Gregor Zons, Anna Halstenbach
Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf

THE AFD AS A ‚LEADERLESS' RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTY. HOW THE LEADERSHIP-STRUCTURE DILEMMA LEFT AN IMPRINT ON THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP

Author
Gregor Zons, senior researcher at the Düsseldorf Party Research Institute (PRuF), Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany, and principal investigator of the project 'Who do parties select as their electoral leaders and why?', funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). Research interests: new political parties, party competition, party organization, and party leadership.

ORCID no. 0000–0002–1013–6492
e-mail: gregor.zons@hhu.de

Anna Halstenbach, research assistant at the Düsseldorf Party Research Institute (PRuF), Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany. Research interests: party organization, party competition, and public opinion.

Abstract
Despite its right-wing populist character, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) shows no signs of a strong party leadership. We ascribe this state of the party leadership to the AfD's institutionalization as a new party and show how organizational features interact with the skill set and goals of the party leaders. At the party level, we, firstly, outline the organizational change at the top of the party and the party leader selection rules. Secondly, we depict leadership turnover and competitiveness. At the leader level, we investigate the failure of Bernd Lucke, the key founder and one of the initial party leaders, as a manifestation of the leadership-structure dilemma of new parties. Embedded in a leadership team and faced with a growing extra-parliamentary party structure, Lucke tried to secure his initial autonomy and position of power by an attempt to become the sole party leader. His subsequent exit from the AfD laid bare the fact that he was not able to manage the challenges of the organizational consolidation phase, in which a new party needs a coordinator and consensus-builder. The AfD itself has proven its organizational autonomy from its initial leaders and its distaste for a strong and centralized party leadership. The barriers for the latter remain in place while, at the same time, the party institutionalization is still on-going, especially regarding its place in the German party competition.

Keywords: right-wing populism; new parties; party leaders; party institutionalization; leadership-structure dilemma

Introduction

Until recently, the German party system was exceptional inasmuch as it did not include any right-wing populist party. The *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) has filled that gap. In this way, Germany has now caught up with other European party systems. Against this, the AfD itself represents an unusual case in the group of modern right-wing populist parties since it does not contain any type of a formal or informal strong party leadership. Thus, we approach the research question of what factors contribute to the 'leaderlessness' of a right-wing populist party. By using the term leaderlessness, we do not deny the presence of any party hierarchy or personalities in leading positions, but what is absent from the AfD is a concentrated leadership vested in a single undisputed individual. Although the AfD has undergone ample organizational (exemplified by its three party statutes) and ideological changes, it has resisted any changes towards a stronger and more centralized party leadership. Most visibly, the AfD's organizational structure at the top is divided as the party has a team of two (previously three) party leaders. As regard to the party in parliament, the AfD also features a dual leadership. Other than in the recent case of Alexander Gauland, the AfD has not combined parliamentary leadership with the leadership of the overall party. Apart from these formal organizational aspects, there has also been a notable degree of leadership turnover. So far, the right-wing populist character of the AfD has not shaped its organization, in the form of the establishment of a strong leadership figure. To explain this unusual combination, we present a case study at the party level and the leader level, which attributes the state of the AfD's party leadership to the organizational genesis of the party and the failure of its key founder, Bernd Lucke, to manage the party organization of a new party in the middle of its institutionalization.

Through our case study, we connect the debates on party leaders around new parties and right-wing populist parties. Leaders and founders of new parties take a crucial role in the institutionalization process of their parties. While enjoying a high degree of autonomy at the beginning of their parties, they then face growing needs for institutionalizing. However, the institutionalization then threatens the leaders' autonomy, causing a leadership-structure dilemma (Bolleyer, 2013, pp. 51–52). Different paths of institutionalization lead to a varying dependence on single leaders. A firm reliance on a single leader may hinder the development of organizational autonomy from the leader (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 153) and pose a threat to the party when the party reaches its electoral breakthrough (Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2017) or faces a leadership vacuum (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 59). Apart from the organizational role of leaders in new parties, there is another, more general debate about the relationship between populism, party organization, and political leaders (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016b; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2014; Taggart, 2000, pp. 99–103; 2017). The question here is whether populist parties are linked to a particular organizational mode, characterized by strong and charismatic party leaders. Based on an ideological understanding of populism, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2014) argue that there is no inevitability to there being such a link, pointing to leaderless populist movements. Relating to the elite-vs-people antagonism, political parties represent a central object of criticism for populists (Taggart, 2000, p. 99). Yet, if they want to engage in the political process, populists cannot escape the 'institutional logic of representative politics': they 'are forced to become that which they dislike' (Taggart, 2000, p. 100), a political party. Thus, relying on a centralized and charismatic leadership instead of a fully institutionalized extra-parliamentary structure

represents a way out of this institutional dilemma (Taggart, 2000, pp. 100–103; 2017, pp. 163–164). In this context, right-wing populist parties, which inherently hold authoritarian views (Mudde, 2007, pp. 22–23; 2014, p. 218), may especially also carry over such views to their organizational configuration and, therefore, rely on strong party leaders.

Although Bernd Lucke is no longer a member of the AfD and the party's ideological profile has since changed significantly, the party's resistance to Lucke's attempt to centralize the party leadership remains characteristic of the current condition of the AfD's leadership; still distributed over several positions and personalities. Hence, Lucke's term and exit from the party represent a milestone for the evolution of the party organization because, since then, nobody has tried to reform the party to centralize power on a single party leader in a formal way. This fact does not mean that there are no individuals after Lucke with leadership claims, like for example, Björn Höcke, the party chair in Thuringia; but they operate more informally and refrain from any party reform attempting to centralise power.

