process of progressive radicalisation. The party has transformed into a classic populist radical right party with a focus on anti-immigrant, xenophobic themes.⁷ The right-wing Flügel faction, led by its most prominent figure Björn Höcke, has framed itself as both the legitimate and credible defender of "true" AfD identity.⁸ In 2017, Höcke faced party exclusion proceedings following a controversial speech in Dresden where he named Berlin's Holocaust memorial a "monument of shame" and criticised Germany's culture of remembering Nazi crime. The expulsion was rejected by the party's arbitration court, which is tasked to handle internal disputes.

In 2020, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV, *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) classified the Flügel as "proven right-wing extremist" and put it under full surveillance.⁹ As a result, the party board took measures and officially "dissolved" the grouping and expelled one of its main actors. Although the Flügel was formally dissolved in 2020, it nonetheless remained the ideologically dominant grouping within the party.¹⁰ Especially in the East German federal states, in

⁵ Arzheimer, Kai, and Carl C. Berning. "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and their voters veered to the radical right, 2013–2017." *Electoral Studies* 60 (2019): 102040.

⁶ Franzmann, Simon, '(Die) AfD', *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, Retrieved from <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/handwoerterbuch-politisches-system/511455/die-afd/> (10.09.2025)

⁷ See, for instance, Arzheimer and Berning, 2019.

⁸ Pytlas, Bartek, and Jan Biehler. "The AfD within the AfD: Radical right intra-party competition and ideational change." *Government and Opposition* 59, no. 2 (2024): 322–340, p. 8.

⁹ Lunday, Chris, 'The AfD is a right-wing extremist group, German intelligence agency says', *Politico*, 2 May 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/afd-officially-right-wing-extremist-group-germanys-intel-agency-says/> (12.05.2026)

¹⁰ Pytlas and Biehler, "The AfD within the AfD".

particular Brandenburg, Thuringia, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt, members from this ideational wing remain the dominant force.¹¹ At federal level, however, it is unclear, and estimations vary about, how large a share of the party membership belongs to it.¹²

The definition of the AfD remains a contested issue. Germany's federal domestic intelligence agency, the BfV, has listed three of the AfD's state-level associations (Thuringia, Sachsen-Anhalt and Sachsen) as "confirmed extremist" (*gesichert Rechtsextrem*) entities. This allows authorities to use intelligence tools to monitor these branches. The party frequently contests these designations in court. Since May 2025, after the BfV upgraded the AfD from a 'suspected' to a 'confirmed' 'rightwing extremist' force at federal level, there is an ongoing dispute about the classification between the party and the BfV.¹³

In a European context, the AfD is currently more extreme than many equivalent far-right parties across Europe, especially due to the dramatic radicalisation that has taken place in the past few years. In parallel, a rift with other European extreme parties appears to have emerged. This can be illustrated by the events that unfolded ahead of the 2024 European Parliament election, when the French National Rally party distanced itself from the AfD following a number of controversies. As a result, the "Identity and Democracy" (ID) group, to which both parties belonged, was dissolved and divided into the groups "Patriots for Europe" and the "Europe of Sovereign Nations" (ESN).¹⁴ National Rally joined the former together with inter alia the Hungarian Fidesz party, while the AfD founded the ESN group, which it leads with Polish Confederation. The ESN positions itself

¹¹ Bernhard, Henry, 'Der Unterschied zwischen „Flügel“ und restlicher Partei', *Deutschlandfunk*, 29 October 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/afd-der-unterschied-zwischen-fluegel-und-restlicher-partei-100.html> (12.05.2026), p. 13.

¹² 'Das ist der AfD-"Flügel"', *Der Spiegel*, 12 March 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-das-ist-der-fluegel-a-084fac0e-30cc-48e4-a859-034d78fb8ba3> (13.05.2026); Decker, Frank, 'Die Organisation der AfD', *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, Retrieved from <https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/afd/273133/die-organisation-der-afd/> (13.05.2026).

¹³ At the time of writing, there is an ongoing legal dispute between the AfD and the BfV. Following the classification in May 2025, the AfD sued the agency. In the legal dispute over whether the AfD should be classified as extreme far-right, the BfV has issued a so-called "standstill promise" (*Stillstand*). This means that the BfV will refrain from publicly repeating the claim until the court has made a decision.

¹⁴ These controversies included media reports about the AfD holding secret meetings and discussing "remigration" and statements made by lead AfD candidate Maximilian Krah downplaying crimes committed by SS members. See, for instance, De Lauzun, Helene, 'Le Pen and AfD Meet To Clarify Positions on Remigration', *The European Conservative*, 26 February 2024, Retrieved from <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/le-pen-and-afd-meet-to-clarify-positions-on-remigration/> (13.05.2026); Guillou, Clément et al., 'European elections: Le Pen officially breaks with German ally AfD', *Le Monde*, 22 May 2024, Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/05/22/european-elections-le-pen-officially-breaks-with-german-ally-afd_6672249_5.html (13.05.2026).

as more radical than the Patriots for Europe.¹⁵ In the foreign policy domain, the parties in the ESN group are united in their opposition to EU integration and military assistance to Ukraine.

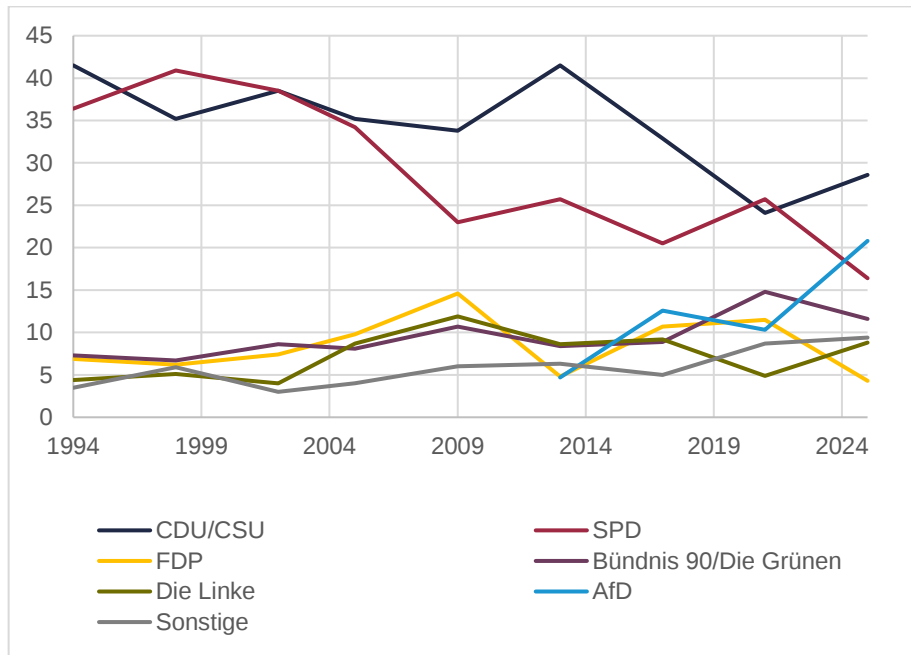
2.3 In the German party landscape

The AfD positions itself as an alternative to the established political parties in Germany. Besides moving further to the right over time, the AfD has, since its founding, both experienced increasing success at the ballot box and solidified its position as a major political opposition force that dominates the agenda on topics such as migration, the debt brake, and energy. Hence, it is no longer a peripheral protest force in the German system. The parties at the political centre still hope to avoid further voter defections to the party.¹⁶ Reversing the trend will be a difficult task, however, since the voter volatility among AfD supporters is low compared to that of the parties at the political centre. In fact, the AfD has one of the largest core electorates among the parties in the Bundestag, which suggests that AfD voters are no longer just protest voters.¹⁷

¹⁵ Starcevic, Sebastian and Eddy Wax, 'New far-right group led by Germany's AfD founded in European Parliament', *Politico*, 10 July 2024, Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/new-far-right-group-european-parliament-germany-afd/> (13.05.2026).

¹⁶ For example, current Chancellor Merz has stated his intention to "fight the fire behind the firewall" with the policies pursued during the current term of office, in order to reduce voter defection to the fringe parties.

¹⁷ Pokorny, Sabine, 'Bäumchen wechsel dich? Politische Einstellungen im Wandel Ergebnisse aus drei repräsentativen Trend-Umfragen', *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, February 2024; Enskat, Sebastian, 'Door Open or Door Closed? Reflections on How to Deal with Far-Right Parties in Europe', *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, International reports 1, 2026.

