

“Alternative für Deutschland”

The Belated Arrival of Right-wing Populism in the Federal Republic

by *Frank Decker*

1. *Introduction*

For most of its history, the Federal Republic of Germany has proven to be a blank space on the map of European right-wing populism. While some right-wing populist and extremist parties have occasionally been successful at the ballot box since the mid-1980s in Germany as well, those triumphs were primarily limited to the regional realm of state elections without leading to the permanent establishment of a right-wing populist party at the national level¹. The rise of the euro(pe)skeptic Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) has changed this. Having come up just short of crossing the five percent threshold in the 2013 federal elections, the newcomers achieved their first remarkable electoral success in the European elections in May of 2014, winning 7.1% of the vote a little over a year after the party's founding. Even better electoral showings were obtained by the AfD in subsequent regional elections in the eastern German states of Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia in late summer. Support was more limited in state elections in Hamburg (6.1%) and Bremen (5.5%), which nonetheless allowed the party to enter its first state parliaments in the western part of the country as well.

While the arrival of this new kind of right-wing populism within the German party system represents an adjustment that places it more in line with its (western) European neighbors and their respective established right-wing populist parties, the question remains why this phenomenon had failed to materialize and establish organizational structures in

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¹ F. DECKER, *Warum der parteiförmige Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland so erfolglos ist*.