In the remainder of this article, we will give a short overview of the emergence and the ideological character of the AfD. Based on its three statutes so far, we will then investigate the AfD's organizational changes since its foundation, with a focus on the party leadership and its selection. Next, we will explore leadership turnover and competitiveness in the AfD. Afterwards, we offer a qualitative analysis of the fate of Bernd Lucke at the top of the party, drawing on an extensive study of newspaper articles. In this way, we combine an account of a party's organizational origin and change with the perspective on the individual goals and capabilities of its initial party leaders. Finally, we will offer a conclusion and prognosis for the possible future developments of the AfD and its leadership.

The emergence of the AfD

The official foundation of the AfD took place on the 6th of February 2013. A little later, on the 11th of March, the new party held its first conference and selected three party speakers as its leadership team: Konrad Adam, Bernd Lucke, and Frauke Petry. The AfD represents the most successful new party foundation in Germany since the Greens. After narrowly failing to enter parliament at the 2013 general election due to the five percent threshold, the AfD cleared this hurdle at the next election in 2017 by gaining a vote share of 12.7 percent, making it the third-largest party. After the formation of the coalition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD), the AfD represents the largest opposition party. At the subnational level, the AfD now sits in all 16 *Länder* parliaments. Even though the party has so far been out of government at both the national and subnational level, it is established in the electoral arena and the public discourse.

The AfD emerged out of a network of political like-minded key actors, who themselves were politically active, and previous members of political groups or thinktanks (Bebnowski, 2015, p. 20; Decker, 2016, p. 14). The leading figures were either economics professors, with Lucke leading the way, or shared conservative views on society and family, like, for example, Petry (Bebnowski, 2015, p. 8) or Beatrix von Storch (Bebnowski, 2015, pp. 25–27). Although some of the key players, like Lucke or Alexander Gauland, were previously members of the *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU), the AfD represents a genuinely new party rather than a split. The former members were not high-ranking officeholders.

The belonging to and engagement in Euro-critical and conservative circles were more formative than the membership in other parties. The *Bündnis Bürgerwille* (Alliance Will of the People), founded in 2013, served as a collective movement for opponents of the EURO rescue politics, with Lucke among them (Niedermayer, 2015, pp. 179–180). To enter the electoral arena, key actors set up an association called *Wahlalternative 2013* (Election Alternative 2013). Its primary purpose was to create a collaboration with the *FREIE WÄHLER*[1] (Free Voters) for the 2013 election in Lower Saxony. However, this partnership failed due to organizational differences and policy disputes concerning the EURO (Häusler, 2013, p. 38; Lachmann, 2013; Niedermayer, 2015, p. 181).

Regarding the organizational origin of new parties, Bolleyer (2013, p. 40) distinguishes entrepreneurial from rooted new parties. While entrepreneurs are party founders without any ties to organized interests or movements (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993, p. 67), rooted new parties feature connections to already existing organizations providing resources to the new party (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 40). According to this distinction, the AfD falls into the category of rooted formations as it was borne by a long-time established network of key individuals with links to various intellectual and political organized groups (Bebnowski, 2015, pp. 19–31). As these individuals had strategically pursued political goals over a long time before, and searched for entry points into the political arena, the formation of the AfD followed a top-down fashion (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 65).

Ideological profile

The failed collaboration with the *FREIE WÄHLER* in part touches on the ideological and programmatic roots of the AfD. In the beginning, the AfD heavily concentrated on the EURO and its crisis. This focus corresponds with the prominent role of economists in the new party, such as Lucke, who served as one of the first party leaders and represented the public face of the party. The party took Euro-sceptical positions, especially towards the countries in crisis and the related policies. Among other things, the AfD demanded the elimination of the EURO (AfD, 2013b, p. 1). These positions stood in contrast to the other German parliamentary parties at the time, which the AfD regarded as justification for the word 'Alternative' in its name. In the ideological spectrum, the AfD locates on the right side (Arzheimer, 2015, p. 544; Franzmann, 2014, pp. 119–120). Franzmann (2014, p. 115; 2016a, p. 461) argues that the EURO crisis served as a window of opportunity for the foundation of the AfD but that the deeper cause was the long-term dissatisfaction with the CDU, due to its neglect of conservatism under Merkel. Thus, the AfD pushed into an ideological vacuum on the right resulting from trends in the German party system beyond the EURO crisis (Franzmann, 2016a, p. 473). This assessment matches the fact that several key figures in the party's foundation have been politically active before the AfD and beyond the EURO issue (Bebnowski, 2015).

While the AfD stayed on the right side of the ideological spectrum, its issue profile and strategy changed with the refugee crisis in 2015. Since then, Euro politics has faded into the background, while, at the same time, the party has shifted its attention to the immigration issue, strongly opposing the decisions and policies of Chancellor Merkel regarding the intake of refugees and immigrants. Although we will argue that the departure of

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[1]   The FREIE WÄHLER originated from local lists at the local level but then also formally registered as a party at the subnational and national level.

Lucke from the party leadership in 2015 cannot be fully understood without considering his failure to reform and manage the party organization, nevertheless his exit from the top of the party also corresponds with this shift in focus. Lucke, as an economics professor, symbolized the programmatic starting point of the party. The party leadership after him, fully embraced the focus on immigration and more nationalistic ideas.