Figure 1. Results in German federal elections 1994–2025 (Second vote, *Zweitstimme*)

Source: Author's own graph, based on data from Deutscher Bundestag, 'Bundestagswahlresultate seit 1949 – Zweitstimmen', 25 February 2025, Retrieved from https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/wahlen/ergebnisse_seit1949-244692 (05.05.26)

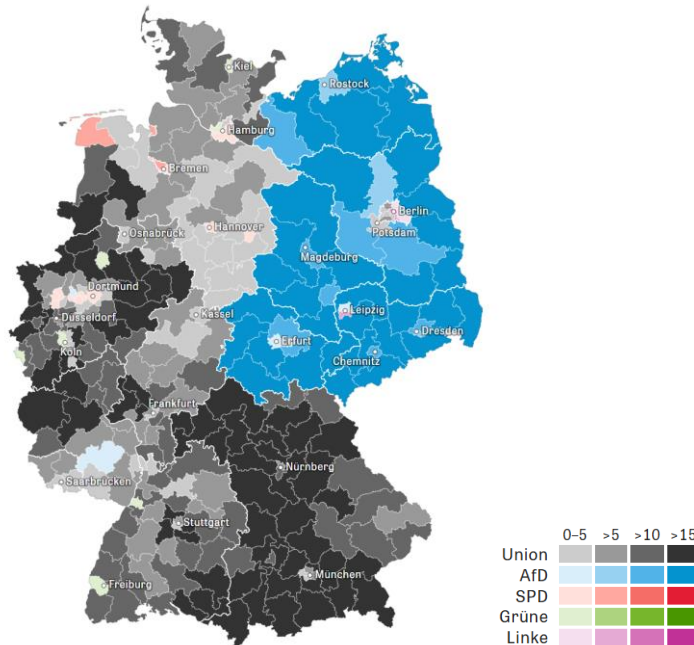
In the 2025 federal election, the AfD achieved its best result to date with 20.8 per cent, making it the second-largest party faction after the CDU/CSU in the German parliament, the Bundestag. The other two parties on the fringes of the political spectrum, the Left (*Die Linke*) and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW, *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht*), also grew significantly in this election. The Left party almost doubled its result to 8.8 per cent, while BSW ended up just below the parliamentary threshold with 4.97 per cent. Hence, the parties at the fringes of the German party landscape have grown considerably in the last decade.

Support for the AfD varies across the country. The AfD is stronger in the east and south than in the west and north. Since its successes in the state elections in Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia in 2014, the AfD has continued to enjoy the strongest support it receives in the five eastern German states.¹⁸ More recently, however, the party's success has broadened, with the party gaining ground in

¹⁸ Pytlas & Biehler, 'The AfD within the AfD', p. 8.

western German state elections.¹⁹ For example, in 2025, the AfD tripled its vote share to 14.5 per cent (an increase of 9.5 percentage points) in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine–Westphalia, a state with a large working-class population and a strong heavy-industry base that has traditionally been dominated by centre-left parties and the SPD. More recently, in 2026, the AfD doubled its result to just under 19 per cent in the state election in Baden–Württemberg. Although the party's strongest voter base is still in the eastern German states, it has become a party with nationwide appeal.

Figure 2. Map of the 2025 election results by district, depicting the strongest party



Source. Original map 'Bundestagswahl 2025. Karte der Wahlkreisergebnisse', *Die Zeit*, based on data from *Bundeswahlleiterin*, Available at: <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2025-02/bundestagswahl-2025-wahlergebnisse-wahlkreise-live> (05.05.2026).

Thus far, all parties in the German parliament have stuck to the so-called firewall against the AfD, ruling out any kind of cooperation. The current government, led by Chancellor Friedrich Merz of the CDU, is a coalition between the CDU/CSU and the Social Democratic Party (hereafter SPD), which together have a majority of approximately 52 per cent. Although this government at the time of writing

¹⁹ Pfeifer, Hans, 'Germany: AfD marks success in state election', *Deutsche Welle*, 9 March 2026, Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-afd-marks-success-in-state-election-despite-scandals/a-76282685> (05.05.2025)

has a stable majority, it faces significant challenges both within the coalition and in relation to the opposition, as reflected in the growing support for the AfD.²⁰

In 2024, a group of MPs from several parties submitted a motion urging the Bundestag to request that the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe initiate a legal process to determine whether the existence and activities of the AfD violate the German constitution.²¹ The court is the only authority that could ban a political party in Germany. Several parties in the Bundestag, including parts of the SPD in the governing coalition, support the motion. As of May 2026, no official proceedings for a ban of the AfD had been initiated by the Bundestag. Yet, calls for such action persist through advocacy groups and public campaigns in several German states.

2.4 Intra-party competition and divided leadership

There is infighting between the AfD's eastern and western state-level associations. The balance of power between these used to be approximately fifty-fifty. But following the 2025 federal election, the balance has shifted further towards the west.²² Some of the West representatives claim that too much attention is being given to the East and especially to the “cries from the Thuringian forest,” referring to Mr. Höcke, the informal leader of the now dissolved Flügel.²³ This is important in the context of this report, as the eastern and the western party districts appear to have profoundly different stances regarding the preferred foreign policy outlook of the party, as becomes clear in the analysis below.

That the AfD has also begun to extend its success to western Germany is mirrored in the party leadership. Alice Weidel, from western Germany, assumed leadership in 2017, together with the then co-leader Alexander Gauland. Ever since, she has played a crucial role in consolidating the party, embracing unity for electoral success. In 2022, the party re-elected Weidel and elected Tino Chrupalla from eastern Germany as its spokespersons. Their leadership was reaffirmed by re-

²⁰ For instance, in opinion polls from April 2026, the AfD polled at 25 per cent whereas the governing Christian Democratic Union polled at 24 per cent. See ‘Sonntagsfrage – aktuelle Umfrageergebnisse zum Wahlrend. Aktualisiert am 1. April 2026’, April 2026, *Ipsos*, Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/de-de/meinungsumfragen/sonntagsfrage> (05.05.2026).

²¹ Deutscher Bundestag, *Antrag auf Entscheidung des Deutschen Bundestages über die Einleitung eines Verfahrens zur Feststellung der Verfassungswidrigkeit der „Alternative für Deutschland“ gemäß Artikel 21 Absatz 2, 3 und 4 des Grundgesetzes i. V. m. § 13 Nummer 2 und 2a, den §§ 43 ff. des Bundesverfassungsgerichtsgesetzes*, Drucksache 20/13750, 13 November 2024, Retrieved from <https://dserv.bundestag.de/btd/20/137/2013750.pdf> (14.01.2026)

²² Only 42 out of the total 151 AfD members of the Bundestag belong to the associations in the East. See Kurz, Julia and Gabor Halasz, ‘Wie die AfD mit der Wehrpflicht hadert’, *Tagesschau*, 28 September 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/afd-wehrpflicht-102.html> (14.01.2026)

²³ *Ibid.*

election in 2024 and prior to the 2025 federal election Weidel was nominated as the party's candidate for chancellor. Both supposedly enjoy support from the dissolved Flügel.²⁴

While Weidel initially made attempts at the beginning of her leadership to distance herself from the extreme right within the party, the willingness of the party leadership to disassociate itself from the extreme right appears to have decreased in the last few years. For example, whereas Weidel supported the party exclusion proceedings against Höcke in 2017, she claimed, in 2025, that she had been mistaken in doing so and concurrently claimed that Höcke could be a candidate for a future ministerial post in the future.²⁵

Despite Weidel's efforts to unite the party, significant divisions remain between the western and eastern party associations. The internal differences are mirrored both in the party leadership and in pivotal foreign policy issues. These divergences are analysed in greater depth in the next chapter.

²⁴ Müller, Ann-Katrin, 'Alice Weidel und Tino Chrupalla wollen AfD-Spitzenkandidaten werden', *Der Spiegel*, 4 May 2021, Retrieved from <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-alice-weidel-und-tino-chrupalla-wollen-spitzenkandidaten-werden-a-e8849e4a-f955-4167-9b37-9e7a5360d4e4> (10.09.2025).

²⁵ Neuerer, Dietmar, 'AfD-Chefin Weidel bezeichnet eigenen Umgang mit Höcke als Fehler', *Handelsblatt*, 19 February 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/afd-chefin-weidel-bezeichnet-eigenen-umgang-mit-hoecke-als-fehler/100108306.html> (24.11.2025)

3 AfD's foreign policy preferences

The AfD's view on how Germany's foreign policy should be shaped is evident in the party's election manifestos from the 2025 federal election²⁶ and the 2024 European Parliament election. Moreover, the contours become clearer when delving into the arguments of the leading party representatives, parliamentarians, and the parliamentary group in motions and debates in the Bundestag.

3.1 Realpolitik in a multipolar order

In AfD's view, Germany is a middle power that is anchored in the West and surrounded by numerous neighbours, while acting as a "bridge to the East." At the same time, it is dependent on peace and stability in Europe, because its geography gives it long borders that are difficult to protect. The party argues that "a war (fought with nuclear weapons) would affect Germany – as it did during the Cold War – as the main theatre of war."²⁷

The AfD promotes an approach to foreign policy in what it describes as the tradition of "realpolitik", as is visible in the party's 2025 election manifesto, stating that "foreign policy must be Realpolitik in Germany's interests." It notes that the world is at a turning point towards a multipolar order, and that Germany can no longer, in this context, be subject to foreign interests.²⁸ The AfD positions itself as contrasting to the centre parties, which it repeatedly criticises for adhering to ideology and a values-based foreign policy.²⁹ It also frequently criticises former governments for having too often "abided by multilateralism."³⁰

The AfD, instead, constantly suggests that Germany should prioritise national interests and follow economic pragmatism rather than adhere to the values of the West. In this vein, the AfD typically frames its own policies in terms of prioritising national interests, for example, by promoting foreign trade relations with the great powers Russia and China as well as the United States.³¹

²⁶ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 21. Deutschen Bundestag*, 2025, Retrieved from: https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/AfD_Bundestagswahlprogramm2025_web.pdf (11.09.2025)

²⁷ Deutscher Bundestag, *Antrag der Abgeordneten (...) und der Fraktion der AfD, "Für Frieden, Stabilität und Sicherheit – Aus dem Ukraine-Krieg lernen – Die Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa weiterentwickeln"*, Drucksache 20/13834, 18 November 2024, Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/138/2013834.pdf> (11.09.2025), p. 1.

²⁸ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87, 90.

²⁹ See, for instance: Deutscher Bundestag, *Antrag der Abgeordneten (...) und der Fraktion der AfD, „Nationalen Sicherheitsrat einrichten – Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie entwerfen und konsequent umsetzen – Für eine Realpolitik im deutschen Interesse“*, Drucksache 21/345, 3 June 2025, Retrieved from <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/21/003/2100345.pdf> (11.09.2025)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87, 90.

3.1.1 Abandoning values, prioritising economic interests

In the last few years, and in particular in 2026, the party increasingly appears to follow a “Germany first” strategy with the goal of restructuring Germany’s international relations based on energy security, trade, and national sovereignty. This primarily involves efforts to secure Germany’s continued role as a trading and industrial nation, in order to satisfy the country’s vital primary energy needs.³² In line with this, the AfD continuously promotes the repairing and opening of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and an end to EU sanctions on Russia.³³ Moreover, the AfD Bundestag factions have put forward motions that Germany should strive for the ratification of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the PRC and the EU.³⁴

According to the AfD, to secure Germany’s status as a trading and industrial nation, a “stable peace order” in Europe and globally must be ensured as a precondition.³⁵ To achieve this, the party maintains that Germany should pursue a strategy that is free from ideology and is not guided by values. It further argues that the “value-based” foreign policy pursued in recent decades has “not made the world safer and could not prevent the outbreak of the largest war in Europe since 1945.” The AfD, on the other hand, promotes itself as a party prioritising diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution.³⁶ In the AfD’s view, being ideology-free implies that Germany should not be tied to, or follow, the ideology of the US and, following that reasoning, not stand on the US’s side in international affairs, including in its competition with Russia and the PRC.

The party does argue, however, that Germany should shape and guarantee this stable future peace order together with its European partners. To this end, it maintains that Europe should expand its sovereignty and formulate its interests, while striving towards autonomy in the security policy sphere, which will open up an opportunity for Europe to become a power centre in the changing world order.³⁷ It is not likely that the party foresees this collective endeavour as taking place within European institutions, however. Instead, the AfD appears to promote new patterns of cooperation and reforms of existing fora.

³² Ibid. p. 87.

³³ See, for example ‘AfD-Chef fordert erneut Inbetriebnahme von Nord Stream 2’, *Die Zeit*, 14.07.2022, Retrieved from <https://www.zeit.de/news/2022-07/14/afd-chef-fordert-erneut-inbetriebnahme-von-nord-stream-2> (22.09.2025); Rzepka, Dominik, ‘Chrupalla lobt Nord Stream-Vorstoß aus CDU’, *ZDFheute*, 20.03.2025, Retrieved from <https://www.zdfheute.de/politik/deutschland/gas-russland-energieversorgung-nord-stream-2-cdu-afd-bsw-100.html> (22.09.2025).

³⁴ Deutscher Bundestag, *Antrag der Abgeordneten (...) und der Fraktion der AfD, „Sanktionen beenden – Investitionsschutzabkommen zwischen der EU und China ratifizieren“*, Drucksache 20/13786, 14 November 2024, Retrieved from <https://ds.bundestag.de/btd/20/137/2013786.pdf> (22.09.2025), p. 1, 3.

³⁵ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

³⁷ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87.

3.1.2 Reforming institutions, changing cooperation patterns

The party advocates incremental reforms to the existing multilateral institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations (UN), as a way to respond to the shifting geopolitical environment. It also promotes a revision of European cooperation in the sphere of trade.

As regards European trade, the AfD advocates an updated/revised version (*Neufassung*) of European cooperation. While arguing that Europe should continue to have a closely coordinated foreign trade policy, the party strives toward having a looser community of European states that share economic interests and coordinate their trade policy on the international stage. Today, Germany, together with other EU member states, has pooled sovereignty in the area of trade within the EU, which today hold exclusive competences in trade policy. The AfD questions the centralisation efforts of the EU at large, however, and the trade area appear to be no exception.

This is suggested by the fact that the party promotes a reform of the WTO. There are no detailed plans as to what such reform would entail, but it may concern how (European) countries are represented in the organisation. Today, Germany is represented in the WTO through the EU. Given the party's view on how to reform existing European structures for trade, a change in how Germany is represented in the WTO would be a direct consequence, meaning individually rather than through the EU, perhaps in coordination with European partners. This would undoubtedly lessen Europe's weight and ability to speak with one voice on trade disputes and negotiations within global trade bodies such as the WTO.

Besides what appears to be a will to reshape Germany's representation within global trade bodies, the AfD has an alternative position with regard to desirable trade partners. It promotes strengthened cooperation with the BRICS states, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.³⁸ The EU today maintains varying trade ties with most of these states, mostly through bilateral agreements. Trade with Russia is heavily restricted, however, and the CAI with China, although negotiated, is currently frozen. As depicted above, the AfD promotes a resumption of trade relations with Russia and a ratification of the CAI with China.

AfD also calls for reforms of the United Nations (UN) reflecting what it sees as countries' changing weight in the international system. This includes advocating a permanent seat for Germany in the UN Security Council.³⁹ In relation to the UN, moreover, the AfD reasons that Germany should leave several UN initiatives related to migration and refugees.⁴⁰ In early 2026, co-leader Weidel claimed that

³⁸ Alternative für Deutschland, *Europawahl Programm 2024. Europa neu Denken.*, Berlin 2024, p. 30.

³⁹ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 86, 90.