Since the AfD's emergence, the literature has investigated and discussed its right-wing populist character (Arzheimer, 2015; Bebnowski, 2015; Berbuir, Lewandowsky, & Siri, 2014; Franzmann, 2014, 2016a; Lewandowsky, 2015; Lewandowsky, Giebler, & Wagner, 2016). An elaborate discussion of populism and its conceptualizations is beyond the scope of this paper. We rely on Mudde's definition, according to which populism is a 'thin-centered ideology' (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). This conceptualization is useful in the context of this paper, as it refers solely to the ideological dimension and is independent of the party organization and its leadership. At the core of this definition lies the antagonism between 'the people' and the elite, as well as the notion of a general will of the people (Mudde, 2004, pp. 544–545). Right-wing populism further includes the elements of nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2007, pp. 22–24; 2014, p. 218). While nativism regards the nation-state as an entity for a native group, dissociating itself from outsiders who are seen as a threat to the essence of the natives (Mudde, 2007, p. 19), authoritarianism refers to 'the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Mudde, 2007, p. 23).

Initially, different sources gave varying indications of the AfD's right-wing populist character. From the beginning, the AfD seized on the elite-vs-people antagonism in various forms and degrees. The idea of an elite is touched on when the AfD attacks the existing parties and portrays them as a uniform cartel-like block, showing no real policy differences, especially in EU related policies (Berbuir et al., 2014, pp. 163,165), which calls for an 'alternative' party. Early speeches by Lucke illustrate this picture of the existing parties (Berbuir et al., 2014, pp. 163–164). The AfD speaks of existing parties as 'Altparteien' (old parties) (FAZ, 2014) and does not regard itself as another party but as a new party coming to the defense of the German people. In its first manifesto for the 2013 federal election, the AfD, for example, justified its call for a more direct democracy by arguing that 'the people should define the will of the parties and not the other way around' (AfD, 2013b, p. 2, translation by the authors). The critique of Euro politics and its form are not enough for classifying the AfD as a right-wing populist party (Franzmann, 2014, p. 122). In this regard, the AfD primarily presents itself as a soft Eurosceptic party (Arzheimer, 2015, pp. 545–546). However, the economists in the party especially used a populist style to address their core issues (Franzmann, 2016a, p. 473). The emphasis of the economics background underlined the picture of the AfD as a group of outsiders to the elite of existing parties (Bebnowski, 2015, pp. 21–22,34; Berbuir et al., 2014, p. 155). Central figures of the AfD justified their positions by their expertise, highlighting the difference from usual politics. Beyond the elite-vs-people antagonism, the AfD distanced itself from certain lifestyles and emphasized a distinct picture of the German family (Berbuir et al., 2014, pp. 166–167), which resembles nativism as an insider-outsider logic (Lewandowsky et al., 2016, pp. 251–252). Based on the GLES candidate survey 2013 (Rattinger, Roßteutscher, Schmitt-Beck, Weßels, & Wolf, 2014), Lewandowsky et al. (2016, pp. 258–262) showed that AfD candidates for the 2013 election had a significantly higher degree of populist and right-wing attitudes compared to the remaining parties. This finding corresponds to

immigration-sceptical attitudes of a large part of the AfD electorate (Schmitt-Beck, 2016). However, regarding authoritarianism, a similar study finds no significant differences between AfD and CDU candidates (Jankowski, Schneider, & Tepe, 2017).

In sum, the AfD has displayed right-wing populist tendencies from the start. With the onset of the refugee crisis in 2015 and the strengthening of the AfD state associations in the East, the right-wing populist character became more distinct, especially the nativist element. The most prominent proponent of this direction is Höcke, the AfD's party leader in Thuringia (also in parliament). He is the leader of the intra-party network *Der Flügel* (The Wing), promoting more nationalistic ideas within the AfD. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution classified the grouping as a suspected case of right-wing extremism (Pepping, 2019). The manifestation of the AfD's right-wing populist character leads to the question of whether this ideological profile impacts, in any way, on the party organization. Although the definition of populism, given above, is independent of organizational features, the question is whether this independence also holds for right-wing populist parties, as authoritarianism can also shape the organizational structure, favoring strong and centralized leadership (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016b). New populist parties may show these features as a way to follow a different party model compared to long-established parties (Taggart, 2017, pp. 163–164).

Organizational change and party leadership

The German party law stipulates certain organizational principles which all parties must follow (Cross & Katz, 2013, pp. 3–4; von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert, & Tipei, 2013, p. 6). Within this framework, the AfD showed significant organizational change, documented by its three different statutes since its birth in 2013. The first statute was enacted at the AfD's first party conference in April 2013 and names three organs: the party executive, the party conference, and the party tribunal (AfD, 2013a, §10). The executive has a minimal number of eight members, including a minimum of two party leaders called speakers. The party conference decides on the exact number of the speakers as well as other members in the executive (AfD, 2013a, §11(1)). At its first party conference, the AfD selected three party speakers: Bernd Lucke, Frauke Petry, and Konrad Adam. The statute defines the party's origin at the national level. Only the party executive can found party branches at the subnational level (AfD, 2013a, §9(1)), which matches the top-down formation dynamic. The party leaders and the other members of the party executive are selected by the party conference by a simple majority (AfD, 2013a, §§11(4),12(9)). The German party law (§9(4)) demands that a party conference elects the party leaders. The statute stipulates that the conference consists of members but allows a delegate conference when membership reaches 10000 (AfD, 2013a, §12(2,3)). Membership is the only formal candidacy requirement for this body (AfD, 2013a, §5(1)). The party conference can deselect the party executive and single members with a three-quarter majority (AfD, 2013a, §11(7)). Table 1 summarizes the leadership selection rules in the AfD's statutes.