⁴⁰ Deutscher Bundestag, *Antrag der Abgeordneten (...) und der Fraktion der AfD, „Die Vereinten Nationen grundlegend reformieren – Für Frieden, Sicherheit und Wohlstand“*, Drucksache 20/13833. 18 November 2024. Retrieved from <https://dsserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/138/2013833.pdf> (06.05.26), p. 2-3.

it was a mistake that Germany had not joined President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace."⁴¹

3.2 Ideologically and tactically driven Russia policy

The AfD's worldview is similar to the Kremlin's. Moreover, it frequently repeats the talking points and propaganda that Russia uses to frame its war against Ukraine. Importantly, the AfD has frequently been accused of being under Russian influence. Both the party at large and individual parliamentarians have been under investigation for having received party funding or bribes, or spied for Russia. Even since Russia's full-scale invasion, some individual AfD parliamentarians have continued travelling eastwards. Against this background, several centre parties have referred to the AfD as a security risk for Germany.⁴²

3.2.1 Agreement on Ukraine and energy policy

There is agreement within the party regarding the "root causes" of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. AfD representatives repeatedly deliver Kremlin rhetoric and point to NATO's "eastward expansion" after the end of the Cold War as its cause. Weidel agrees with this line of reasoning but has nevertheless argued that this "should not be a justification for a war of aggression that violates international law."⁴³

This perspective on the root causes of Russia's war is also connected to the widespread anti-Americanism that still prevails within the party, which is also further elaborated upon in the next chapter. Within these circles, the US is blamed for the war, as it is the dominant force within NATO. This has also led to the conclusion that NATO is an "expansive" alliance with "offensive" intentions, a view that has influenced the party's overall view of the alliance and Germany's future within it. AfD rejects all eastward enlargement of both the EU and NATO. And as for Ukraine, it views its future as a neutral state outside European institutions.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 'Alice Weidel zur Regierungserklärung von Friedrich Merz zur außenpolitischen Lage am 29.01.26', *Phoenix* [YouTube], 29 January 2026, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACfIQwaTttU> (20.03.2026)

⁴² See for example 'AfD nach Vorwürfen russischer Einflussnahme heftig kritisiert', *Deutscher Bundestag*, Retrieved from <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2024/kw15-de-aktuelle-stunde-russland-afd-997398> (06.05.2026)

⁴³ 'BURGARD: Alice Weidel - "Unser Land wird durch eine extremistische Politik gegen die Wand gefahren"', *WELT* [YouTube], 4 December 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeVPM65Pv50> (06.05.2026)

⁴⁴ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87, 92.

There is, furthermore, complete consensus within the party that it is not in Germany's national interest to support Ukraine, either politically, economically, or militarily. The party recommends immediately discontinuing all support. Chrupalla has even insisted that "Russia has already won the war."⁴⁵ With regard to the ongoing peace negotiations, the party leadership continuously blames both the current German government for hindering Trump's peace efforts and the Ukrainian government for not wanting to give up land for the sake of peace.⁴⁶

Agreement also prevails regarding energy policy, and more specifically energy trade with Russia. The official position, shared throughout the party, is that Germany's energy supply issue should be solved, inter alia, through the opening of the Nord Stream pipeline and that EU sanctions on Russia should be lifted.

3.2.2 Different visions of German-Russian relations

The different factions within the AfD agree upon the "root causes" of Russia's war against Ukraine, such as considering NATO as the aggressor; Russo-German energy trade, including reopening the Nord Stream 2 pipeline; and the end of support to Ukraine. Regarding perceptions or visions of Germany–Russia relations and Germany's future relationship with Russia, there are some nuances between the camps, however.

Within the party, the eastern party faction advocates a multipolar world order and Eurasianism. This position, represented by Chrupalla, among others, is particularly prominent in eastern German party districts. In these environments, support for closer ties with Russia is noticeably stronger. Many representatives promote more extensive and long-term cooperation between Germany and Russia, at both the structural and more practical levels of foreign policy. This camp reasons that Russia is a legitimate and stable partner in international politics. For example, Chrupalla has claimed that Russia and the US should be considered equally reliable partners. Additionally, it is often claimed in these circles that Russia is part of Europe's political and historical space and that the relationship should therefore be understood in a long-term perspective that extends beyond the current Russian political leadership.⁴⁷

Some representatives within this camp, in particular the most prominent figure, Höcke, make an even stronger case for expanded Russo-German relations. In this view, Russia is Germany's natural partner and, conversely, Germany needs to

⁴⁵ Kottász, Zoltán, 'AfD Leader: "Russia Has Won This War"', *The European Conservative*, 16 December 2024, Retrieved from <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/afd-leader-russia-has-won-this-war/> (15.12.25)

⁴⁶ 'Alice Weidel zur Regierungserklärung von Friedrich Merz', 29 January 2026.

⁴⁷ 'AfD-Chef Chrupalla wird "Inkompetenz" vorgeworfen | Markus Lanz vom 07. Dezember 2023', *ZDFheute Nachrichten* [YouTube], 8 December 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDopne3mryE> (25.09.2025)

“free itself” from the US, both to enable peace in Europe and to achieve closer cooperation with Russia. This is clearly related to the widespread anti-Americanism within the party (which is elaborated on in Chapter 3.3). Höcke even quoted the speech that Putin gave in the German Bundestag in 2001, in which he made the same argument that “Germany and Russia are natural partners in Europe: German technology and Russian raw materials. Together we would be unbeatable.”⁴⁸ Broadly, these circles advocate a large economic area stretching from Paris to Vladivostok, which would be formed on the basis of German-Russian complementarity.⁴⁹

A different stance on Russia emerges in the western German districts, however. Co-leader Weidel can be said to represent this faction. Here, the foreign policy outlook is more often formulated on the basis of a nationally oriented set of priorities, with German interests at the forefront. Sometimes, this part of the party leans ideologically towards “Germany first” thinking, with some resemblances to Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement.

The differences within the party are particularly evident in how the threat posed by Russia and the country’s role in the war in Ukraine are described. Chrupalla, for example, has downplayed the notion of a direct Russian threat to Germany and emphasised that Russia has not taken any concrete actions directed against Germany. Weidel, on the other hand, takes a more cautious stance. The differences were exposed when Russia was suspected of having violated the airspace of European NATO member states in the autumn of 2025. Chrupalla rejected this as propaganda, whilst Weidel claimed this would be a serious violation, if proven to be true. Weidel even went as far, from an AfD perspective, as to claim that NATO would need to respond if, for example, a NATO member state’s airspace were to be violated.⁵⁰ There was no reaction from Weidel when the North Atlantic Council (NAC) shortly after issued a statement presenting proof that it was Russia that violated Estonian airspace.⁵¹ Despite the absence of a reaction, the initial rhetoric suggests that Weidel is seeking to adopt more moderate rhetoric tailored to appeal to a broader electorate in western Germany.

⁴⁸ Krumbeck, Victoria, ‘Höcke äußert sich zum Ukraine-Krieg und provoziert mit Putin-Zitat: „Zusammen wären wir unschlagbar“’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 21 August 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.fr.de/politik/afd-bjoern-hoecke-putin-rede-zitat-ukraine-krieg-russland-verfassungsschutz-92472829.html> (25.09.2025)

⁴⁹ Peters, Tim B., ‘Raumfremde Macht’. Amerika aus der Rechtsaußen- perspektive’, *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, 24 Februar 2025, p. 75f.

⁵⁰ Nauerer, Dietmar, ‘„Ungenaue Faktenlagen“ – Russlands Provokationen spalten AfD-Spitze’, *Handelsblatt*, 22 September 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/nato-ungenau-faktenlagen-russlands-provokationen-spalten-afd-spitze/100157217.html> (06.05.2026)

⁵¹ ‘Statement by the North Atlantic Council on recent airspace violations by Russia’, 23 September 2025, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]*, Retrieved from: <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/09/23/statement-by-the-north-atlantic-council-on-recent-airspace-violations-by-russia> (06.05.2026)

It is important to keep in mind that, at the same time, Weidel and the west German party districts have a clear desire to appear as a potential government alternative. For this to become realistic, the party needs to attract voters from the CDU/CSU, whose traditional foreign policy stance is that of *Westbindung*, namely a cherishing of Germany's traditional Western orientation. These voters in particular, whom the AfD most probably needs in order to become a viable government alternative, are less inclined to identify with positions that could be perceived as too pro-Russian, such as those presented by representatives from party districts in eastern Germany. In light of this, it is difficult to determine whether these representatives, including Weidel, are masking their views on Russia through a more tactically adapted public communication. It could also be the case that Weidel strives to maintain maximum flexibility as she balances between not wanting to alienate neither core AfD voters in eastern Germany, nor potential voters in the western parts of the country.

Evidently, the two factions, comprising mainly eastern and western German party districts respectively, are articulating different, competing positions. Given these factional differences, internal fragmentation exists regarding the desired approach towards Russia. The AfD's policy and visions for the Russia-Germany relationship sometimes appear incoherent and difficult to interpret. However, the fragmentation and presented differences must be seen in light of the party's current strategy to establish itself as a governable and more "normal" party until before the federal elections in 2029. This ambition results in parts of the party leadership, most notably Weidel, often toning down or packaging controversial positions on Russia to avoid damaging the party's future coalition potential. Despite these differences and varying rhetoric, the factions manage to agree on policy positions regarding Ukraine, energy policy, and NATO enlargement.

3.3 The dilemma of transatlantic relations

Anti-Americanism is in the DNA of the AfD. There is a mix of both traditional left- and right-wing criticism of the US within the party. Traditional left-wing criticism tends to include US hegemony and imperialism, as well as its cultural, economic, and military dominance in the world. The traditional anti-American right, on the other hand, tends to be critical of the very understanding of the US as a traditional country of immigration and the very embodiment of multiculturalism, more specifically that the US is a "woke" liberal country.

The view of the United States within the party has evolved with the re-election of President Trump. Since early 2025, the US has been portrayed as an important partner, not only ideologically, because of its affinity with the MAGA movement, but also with regard to Russia policy, where there is strong support for Trump's efforts to engage in peace negotiations with Putin. However, regardless of these

similarities, the AfD makes a clear distinction between the US as a system and the US under Trump.

Despite Trump's re-election, the longstanding and widespread anti-American sentiments remain within the party, especially in eastern Germany. This should be understood in conjunction with the prevalent pro-Russian stance, as depicted above. These positions are increasingly shaping the party's public image, especially since several of the more moderate voices have left the party in recent years.⁵²

Since there is presently a variety of attitudes toward the US within the AfD, and anti-American stances remain widespread, there is considerable uncertainty about the party's positions and preferences on the more fundamental and concrete aspects of the transatlantic relationship. Moreover, Trump's increasingly interventionist foreign policy, as it has evolved in 2026, might lead to a return, or acceleration, of the traditional US critique, and in turn an end to the AfD-MAGA rapprochement that was seen during Trump's first year in office.

3.3.1 Emphasizing sovereignty

The party broadly and consistently perceives that Germany does not have full sovereignty and independence in its own decision-making. In its 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections programme, the party noted that the geopolitical and economic interests of the US were increasingly diverging from those of Germany and other European countries. Moreover, it noted that Germany must not allow itself to be drawn into conflicts with other states based on US decisions.⁵³ The party repeatedly questions Germany's participation in US missions and operations in crises worldwide, for example, claiming that Germany should not be the "extended arm" of the US. Concurrently, the AfD at large rejects the participation of German conscripts in "foreign wars."⁵⁴ This includes the participation of German soldiers in any form in a peace enforcement mission in Ukraine following a potential agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

One argument frequently put forward by party representatives is that Germany is a "vassal" to American directives, making German policy and ideology a mere extension of the US's. The co-chair Weidel appears to support this view, since she, as late as early 2025, argued that Germany has been "a slave" to the US for many years.⁵⁵ On the basis of this line of argumentation, a number of policy positions with possibly far-reaching consequences have been brought forward. In its

⁵² Peters, "Raumfremde Macht".

⁵³ Alternative für Deutschland, *Europawahl Programm 2024*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Kurz and Halasz, 2025.

⁵⁵ Maitra, Sumantra, "Slaves Don't Fight: AfD's Weidel Speaks Exclusively to The American Conservative", *The American Conservative*, 6 January 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/slaves-dont-fight-afds-weidel-on-germanys-future/> (25.09.2025)

2016 programme of principles, the AfD stated that it wanted to see “a withdrawal of all Allied troops stationed on German soil, and in particular their nuclear weapons.”⁵⁶ This position was still valid in late 2024, as it was stated in the EP election programme, that the American troops on German soil should be replaced as soon as Germany’s own armed forces were in a position to replace them.⁵⁷

When asked why the party advocates the withdrawal of all US troops and nuclear weapons from Germany, Weidel argued in 2024 that war is near and that Germany must therefore regain its full sovereignty and eliminate possible danger points (*Gefahrenpunkte*) that could make Germany a target. She claimed that Germany is safer without US nuclear weapons and that “America’s interests in Germany fundamentally contradict our own security interests.”⁵⁸ In September 2025, Weidel proposed an additional argument on this topic, claiming that the US would not protect Germany in the case of a nuclear attack due to its doctrine of “flexible response,” as it suggests that the US would only respond if its own national interests were concerned.⁵⁹ This implies that the motivations for not wanting US nuclear weapons on German soil are somewhat unclear. Do they stem from a fear of being entrapped or from doubts about the US’s actual willingness to protect Germany, should there be a nuclear confrontation? Regardless of the motives, a departure from Germany’s participation in NATO’s nuclear sharing programme would have immense consequences.

Although the rejection of US nuclear weapons on German soil and German participation in “foreign wars” may have far-reaching consequences for alliance coherence, the ideas presented by the party’s more radical anti-American figures, as presented in the following section, would have more all-encompassing consequences for European security as a whole.

3.3.2 A multifaceted anti-Americanism

The anti-American figures within the AfD tend to be critical of US hegemony, as well as its cultural, economic, and military dominance in the world. Moreover, the anti-American circles mainly blame the US for several of the present crises. For instance, US interventions in the Middle East are perceived as one of the causes of the refugee crises, the consequences of which have affected Europe in particular.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Alternative für Deutschland, *Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 2016, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Alternative für Deutschland, *Europawahl Programm 2024*, p. 30.

⁵⁸ ‘Weg von den USA, hin zu Russland und China - Die außenpolitische Vision der AfD’, *DW Deutsch* [YouTube], 5 October 2024, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJWVoYP1vsA> (26.11.25)

⁵⁹ ‘Die AfD ist Deutschlands letzte Chance: Alice Weidel über ihr Leben in der Politik’, *Die Weltwoche* [YouTube], 7 September 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2Ks9SfDILM> (26.11.25)

⁶⁰ Peters, “Raumfremde Macht“, p. 74.

However, within the more radical circles, Russo-German cooperation is instead viewed as a natural given, and the US is instead presented as a so-called “alien power” (*raumfremde Macht*) with a strategy to “drive a wedge between the peoples and nations who can actually work very well together.”⁶¹ Hence, the suggestion preferred by the radical anti-Americanist figures is not to “regain” some of Germany’s alleged lost sovereignty through a somewhat reduced engagement between the US and Germany, but instead to pivot away from the Western alliance as a whole.

As depicted above, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is considered to be a result of the supposed US-dominated NATO expansion into Eastern Europe as well as of the perceived anti-Russian politics of the West.⁶² In the more radical circles, the US, mainly its energy sector and arms manufacturers, is portrayed as beneficiary of Russia’s ongoing war. Mr. Höcke has even portrayed the war as the US ordering the German government to pursue “economic suicide.”⁶³ The US’s view of, and actions in relation to, the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline have fuelled this anti-American stance, but have also augmented the spread of conspiracy theories. For example, Mr. Höcke has argued that the fact that the opening of Nord Stream 2 was halted in 2022 and that Germany subsequently redirected its energy imports to liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the US, among others, can be seen as a proof that the German government is pursuing “American interest politics.” This in turn is depicted as evidence of the alleged US strategy to “drive a wedge between nations that could actually work very well together.”⁶⁴

The view that Germany and Russia are natural partners, as depicted in Chapter 3.2, has also led to arguments in these circles, including by Höcke and other local AfD representatives in the east German state of Saxony-Anhalt, that the US intends to prevent the emergence of a continental power in Europe that could constrain its own (US) power. This is linked to the claim that the US seeks to keep Germany and Russia apart.⁶⁵ In this view, the US should withdraw from Europe because Russia is Germany’s natural partner, or, conversely, that Germany needs to free itself from the US, both to enable peace in Europe and to achieve closer cooperation with Russia.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 75–76.

⁶² Peters, “Raumfremde Macht“, p. 76.

⁶³ Transcript of Björn Höckes’ speech in Gera on October 3, 2022, *Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten [VVN-BdA Bundesvereinigung]*, Retrieved from <https://vvn-bda.de/hoeckes-geraer-rede/> (26.11.25).

⁶⁴ ‘Höckes Rede zum Tag der Deutschen Freiheit am 3. Oktober in Gera’, *PI News*, 4 October 2022, Retrieved from <https://pi-news.net/2022/10/hoeckes-rede-zum-tag-der-deutschen-freiheit-am-3-oktober-in-gera/> (26.11.25).