The second statute can be traced back to the third party conference in January 2015 and resulted from Bernd Lucke's efforts to centralize and concentrate power in his own hands (see below). As before, article 10 lists the party conference and executive as party organs. It no longer mentions the party tribunal but adds the party convention. The latter is a representative assembly of the subnational party branches. Similar to the first statute, the

second allows the party conference, as the selectorate for the party leadership, to consist of either members or delegates. In case there is no predetermination by the party conference or the convention, the party executive decides whether delegates or members constitute the party conference (AfD, 2015c, §11(2)). In contrast to previously, the second statute determines the party executive to consist of 13 members, including two party speakers. The latter are elected in two separate ballots. There is a hierarchy between the two speakers as the first has the right to propose a party secretary (AfD, 2015c, §§11(15),§13(1)).

Table 1. Selection rules

Statute	Selectorate[1]	Term (in years)	Voting rule	Deselection
AfD 2013	Party conference (members or delegates, possible from 10000 members) (§§11(4),12(2,3))	2 (§11(4))	Simple majority (§12(9))	By the party conference with a three-fourth majority (§11(7))
AfD 2015[1]	Party conference (members or delegates) (§11(2,15))	2 (§11(15))	Simple majority (ER[2] §2(3)); When missed & only 1 candidate new election ER §6(1)), otherwise run-off between top two candidates ER §6(2)	By the party conference with a two-third majority (§11(16))
AfD 2015[2]	Party conference (members or delegates (default)) (§11(2,14))	2 (§11(14))	Simple majority (ER §2(3)) in single or group vote with possible run-off (ER §6(1–3)) or approval voting (ER §7)	By the party conference requiring a two-third majority (§11(14))

[1] De-facto selectorate: >1500 members Berlin 2013, >3000 members Essen 2015, 600 delegates Hanover 2017 (see sources for Table 2); [2]Electoral rules (ER) for intra-party elections (separate versions for 2015[1] and 2015[2]);

Apart from the second statute, the AfD also enacted electoral rules which have the same legal force as the party statute. For individual positions, the electoral rules demand a simple majority (AfD, 2015a, §2(3)). If a simple majority is not achieved and there is only one candidate, there has to be another vote. When, in a field of multiple candidates, nobody reaches a simple majority, the electoral rules prescribe a run-off between the two top candidates (AfD, 2015a, §6(1–2)). The election of the party executive and speakers by the party conference now holds for two full years (AfD, 2015c, §11(15)) and requires party membership (AfD, 2015c, §5). The quorum for the deselection of a party executive member is two thirds (AfD, 2015c, §11(16)) and, thus, lower as in the first statute. Overall, the second statute met Lucke's primary goal of centralizing the party organization as it codifies that there should be only one party leader from the 1st of December 2015 onwards (AfD, 2015c, 13(1)). However, Lucke, as the driving force of these organizational reforms, lost his leadership election at the special party conference in July 2015. Soon after this defeat, he left the party and founded his own, called *Allianz für Fortschritt und Aufbruch* (ALFA, Alliance for Progress and Renewal) (Franzmann, 2016b).

At the following party conference in November 2015, the AfD enacted its third and current statute. In comparison to the previous statute, the third adds the convention for European elections (AfD, 2015b, §10). As a default, the party conference consists of dele-

gates, unless the party conference or convention decide for a general meeting of members (AfD, 2015b, §11(2)). In contrast to the second statute, the current allows for two or three party speakers (AfD, 2015b, §13) but gives no further instructions on this aspect. This decision then is in the hands of the party conference. This reversion back to a leadership team marks the end of the attempts to centralize the party leadership, initiated by Lucke. The statute also abolishes the hierarchy in the leadership team as the statute no longer includes the position of a general secretary. In contrast to the second statute, the third does not establish any concrete voting procedure for the selection of the party speakers. The renewed election rules allow single votes, group voting, or approval voting for allocating party positions (AfD, 2015d, §§3,6,7), and still demand simple majorities (AfD, 2015d, §2(3)). As before, the term length amounts to two years, and the deselection quorum is still two thirds (AfD, 2015b, §11(14)).

Judging by its formal structure and its change, the AfD shows no indication of a strong party leadership. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that all three statutes stipulate a party leadership of at least two individuals which prevents the concentration of power on a single leader at the top. The reduction to a single party leader, codified in the second statute, was abolished before its implementation. Correspondingly, in the party's past, this multi-member leadership enabled the representation and power balance of different factions within the party. The factionalism in the AfD traces back to its ideological roots, combining economically liberal Eurosceptical with nationalistic-conservative forces (Bebnowski, 2015; Franzmann, 2016a, pp. 461–462), and in part overlaps with the division between eastern and western AfD state associations.

The AfD's selection rules for its leadership are very similar to the other German parties, in part due to the German party law. Regarding the selectorate, delegate party conferences are the norm (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014, pp. 80–81). Due to the party law, primaries can only be consultative and are more often used at the Länder level (Detterbeck, 2013). The last primary at the federal level was the case of the SPD before the 1994 election. The major parties stick to the maximum possible term length of two years, whereby the Left only allows a maximum of four terms. The AfD's voting procedure is similar, too (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014, pp. 81–83), although the party conference itself can opt for alternatives (AfD, 2015d, §3(1)). All parties require membership in order to be a candidate in leadership elections. SPD, the Left, and the Greens share with the AfD a deselection mechanism through the party conference while CDU, CSU, and the FDP (Free Democrats) do not have any such procedure (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014, p. 83). Judging by the formal structure and the selection rules, the AfD shows no signs of a strong party leadership and resembles the Greens and the Left which display similar features, e.g., a team of party leaders (Decker, 2016, p. 17).