⁶⁵ Peters, “Raumfremde Macht“, p. 75f.

⁶⁶ Krumbeck, 2023.

3.3.3 Ideological rapprochement

In addition to the above-mentioned view of the US, parts of the AfD's critical stance toward the United States has previously also been tied to the perception of the US as a traditional country of immigration and the very embodiment of multiculturalism.⁶⁷ In addition, there has been a perception of the US as a "woke" liberal country. All parts of the AfD rejects both multiculturalism and so-called "wokeism," continuously warning against supposedly widespread radical-left ideology and Germany's immigration policy.

This led the AfD to initially welcome Trump's return to office in 2025. Weidel seized on the opportunity to normalise the own party, using the Trump administration as a benchmark or comparative standard. The AfD leadership has been championing the current administration's efforts to strengthen free speech in Europe, as exemplified by Vice President J.D. Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2025 and Elon Musk's involvement in the German federal election the same year. In early 2025, Weidel met Vance on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference and Musk interviewed Weidel on X shortly before the 2025 federal elections. Ever since, AfD has sought to strengthen ties to the US administration, for example with several representatives visiting Washington DC.⁶⁸ Several AfD representatives have made attempts to develop closer relations with the MAGA movement and the Trump administration throughout the past year, for instance through meetings with the White House and US State Department.⁶⁹

After Trump's seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, threats to take control of Greenland, and, more recently, the war against Iran, the AfD is recalibrating its alignment with the Trump administration. Following the developments in Iran, the party's rhetoric about the US and Trump has shifted. AfD condemned the Iran attack and called for German neutrality while framing the US as the aggressor. Chrupalla, who previously praised Trump for his peace efforts in Russia's war against-Ukraine, has since changed his rhetoric, now claiming that the American president risks being remembered as a "war president."⁷⁰ He has also praised Spain's government for banning the US from using military bases in

⁶⁷ Peters, "Raumfremde Macht", p. 75.

⁶⁸ Pfeifer, Hans, 'Germany's AfD seeks closer ties to Trump and MAGA movement', *Deutsche Welle*, 10 June 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-alternative-for-germany-beatrix-von-storch-donald-trump-markus-frohnmaier-jan-wenzel-schmidt/a-74254801> (5.12.2025)

⁶⁹ See, for example Lunday, Chris, von Pezold, Pauline and Ferdinand Knapp, 'Top AfD politician makes surprise visit to White House', *Politico*, 15 September 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/top-afd-white-house-donald-trump-jd-vance-germany-politics/> (25.03.2025); Post on X by @UnderSecPD. Under Secretary of State Sarah B. Rogers. [X], 1 October 2025, <https://x.com/UnderSecPD/status/1973200907111391613>

⁷⁰ 'AfD leader Chrupalla on Trump and the Iran war: "I am extremely disappointed" | Markus Lanz, Marc...', *ZDFHeute Nachrichten* [YouTube], 12 March 2026, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9D75ga3-A8> (12.05.2026)

Germany in its war against Iran, while reiterating the longstanding position within the party that the US should withdraw all troops from the country.⁷¹

Against this background, it is clear that the war in Iran has resulted in a return to, or intensification of, the established anti-American positions that are still widespread within the party. Weidel has remained more muted on the issue of Iran, which suggests that the AfD leadership is facing a dilemma on how to deal with the Trump administration. Despite the ideological consensus between the AfD and the US administration, with shared critique of so-called “woke” ideology and multiculturalism, significant differences are emerging in their foreign policy orientations. This is particularly evident in the AfD’s view of the US’s role in world politics, where a more traditional perception of the country as an expansionist power is being revived. Overall, this indicates ideological convergence primarily in domestic politics and in overarching worldviews, but clear conflicts of interest remain, not least regarding military interventions. In this regard, the party shows a clear preference for trade and peaceful relations rather than war, which is also linked to a desire to avoid energy crises and economic instability.

3.4 European defence: With or without institutions

The AfD is likewise divided over Germany’s future engagement in both the EU and NATO. The radical question about a potential German withdrawal from the two remains a point of contention.⁷²

AFD’s broader stance on the EU is Euroscepticism. The party rejects transferring powers to Brussels and instead believes that national sovereignty should be prioritised. Since deeper EU integration is generally rejected, the party also has a negative stance on turning defence into an area of shared EU competence and deepening the member states’ defence cooperation.

The AfD maintains that European states should strive towards pooling their military capabilities in a “system of its own for collective security.”⁷³ The party argues that Germany and its European neighbours should no longer rely exclusively on the security or assurances provided by non-European countries, but that they should instead achieve far-reaching military and strategic autonomy.⁷⁴ In line

⁷¹ Burnett, Aron, ‘AfD demands US troops leave Germany’, *The Telegraph*, 29 March 2026, Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2026/03/29/afd-demands-usa-troops-germany-tino-chrupalla-trump-iran/> (12.05.2026)

⁷² Preuß, Roland, ‘Nichts wie raus!’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 July 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/afd-parteitag-eu-nato-hoecke-weidel-chrupalla-1.6071166?reduced=true> (12.05.2026)

⁷³ Alternative für Deutschland, *Europawahl Programm 2024*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

with this, the party supports the concept of European strategic autonomy and “its development into a separate power centre” in the changing world order.⁷⁵ What this separate, own system for collective security means is highly unclear, given that the party at large questions Germany’s membership in both the EU and NATO.

3.4.1 A conditional NATO membership

The AfD argues that Germany’s NATO membership will remain a cornerstone of its security strategy, at least until an independent and capable European military alliance has been built.⁷⁶ The party also argues, however, that NATO membership is critical for the country’s security and defence capability only as long as the alliance is restricted to its task as a “defensive alliance.”⁷⁷ In addition, the Bundeswehr’s participation in operations outside NATO territory should take place only if it is conducted under a UN mandate and in Germany’s national interest.⁷⁸ As noted above, the AfD generally rejects participation in “foreign wars” (*fremder Kriege*), which certainly could have implications for Germany’s participation in NATO operations, including for its engagement on the alliance’s Eastern Flank.

The scepticism toward NATO is highly connected to the pro-Russian stance held by many representatives of the party. These representatives, including co-leader Chrupalla, present arguments such as “a defensive alliance must accept and respect the interests of all European countries, including Russia’s,” or that Germany must otherwise consider whether membership is still “useful.”⁷⁹ This stance is also visible in the party’s official posture, although formulated slightly more vaguely, for example, that a “stable European peace order requires balanced cooperation based on the legitimate security interests of all European states” and the “rejection of eastward expansion of the EU and NATO.”⁸⁰

The scepticism toward NATO is also closely connected to the widespread anti-Americanism within the party. The argument consistently put forward by these voices is that the alliance, under US leadership, historically has acted and still acts offensively. Therefore, it is no longer considered a “defence alliance.”⁸¹ Voices

⁷⁵ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Alternative für Deutschland, *Europawahl Programm 2024*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ Alternative für Deutschland, *Europawahl Programm 2024*, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Kottász, Zoltán, ‘AfD Leader: “Russia Has Won This War”’, *The European Conservative*, 16 December 2024, Retrieved from <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/afd-leader-russia-has-won-this-war/> (15.12.25)

⁸⁰ Alternative für Deutschland, *Zeit für Deutschland*, 2025, p. 87.

⁸¹ See, for example, ‘«Die AfD ist Deutschlands letzte Chance»: Alice Weidel über ihr Leben in der Politik’, 2025; and Kottász 2024.

from this camp have argued that NATO's previous eastward enlargement to the Baltic states in 2004 was a mistake.⁸²

The arguments about NATO being an "offensive alliance" have accelerated since Russia initiated its full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022 and Germany and its allies began supporting Ukraine militarily, politically, and financially. The far-reaching support for Ukraine's prospects of a future NATO membership is also frequently portrayed as a severe mistake. Ever since, these arguments have been put forward by the traditional anti-American wing within the party, but also by representatives from the party's western state associations, not least by co-leader Weidel.

Given that the 2004 NATO enlargement is viewed as a mistake by substantial parts of the AfD, it is highly unclear how the party would consider the activation of NATO Article 5 in relation to the Baltic states. This is particularly relevant for Germany, which will have a permanent German brigade stationed in Lithuania from 2027 onwards. Could the AfD, in a scenario of escalation and an invocation of Article 5, consider Lithuania as a "foreign war" and not in Germany's national interest to defend? On the other hand, this raises the question as to whether the AfD, in such scenario, would actually actively choose to not defend German soldiers stationed in the country, which appear less likely.