Besides these formal aspects, leadership turnover and competitiveness inform about the actual distribution of power at the top of the party (see Table 2). So far, the AfD have had three different leadership teams. The first team consisted of Bernd Lucke, Frauke Petry, and Konrad Adam. After that, Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen led the party. Since December 2017, the leaders are Jörg Meuthen and Alexander Gauland. On the one hand, there are the failures and party exits of Bernd Lucke in 2015 and Frauke Petry in 2017; on the other hand, the reelection of Petry in 2015 and Meuthen in 2017 depict partial continuity at the party leadership.

Table 2. Leadership turnover and competitiveness

Leader	Terms	Tenure		Length (days)	Vote share	No. of candidates	Margin of victory
Bernd Lucke	1	14.04.2013	04.07.2015	811	96.4	16	
Frauke Petry	2	14.04.2013	29.09.2017	1629	80.8	16	
					59.7	5	21.6
Konrad Adam	1	14.04.2013	04.07.2015	811	79.6	16	
Jörg Meuthen	2	04.07.2015	open		62.0	5	33.0
					72.0	1	
Alexander Gauland	1	02.12.2017	open		67.8	2/2/1	

Sources:
https://jungefreiheit.de/politik/deutschland/2013/alternative-fuer-deutschland-gruendet-sich-in-berlin/
https://jungefreiheit.de/politik/deutschland/2015/afd-beginnt-entscheidungsparteitag/
https://rp-online.de/politik/afd-parteitag-2017-in-hannover-so-lief-der-afd-wahlkrimi_aid-17712325
https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/afd-parteitag-in-hannover-afd-waehlt-gauland-zum-co-parteichef-1.3775699
(All accessed on 5 April 2019)

At the first party conference in April 2013, there was a group vote with 16 candidates for three party leadership positions. In July 2015, the two separate votes for the two leadership positions had five candidates each. The last leadership election in 2017 featured only one candidate (Meuthen) for the first leadership position and two for the second. Despite this decreasing number of candidates, the AfD in this regard shows a higher degree of competitiveness compared to leadership contests in other German parties, including on average 1.31 candidates (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014, p. 84). After its first party conference, the highest vote share reached in a leadership election is 72 percent (Meuthen in 2017). The last two leadership elections were in part hard-fought and expressed strong factionalism within the party. In July 2015, Lucke lost his party leader position to Petry (38.1 vs. 59.7 percent). At the party conference in Hanover in 2017, neither Georg Pazderski nor Doris von Sayn-Wittgenstein could achieve an absolute majority (deviating from the simple majority demanded by the electoral rules) in two consecutive rounds of voting. Their vote shares were between 47 and 49 percent. To resolve this deadlock, they withdraw from the race, and Alexander Gauland was elected as the second party leader next to Meuthen. He had not run in the first two ballots (Mayntz & Rathcke, 2017). This meant an unplanned accumulation of leadership positions for Gauland, as he and Alice Weidel were previously chosen as the leaders of the parliamentary group in the Bundestag. Leadership turnover and competitiveness in the AfD demonstrate that the party has not yet had a strong leader who enjoyed unified support over a longer period. Gauland is the only prominent figure of the foundation phase who is still relevant for the party leadership. However, he represents more of a moderator within the party and between its factions than a top-down leader setting the course for the whole party. Gauland's role is supported by the fact that he was the

only figure capable of resolving the stand-off in the selection of the second party speaker in Hanover 2017.

Taken together, the formal structure, leadership turnover, and leadership competitiveness all point against a strong party leadership. Thus far, the AfD has not had a strong and charismatic leadership figure. Instead, the party has rather tolerated than embraced its leaders. Although the party was founded in a top-down fashion, the party's institutionalization went in a direction resisting efforts of greater centralization and control by the party leadership. This state of the party and its leadership results from its organizational genesis, its factionalism fueled by different ideological strands inherent in the party from its beginning in combination with the federal party structure, and the capabilities of its leaders (see below) so far.

A decentralized leadership in combination with distinct factionalism put the AfD under pressure and compromised party unity, ultimately endangering the party's very existence. After his departure, Lucke quickly founded his own new party ALFA. Petry also created her own new party after her exit from the AfD, named the *Blue Party* (Steffen, 2017). The low profiles and prospects of these parties do not mean that the AfD might not get hurt by future power struggles and splits. However, at the same time, the AfD's institutionalization has led the party to be non-dependent on any single charismatic and powerful leader. The party possesses a fully-developed extra-parliamentary party organization, both at the national and subnational level. This configuration mimics the model predestined by the established parties and the guidelines set by German party law. The AfD's extra-parliamentary structure confirms insights on other right-wing populist parties in that they 'they conform to some extent to conventional forms of party organization' (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016a, p. 238), despite the party's present anti-party sentiment (Franzmann, 2016a, pp. 469–470; Taggart, 2017, p. 162). Against this, the AfD differs from other right-wing parties in its distaste for a strong 'centralization of power in the party leadership' (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016a, p. 239).

Bernd Lucke and the leadership-structure dilemma

Lucke's failed attempt to reform the party organization and make himself the only party leader illustrates the challenges for a founder and leader of a new party. Although Lucke was only one of three equally entitled party speakers, he was the public face of the party and the one who strived for a party reform to his advantage. The leadership-structure dilemma exists especially for party founders who assume the party leadership from the beginning (Bolleyer, 2013, pp. 62–63). In the founding process, they enjoy high autonomy and discretionary leeway. Party institutionalization and organizational growth then constrain the leader's position of power. The way the dilemma unfolds depends on the party's genesis but also on party agency (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 63). The genesis of the party refers to the distinction between rooted and entrepreneurial parties as well as the formation dynamic (top-down vs. bottom-up). Party agency relates to the key actors' goals and their room for manoeuvre, in part influenced by their capabilities.