Even if the AfD were prepared to accept continued German NATO membership, it would probably remain sceptical about actual German involvement in alliance operations. This could also comprise operations currently in place under NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF) on the Eastern Flank, including, in Germany's case, its permanent brigade in Lithuania. However, as it may be difficult to dismantle a permanent unit, the party could instead strive to alter rules of engagement, or potentially seek to delay or, in the worse case, reject German involvement, should there be an Article 5 scenario.

⁸² See, for example, „Wehrpflicht – ja oder nein?“ Björn Höcke über den Skandal in Deutschland, *Kurbel TV* [YouTube], 30 September 2025, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr1REMI4WaQ> (15.12.25)

4 Discussion: A departure from German foreign policy?

This analysis shows that the AfD is clearly at a crossroads with regard to its foreign policy stance. Internal divisions herald indecisiveness in choosing a clear pathway. The party has not yet defined its position regarding Germany's future place within the global and European system. Hence, should it, in the evolving multipolar world, connect to the East with a vision of a "Eurasian" future, or should it belong to the "new" West, that is, the new post-liberal renaissance led by Trump's MAGA movement? Will it seek to maintain maximum flexibility by avoiding the need to commit to a single path? Or will the party collapse under its own divisions? Absent collapse, both paths would signify a significant departure from Germany's post-Cold War foreign policy tradition.

4.1 Main differences compared to current policy

4.1.1 A departure from Western institutions

Germany's post-Cold War foreign policy tradition has been anchored in the West, namely in Western institutions and the transatlantic relationship. The core principle of multilateralism, that is, membership in NATO, the United Nations, and later the European Union, is a fundamental pillar of Germany's foreign policy posture. While traditional German political parties differ regarding specific policy preferences, they all agree that these memberships are beneficial for Germany, and also central to the country's role in the world and core to its identity. The AfD wants to reform these institutions from within, and should this not succeed, it strives for Germany's departure.

There may be some prospects for the AfD to become less critical of NATO, however. Parts of Trump's current policy towards Europe and NATO, as presented in the 2025 US National Security Strategy (NSS), could ironically have a positive impact on the AfD's stance on Germany's future within NATO. In the NSS, the US deviates from NATO's open-door policy, stating that the Alliance should end its eastern enlargement and hence remove Ukraine's prospects for future membership.⁸³ The AfD shares this position, which opens the question of whether the party would no longer consider NATO an "offensive" alliance, should it pivot from its current policy. In such a case, the party could become less critical

⁸³ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025.

of NATO at large, which subsequently could prevent the party from demanding a German exit. However, this would probably also be conditional upon the suspension of all military support for Ukraine. In addition, the party could become increasingly suspicious of whether the Trump administration actually follow its strategy documents, especially given the war with Iran. This could speak against such a development.

4.1.2 Abandoning Ukraine, rejecting enlargement

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Germany has bilaterally provided civilian and military aid to Ukraine. In the military sphere, Germany is Ukraine's largest supporter. At the end of 2025, it made available or earmarked further support for the coming years. In addition, Germany provides approximately 25 per cent of the EU's support measures for the Ukrainian armed forces as part of the European Peace Facility (EPF). On the political level, the current German government supports Ukraine's process of accession to the EU and its future NATO membership. It has also stated its intention to assume continuous responsibility for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire and peace agreement, including with security guarantees and as part of the Coalition of the Willing.⁸⁴

The AfD claims that it is not in Germany's national interest to support Ukraine, and advocates an end to all political, economic, and military support. Importantly, the party places limited demands on Russia in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian negotiations. The AfD leadership even blames the current German government for hampering Trump's peace efforts by making demands on the part of the Ukrainian side. It has likewise blamed Ukraine for obstructing the negotiations. It repeatedly calls Ukraine corrupt and unwilling to compromise.

4.1.3 Reforming trade and energy policy

Besides the completely different view of Western institutions and Germany's role within them, there is a considerable difference between the AfD and the centrist parties' current view of international trade policy, and in particular trade with Russia and other authoritarian states. Although German trade policy was more characterised by economic interests prior to Russia's 2022 invasion, all centrist parties are now in agreement on the departure from this policy. Trade with Russia has halted, and the government strives to find alternative energy sources from reliable partners.

⁸⁴ Auswärtiges Amt, 'Germany stands firmly by the side of the people in Ukraine', 17 March 2026, Retrieved from [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/ukraine-node/ukraine-solidarity-2513994#:~:text=In%20the%20EU%20,%20agreement%20was,been%20paid%20by%20the%20country\(10.05.2026\)](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/ukraine-node/ukraine-solidarity-2513994#:~:text=In%20the%20EU%20,%20agreement%20was,been%20paid%20by%20the%20country(10.05.2026))

The AfD, regardless of which ideological or geographical faction is implied, disagrees with this 2022 departure in energy and trade policy and instead supports an interest-based trade policy that does not consider vulnerabilities. Resuming trade with Russia, opening up the Nord Stream pipeline, reforming Germany's representation within global trade fora such as the WTO, and deepening cooperation with the BRICS states are some of the suggested policy measures.

4.2 Preconditions for influence and change

The AfD's foreign policy preferences diverge remarkably from those of the centrist parties in the German party landscape. This is particularly true for the areas presented above. It is nevertheless not a given whether and how the AfD would be able to actually influence Germany's foreign policy, and, in turn, security and defence policy, in a situation of increased power and influence. Should the AfD be given a role in a future German government, there are several contextual factors that will influence whether and how the party would actually have an impact on foreign policy within that government.

In addition, it is important to mention that there may be a number of mediating factors and bureaucratic obstacles that affect whether attempted policy change is actually implemented. For instance, there is a wide array of bureaucratic tactics that can be used to hamper, stall, or reverse attempts to change foreign policy.⁸⁵

To round off this initial and non-exhaustive discussion of the AfD's potential influence on foreign policy in a German government, this section of the report turns to previous research on coalition dynamics and populist foreign policy. Most studies on the topic of populist foreign policy pertain to single-party governments, but initial research has been conducted on how and whether a populist party, in the role of coalition partner, could influence foreign policy.⁸⁶ Here, coalition negotiations, formation, and constellations, as well as characteristics of populist governance, may matter.

4.2.1 Coalition dynamics

The nature of any potential coalition including the AfD would be central. For instance, in a minimal winning coalition,⁸⁷ each party's bargaining power tends to increase, especially if the policy gap between coalition partners is significant in

⁸⁵ Corsini, Hanna and Edoardo Ongaro, "Bureaucratic Responses to Populist Government: Explaining Foreign Policy (Non-)Change," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* (2025), p. 18.

⁸⁶ For a thorough discussion on populism and coalitions, see Corsini, Hanna, "Populism, Coalition Dynamics, and Foreign Policy." In Cadier, David, Chrysogelos, Angelos and Sandra Destradi (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Populism and Foreign Policy*, Routledge, 2025, pp. 216-232.

⁸⁷ A minimal winning coalition contains a group of parties that hold the smallest possible number of seats or votes needed to form a majority. The key characteristic is that removing one member from the coalition would reduce its power below the threshold required to form a majority.

foreign and security policy. The greater the ideological distance, the greater the scope for a party to exert disproportionate influence through vetoes or bargaining.

In addition, the coalition's specific composition matters, not least through portfolio allocation. If the AfD were to act as a junior partner in a coalition, it would likely seek to secure its influence over foreign policy both during the coalition formation negotiations and throughout the subsequent term in office.⁸⁸ If the party ultimately were assigned strategically important ministries responsible for implementing (parts of) the government's foreign policy, such as defence, foreign affairs, development, or trade portfolios, its capacity to directly influence policy outcomes and control the agenda would increase.