As mentioned before, the AfD was not the creation of a single entrepreneur but emerged out of a network of long-time politically active figures who had roots in various political groupings and thinktanks. At the same time, this elite advanced the foundation of the AfD in a top-down manner. Despite this central steering of the foundation process, power

was never concentrated on any single person. The fact that the party started with a leadership team of three demonstrates its initial distaste for too much power concentration at the top. The wording of the statutes adds to this notion as it speaks of party speakers, not leaders. Despite the equal status of the three party speakers, Lucke became the public face of the party (Pichler, 2014; Spiegel Online, 2014). He was most visible in the AfD's press releases (Franzmann, 2014, p. 121) and very often represented the party in political TV talk shows (Berbuir et al., 2014, p. 155).

Regarding the party's institutionalization, there is no evidence that Lucke or anyone else in the party leadership opposed the building of an extra-parliamentary party structure. On the contrary, the AfD quickly developed its extra-parliamentary organization, also at the subnational level (Niedermayer, 2015, pp. 183–184). The AfD's membership numbers also rose quickly, to 17,687 at the end of 2013, up to 20,728 in 2014 (Niedermayer, 2018, p. 351). The building of extra-parliamentary structures is necessary to fulfill legal requirements for participating in elections (Niedermayer, 2015, pp. 184–185). Moreover, the significant 5-percent threshold for entering parliament makes it a high-risk strategy for new parties to solely rely on a party apparatus around the party in public office.[2] Given the necessity of the extra-parliamentary structure, Lucke showed an early interest in advancing his formal position as the leadership-structure dilemma involves strong time pressure from the perspective of the leader. The more the (extra-parliamentary) institutionalization progresses, the more likely the leader loses autonomy and the opportunity to secure her position of power.

At the party conference in Erfurt in March 2014, Lucke tried to escape the leadership-structure dilemma by securing his autonomy by making himself the single party leader through a new statute. In addition, Lucke also wanted to establish the possibility to deselect other members of the party executive by a simple majority in the executive itself (Amann, 2014b). However, he met with strong resistance in the party conference as it voted to postpone this decision by an 80 percent majority (Bernhard, 2014). Opponents of Lucke's proposals regarded them as an attack on intra-party democracy (Amann, 2014a) and called them *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (enabling law) (Amann, 2014b; Bernhard, 2014), referring to the transfer of legislative powers to the executive and the case of Hitler's empowerment in 1933. It is important to note that this was a point in time where the ideological conflict within the AfD was long before its peak in 2015. Correspondingly, Lucke's programmatic speech met great approval by the same party conference (Schneider, 2014).

After the postponement of the statute reform, Lucke came into conflict with the statutes commission, including him and Petry as members, when he pressed for his reform ideas, even creating rumors about a potential resignation (Bender, 2014; FAZ, 2014). Petry, feeling reinvigorated by her electoral success in Saxony, opposed Lucke's claim to power, as did the other party speaker, Konrad Adam (Weiland, 2015a). Gauland, as one of the leading conservatives in the party, also joined Petry in her opposition to Lucke's plan (Amann, 2015a). At this point, in the autumn of 2014, the conflict about the statute became more intermingled with disputes over the party's issue profile as electoral successes in the East more strongly rested on issues like culture, immigration and crime (Franzmann, 2016b, p. 31; Lewandowsky, 2015, p. 127; Pichler, 2014), while, for example, the AfD in Ham-

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2   The picture in 2019 looks different. The AfD has now entered all Länder parliaments and the Bundestag in the 2017 election. This parliamentary basis strengthens the party in public office, bringing with it an increase in resources.

burg preferred a more moderate and liberal course (Franzmann, 2016b, p. 32; Lachmann, 2015c). Additionally, the leading figures were split over the right approach to deal with the *PEGIDA* movement (Franzmann, 2016b, p. 31; Lachmann, 2015d; Spiegel Online, 2015b). The movement started with demonstrations in Dresden against Islam and foreigners. Several AfD politicians from the East were open to connecting to the movement while Lucke and his allies tried to keep the party at a distance (Weiland, 2014). The quarrel over *PEGIDA* was emblematic for the party's struggle about how to deal with right-wing radical ideas and circles (Amann, 2015a).

At the end of 2015, Lucke became further isolated among the AfD's leading figures in his efforts to reform the party statute. He described the working mode of the party executive as amateurish and called for a professionalization of the party organization (FAZ, 2014; Lachmann, 2015a). As the opposition to Lucke and his plans intensified at the top of the party, Lucke tried to bypass his opponents at the leadership level by directly mobilizing the party's base. He sent emails and called for a conference of local party chairs to prepare for the next party conference without any approval of his colleagues in the party executive (Amann, 2015a; Lachmann, 2015d). This solo initiative by Lucke met with strong resistance by other leading figures, leading to negotiations between both camps. The latter resulted in the compromise of the second party statute, codifying a dual party leadership as an intermediary step towards a single party leader position at the end of the year (Amann, 2015a). This compromise represented a postponement, and not a solution, to the power struggle between Lucke and Petry.

Lucke held on to his intra-party mobilization strategy which reached its climax in the foundation of the intra-party grouping, *Weckruf 2015* (Wake-Up 2015), as a movement of moderates in the party (Weiland, 2015c). The party executive reprimanded Lucke for his action (Hildebrandt, 2015). As a result, Lucke and Petry declared a future collaboration as a leadership team as impossible (Weiland, 2015b), implying a crucial vote between the two at the next party conference. While Lucke suffered a defeat as the party tribunal ruled his movement as incompatible with the party's statute (Lachmann, 2015b), he benefited from the cancellation of the delegate party conference in Kassel, scheduled for June 13, due to doubts about the rightful selection of delegates (Spiegel Online, 2015a). Lucke anticipated better chances at the then set membership party conference in Essen in July (Leber, 2015). However, in Essen, Petry defeated Lucke by achieving 59.7 percent (FAZ, 2015). Shortly after, Lucke left the AfD to start his own new party, ALFA, followed by many who had already joined his intra-party platform.

Lucke and Petry belonged to different ideological factions within the AfD, disagreeing about the party's issue profile and the positioning regarding more right-wing ideas and actors. Nevertheless, Lucke's exit from the party and its timing cannot be understood without considering his efforts to change the party organization and concentrate power in his own hands. The strong resistance at the leadership level is not surprising since his plans implied a loss of power for the other members of the leadership team who represented other ideological strands of the party. Beyond that, Lucke's failure shows two things: first, many in the party rejected a further centralization at the top and refused his grab for more (formal) power. This motive expresses value infusion (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 55; Levitsky, 1998, pp. 79–80) independent of one of the key party founders. Although the party foundation happened in a top-down fashion, the party base resisted strong steering from above. In this way, the AfD's institutionalization had decoupled itself from its key

founder. Second, Lucke's failure also points to his lack of the skills necessary to lead and consolidate the new party after its initial phase.

Even beyond the leadership-structure dilemma, setting up a new party is a demanding process for any founder. As an organization in the making, a new party runs through distinct phases, involving different challenges for party founders and, therefore, demanding separate skill sets. For new parties, going through these phases is tied to their seeking of public office. Running for office, entering parliament and government participation bring about different tasks, cause organizational growth and demand new forms of intra-party coordination. Harmel and Svåsand (1993) outline this process for entrepreneurial parties. However, their conceptual framework can be applied to new parties in general (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 52). The authors make out three phases in the institutionalization of a new party: identification, organization, and stabilization.

The main task in the identification phase is to make the party known to the public. Therefore, the founders must establish and communicate the party's central message to the outside world. The message serves as an instrument for the new party to set itself apart from the existing parties. Drawing attention to the party and its message is important, not only to attract voters but also to recruit members. Internally, the founders have to opt for an organizational model of the party (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993, p. 72). As mentioned above, the AfD and its founders committed to institutionalization in the form of a fully-fledged extra-parliamentary organization (Niedermayer, 2015, pp. 184–185). As the EURO crisis opened the window of opportunity for the creation of a Euro-skeptical party, Lucke was central to developing and communicating the message of the new party (Franzmann, 2016a, p. 461). Prior to the AfD's formation, he became involved at the top of predecessor organizations (Bebnowski, 2015, p. 22). He figured as the public face of the party, often present in political talk shows (Berbuir et al., 2014, p. 155). Notwithstanding his visibility, Lucke does not fall into the category of charismatic leaders (Decker, 2016, p. 16) but reached political notoriety (Blondel et al., 2010, p. 42; Harmel & Svåsand, 1993, p. 74). Lucke used his background as an economics professor to back and legitimize his party's policies.

In his messenger role, Lucke was undisputed in his party. His failure falls into the organizational phase. This phase begins when a party reaches significant representation in parliament. The tasks during this phase concern the routinization of the party and its cohesion. The organizational growth due to the federal structure and parliamentary representation calls for routinized coordination and delegation on the part of the founders. With additional party branches comes the danger of competing factions within the party. At this point, the founder must function as a coordinator and consensus builder (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993, pp. 73–74).

In this area, Lucke showed his flaws. It was not like he opposed routinization in principle. Instead, he sought for routines and procedures, geared to his own objectives. However, in the attempt to enforce his visions, he ignored existing routines and demands of coordination at the top of the party. Instead, he described coordination at the party leadership level as a burden, inferring a necessary professionalization (FAZ, 2014). For him, the latter was meant as a relief from the duty to coordinate. However, the aim of accumulating power at the expense of others makes demands for communication and consensus-building even more pressing, not to mention when factionalism is present. In the AfD, factionalism was inherent from its beginning, as it combines different ideological roots. When, in such

a scenario, a member of one faction aims for more power at the expense of key actors representing the remaining faction(s), factionalism is guaranteed to intensify.

Lucke was neither a moderator nor a consensus builder. Despite his ability to communicate the party's message to the outside, Lucke's skills or intention to communicate and coordinate at the leadership level were less distinct. Emails from Lucke to other officials contained confrontational and aggressive language (Bender, 2014). In November 2014, Gauland described Lucke as being a 'control freak' (Spiegel Online, 2014). Top officials criticized him for his solo efforts (Amann, 2015a). Petry warned him against a 'one-man-show', while others raised doubts about Lucke's ability for collaboration in general (Lachmann, 2015a). When Lucke was not able to convince the other members in the party executive of his plans for the new statute, he threatened to quit (Bender, 2014) and tried to directly appeal to the party base, in part behind their back (Amann, 2015a; Weiland, 2015a). Lucke's behavior matches his self-image. When a journalist asked him whether he is the AfD, his answer was:

'I basically drove the whole foundation process of the AfD forward; I oversaw the whole management. […] All predecessor organizations stem from my initiative. I believe, one can say that I am the founder of the AfD' (Amann, 2015b, translation by the authors).

At the party conference in early 2015, Lucke declared during his speech:

'I was the engine, which pushed things forward in the party executive. Like nobody else, I'm the face of the party' (Lachmann, 2015a, translation by the authors).