In the case of Germany, the possibility of a junior partner influencing specific areas of foreign policy by holding particular ministries would also be influenced by the country's governance model known as "ministerial government," meaning that the government consists of decentralised administrative structures in which individual ministries have autonomy. In this type of system, a party must hold senior authoritative positions in the foreign policy executive to shape policy. Junior partner influence comes from controlling one or several ministries responsible for foreign policy, most notably the ministries of foreign affairs or defence. However, for issues of high salience for the senior coalition partner, the latter will likely seek to constrain the junior partner's room for manoeuvre by asserting its overall lead role in the coalition.⁸⁹

4.2.2 Features of populist governance

In addition to the prerequisites of a potential coalition including the AfD, it is necessary to turn to research on how populist parties typically make foreign policy decisions. Research on populism and foreign policy has identified two main mechanisms that are characteristic of this decision-making: personalisation and mobilisation.⁹⁰

One of the most commonly observed features across cases and regions is the tendency to politicise foreign policy for the purpose of mobilisation.⁹¹ Populists in government tend to treat governance as a constant campaign in order to

⁸⁸ Oppermann, Kai, and Klaus Brummer. "Patterns of junior partner influence on the foreign policy of coalition governments." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16, no. 4 (2014): 555-571, p. 557f.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 558.

⁹⁰ Jenne, Erin K. "Populism, nationalism and revisionist foreign policy." *International affairs* 97, no. 2 (2021): 323-343; Plagemann, Johannes, and Sandra Destradi. "Populism and foreign policy: The case of India." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 2 (2019): 283-301.

⁹¹ See, for instance, Pappas, Takis S. *Populism and liberal democracy: A comparative and theoretical analysis*. Oxford University Press, 2019; Destradi, Sandra, and Johannes Plagemann. "Populism and International Relations: (Un) predictability, personalisation, and the reinforcement of existing trends in world politics." *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): 711-730.

achieve permanent mobilisation and avoid being considered part of the establishment. The “logic of differentiation” drives populists to shape their foreign policy preferences and decisions in contrast to those of their predecessors in office.⁹²

Previous case studies hint that populists are less interested in changing foreign policy substantively, but instead want to use it opportunistically for their domestic political benefit, for example, for the purpose of political marketing and domestic mobilisation.⁹³ As for the AfD, its main focus is on internal affairs, most notably on the economy and energy, as well as migration and asylum policy. This implies that the party could be less interested in actually changing German foreign policy substantively. That said, the party leadership could become vocal on these issues for the benefit of domestic mobilisation, which in turn could influence German public opinion.

The second main feature of populist governance is the tendency to concentrate power and authority in the populist leader’s hand, namely the personalisation of foreign policy.⁹⁴ This tends to lead to more personalised decision-making, in which expertise is neglected, and the leader chooses their own advisors. In general, populist leaders who personalise power will tend to crowd out both the more moderate figures and expert advisors.⁹⁵ The same can be expected to apply to foreign policy advisers, which, by extension, may lead to weakened foreign policy bureaucracies that are instead filled with political loyalists.⁹⁶ This highly personalised decision-making can possibly lead to more extreme decisions, or unilateral decisions without institutional consultation or mediation. In the case of the AfD, it appears likely that a minister from the AfD would adopt more extreme decisions, if it would choose its advisers from the more radical faction depicted in this study.

⁹² Cadier, David. "Foreign policy as the continuation of domestic politics by other means: Pathways and patterns of populist politicization." *Foreign policy analysis* 20, no. 1 (2024).

⁹³ Pugliese, Giulio, Ghirelli, Francesca and Aurelio Insisa, “Italy's Embrace of the Belt and Road Initiative: Populist Foreign Policy and Political Marketing”, *International Affairs* 98, No 3 (2022): 1033–1051.

⁹⁴ Urbinati, Nadia, “Political Theory of Populism”. *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, No 1 (2019): 111–127.

⁹⁵ Destradi and Plagemann, 2019.

⁹⁶ Cadier, David, “The Politico-Strategic Approach to Populism and the Study of Foreign Policy”. In Cadier et al., (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Populism and Foreign Policy* (pp. 34-49), Routledge, 2025, p. 40f.

5 Conclusion

The AfD's foreign policy preferences are a work in progress; the party has not yet defined its foreign policy on several fronts, mainly due to internal differences in preferences. The disagreements are visible in the party's public communication, increasingly in response to Trump's foreign policy. There are contentious issues between those referred to in this report as "tacticians" and "ideologues" on almost all issues covered here, be it Russia, the US, or European defence cooperation. Tacticians attempt to tone down statements by Russia-friendly figures, while nevertheless promoting the resumption of energy trade and an end to German military support for Ukraine. Tacticians also try to promote the ideological affinity with the Trump administration while the traditional anti-Americans criticise Trump's increasingly interventionist foreign policy.

The more ideological camp within the party, those who are more inclined to be anti-Americans and Russophiles, is increasingly clashing with the tactician camp trying to establish the party as a viable alternative to the centrist parties, notably by appealing to western German voters. Should the former have an impact, the very foundations of traditional German foreign policy would be challenged to the core. Should the latter have an impact, the party could become more inclined to make concessions, or at least approach some of traditional foreign policy, at least with regard to Germany's institutional affiliation (NATO and the EU).

There is one issue, however, where these camps do not clash and that concerns the view of Germany's role in the world. There is agreement that Germany should embrace multipolarity and establish itself as an autonomous and sovereign middle power that prioritises national interests over common Western values. In a role of increased power and influence, the AfD could try to more actively strive towards a strengthened role for Germany and, by extension, Europe in the evolving multilateral world order. This would nevertheless not be in the same ways that Germany has traditionally acted on the international scene, that is, through multilateral fora and through the promotion of international rules and multilateralism. Instead, the AfD would probably seek to alter rules and fora, while cooperating with both foes and friends. It would likely seek closer cooperation with BRICS states and a reform of both the UN and the WTO. Taken together, this could dramatically change Germany's patterns of cooperation and its stances towards shared Western values.

Given that the party agrees that German national interests should be prioritised, regardless of the above-mentioned differences, Germany could also turn more inward-looking. Under the auspices of the AfD, the German voice within European institutions could fall silent, and Germany could start going it alone. National interests could be prioritised ahead of alliance considerations. Another possibility is that Germany promotes its national interests more aggressively

within European institutions and acts as a spoiler therein. Hence, even if the AfD accepts Germany's institutional affiliations, the party could seek to alter or shift the German position within them. This would hamper possibilities of formulating a common European position and, in turn, European cohesion.

Under the direction of the ideologists, a reformation of the very core of German foreign policy is more likely. Returning to cooperation with Russia, rejecting the US and the West, and leaving institutions would be natural givens. Under the direction of the tacticians, by contrast, an incremental adaptation of the German position towards a "Germany first" approach is more likely. In this scenario, keeping Germany's institutional affiliations while cooperating with like-minded (anti-liberal) actors in order to change, or spoil, policy from within institutions would probably be an integral characteristic. Consequently, in a governing position, an AfD under the auspices of tacticians could become a party of adaptive spoilers. An AfD managed by ideologists, on the other hand, would instead become a party of reformists, transforming German foreign policy.

Whether the AfD will actually have the possibility to change either the style or content of German foreign policy in coming years, in one of the above-mentioned ways, is conditioned by several factors, however. These notably pertain to the party's role within a potential coalition and the coalition's nature and portfolio allocation. The party's size within the coalition, that is, whether the AfD would be either the largest party or a large junior partner, would also matter, as this would influence portfolio allocation, negotiation fallout, and later opportunities to exercise veto power. Lastly, one can speculate whether the AfD would be more interested in using foreign policy for the purpose of political marketing and domestic mobilisation rather than in striving for change. Should the party strive for change, the competing visions and internal fragmentations, as depicted in this report, if not resolved, could make it difficult for the party to turn its preferences into actionable policy and limit the extent to which it can change Germany's foreign relations in a fundamental way.

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The party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has evolved from a marginal protest party into a dominant force in German politics. This report analyses the party's foreign policy preferences, which differ sharply from current German policy. EU and NATO membership and the transatlantic link are not taken for granted, while closer ties with Russia are sought.

The party is internally divided between two main factions. One faction, primarily consisting of representatives from eastern federal states, advocates a radical reorientation toward Moscow and distancing from the West, while a second faction, primarily comprising representatives from western federal states, pursues a more tactical approach and strives towards a "Germany-first" strategy. Despite differences, both factions share sovereignty-centered views and support ending aid to Ukraine, lifting sanctions against Russia and resuming energy trade with Russia.

The AfD's prospects for exerting greater influence over, or radically reshaping, German foreign policy in the future will depend on several factors, including the dynamics of a potential future governing coalition and, not least, the party's ability to manage internal divisions and establish a unified and coordinated foreign policy line.