These quotes illustrate that Lucke was used to his autonomy and discretionary leeway during the formation process. Facing the leadership-structure dilemma in the organizational phase, he was not willing to give up his claim to determine the party's course alone. It may be that Lucke actually saw deficits in the working mode of the party organization. Nevertheless, his (solo) actions were diametrically opposed to the requirements in the organizational phase (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993, pp. 73–75). Lucke's exit corresponds to the propositions of Harmel and Svåsand. First, they expect turmoil for a party when its leader lacks the skills necessary to pass through a particular phase in the party institutionalization. Second, a leader with such deficits is likely to be replaced, except if she tolerates being complemented by other leader personalities (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993, p. 76). Yet, the unwillingness regarding the latter was one of Lucke's most significant flaws.

The AfD's leadership after Lucke

After Petry won the power struggle against Lucke, she found herself in her own power struggle, which ultimately led to her exit from the party. Although she complained about Lucke's leadership style, she was then also confronted with complaints about her solo actions. For example, Petry created her own press office and tried to isolate Höcke, the leading figure of the right in the AfD, against the will of the majority in the party executive (Kamann, 2016). Her private relationship to Marcus Pretzell, the AfD's party chair in North Rhine-Westphalia, impacted the power balance in the party, as both worked closely together in the party and built their own power centre (Amann, 2016). For this reason, her opponents, like, for example, Gauland, tried to prevent her of becoming the party's sole leader for the upcoming election of the Bundestag in September 2017 (Kamann, 2016). Moreover, Petry clashed with her co-leader Meuthen, when he tried to expel a member of his parliamentary group in Baden-Wuerttemberg due to antisemitic writings, and Petry

criticized his handling of the matter (Kamann & Leubecher, 2016). In 2017, Petry was thrown onto the defensive. First, at the party conference in April in Cologne, she failed with her motion aiming at establishing future coalition potential, despite her declaration not to run as a leading candidate for the general election. Second, Meuthen intended a crucial vote for the party leadership against Petry at the upcoming party conference in December (Boese, 2017). After gaining her direct mandate in September, she left the party (Weiland, 2017).

Petry's attempt to develop her party's coalition potential relates to the stabilization phase, in which a new party must gain credibility and dependability for other parties to accept the new party as a potential coalition party. Apart from the fact that the AfD was not close to this state at this time, Petry lacked the skills of the organizational phase, similarly to Lucke. While she did not try to change the formal structure of the party, she aimed at accumulating power informally and neither coordinated with others, nor built a consensus between different groups within the party. Since Petry's departure, Meuthen and Gauland lead the party.

The fates of Lucke and Petry does not prevent others from making leadership claims. A prominent case in this regard is Björn Höcke; but, in contrast to Lucke and Petry, he operates more informally to exert power, leading the right-wing intra-party network, *Der Flügel*, while he holds no formal position at the top of the federal party organization. Despite his informal influence, Höcke does not represent an undisputed leader at the top of the federal party. His demeanor and speech at a gathering of *Der Flügel*, called *Kffhäuser-Meeting*, in 2019 provoked an intra-party call, signed by top officials at the federal and subnational level, condemning his appearance: 'The AfD is and won't be a Björn-Höcke-party' (Spiegel Online, 2019). This quote illustrates the resistance of the party to conform to a single powerful leader which remains a constant in the AfD since its foundation and finds its expression in its formal structure at the top. Even Höcke has so far not tried to get to the top of the federal party organization, not to mention the fact that neither he, nor others, has made any attempt to reform the party statute. The decentralized leadership structure persists in serving as a significant obstacle for anyone claiming the role of a sole party leader.

Conclusion

To explain why the AfD as a right-wing populist party shows no strong party leadership, we investigated the party's institutionalization as a new political party and the associated challenges for its founders. By doing so, we followed the advice of Bolleyer (2013, p. 62): 'in order to understand the distinct trajectories of new parties, we need to assess how the consequences of institutionalization relate to the initial decision-makers' individual interests and ambitions by looking at their own characteristics as well as at the constraints they operate in.' The organizational starting point left a stronger imprint on the AfD's party leadership than does its right-wing populist character, which had not been that distinct at the beginning. The AfD exhibits a team of party leaders since its birth. Together with apparent factionalism and the federal party structure, this makes for a decentralized and weak party leadership. So far, none of its leading figures has been able to overcome these hurdles to establishing herself as an accepted sole leader. The fate of Bernd Lucke demonstrates this perfectly. As one of the key founders, he wanted to secure his autonomy and

power by trying to become the formal single party leader. While Lucke performed well as the party's messenger in the identification phase, his power-seeking revealed his flaws as an organizer in the next phase of the party institutionalization (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993). Instead of routinizing coordination and building consensus, his actions only intensified the party's factionalism. He consequently fell victim to the leadership-structure dilemma. Petry showed similar weaknesses after winning the power struggle against Lucke. Although the obstacles for the establishment of a strong leadership figure are high, the institutional configuration is not deterministic. Since the exits of Lucke and Petry, the AfD's ideological coherence increased – a process also undergone by other right-wing populist parties (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016a, p. 237). Moreover, the party has yet to reach the stabilization phase, in which it must acquire credibility and dependability vis-à-vis its competitors and voters. While this period will bring new challenges for the party and its leaders, it also represents a window of opportunity for the leaders to prove their abilities and boost their standing in the party. On the contrary, the leadership turnover in the past has shown that the AfD is able to survive its leaders. In this way, it is a right-wing populist party with organizational autonomy from its leaders.

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