



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 14, 2016

Anti-immigration AfD Party Makes Gains in German State Elections

Candidates of Germany's Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or AfD, in German) Party increased their numbers in four German state legislatures in elections held on March 13. The party is known for its opposition to immigration, and has gained support since the European refugee crisis resulted in Germany admitting more than a million refugees from the Middle East, more than twice as many as any other European Union nation. After the United States, Germany is the second-most-popular migration destination in the world.



As of March 2016, the AfD had gained representation in eight of Germany's 16 state parliaments.

Reuters reported that AfD also performed better than polls predicted in two other states, receiving nearly 15 percent of the vote in Baden-Wuerttemberg (Germany's third-most populous state) and over 12 percent in Rhineland Palatinate.

Among the states where AfD did well was Saxony-Anhalt, where the party received 24 percent of the vote to become the second-biggest party in the state parliament.

"We are seeing above all in these elections that voters are turning away in large numbers from the big established parties and voting for our party," the party's leader, Frauke Petry (shown), was quoted by the AP. Petry said the German voters looked to AfD "to be the opposition that there hasn't been in the German parliament and some state parliaments."

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The AP report noted that a top official with Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) called for it to maintain its course regarding the refugee crisis. CDU general secretary Peter Tauber pointed to recent polls indicating that Merkel's popularity is rebounding, and added, "this shows that it is good if the CDU sticks to this course, saying that we need time to master this big challenge."

While Merkel's government tightened asylum rules, she still insists on a pan-European solution to the refugee crisis, ignoring demands from some conservative allies for a national cap on the number of refugees.

When the AfD party was founded in 2013 by a group led by economics professor Bernd Lucke, its main focus was on opposition to German federal policies concerning the eurozone crisis that resulted from several eurozone member states (Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and Cyprus) being unable to repay or refinance their government debt. The party's key support came from Germans disenchanted with the economic policies of Germany's main parties, particularly Merkel's CDU. Many of those attracted to the AfD were outraged at having to bail out mainly southern European countries, which they believed should take responsibility for their own sovereign debt crises.



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The AfD became divided in 2015 between one led by Lucke and another by Petry, an entrepreneur who has been described as a “right-wing” leader. On July 19, 2015, Lucke and a group of former AfD members announced they would form a new party, the Alliance for Progress and Renewal (ALFA) Party.

Petry took over as party chief in July 2015, and the priorities of the AfD changed. Propelled by widespread concern among Germans about the large numbers of Syrian and other refugees entering Germany, Petry advocated a strong anti-immigration stance for the party. She became known for making a controversial statement on border security in January 2016 when she stated in an interview with the regional newspaper *Mannheimer Morgen* that German border police must “use firearms if necessary” to “prevent illegal border crossings.” She added that no policeman “wants to fire on a refugee and I don’t want that either,” but “police must stop refugees entering German soil.”

Among her other proposals, Petry has recommended that native Germans have larger families. Bloomberg reported in July 2014 that Petry told reporters in Berlin: “We need more children in Germany and we need politicians who have the courage to speak about an active population policy again. We want to promote the idea that it’s not the zero-child family or the one-child family, but the three-children family that should again be the standard in Germany.”

Many social observers and demographers have noted that the declining birthrate in Europe, combined with large numbers of non-European and Muslim immigrants, will eventually change the composition of Europe and produce a continent where native Europeans are no longer a majority. Petry’s proposals for larger German families were very likely motivated by such dire predictions.

An article from Bloomberg on March 13 compared the success of the AfD in Germany to the campaign successes of Donald Trump in the United States. The report observed:

Like Trump, [Petry’s] rhetoric hasn’t damaged AfD support but rather struck a chord with those disgruntled with the establishment parties, in particular nabbing voters unhappy with Chancellor Angela Merkel’s open-door policy for refugees....

The rise of the AfD in Germany mirrors growing support for populist politicians such as National Front leader Marine Le Pen in France and Trump, who has called for banning Muslims from emigrating to the U.S. Like Trump, Petry regularly gives the media that hang on her every word a tongue-lashing.

Germans are justifiably concerned about the massive number of migrants who have entered Germany over the past year. As we [noted in a recent article](#):

German officials released a document on February 26 stating that government officials do not know the whereabouts of 130,000 migrants who registered for asylum last year. These missing aliens represent about 13 percent of the refugees, mostly from the Middle East, who entered Germany in 2015.

This news is alarming because following the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, in which at least one key participant was shown to have entered Europe disguised as a refugee, it became more important than ever to know exactly where the migrants were. Even though European authorities have become more vigilant concerning the possibility of members of ISIS and other Islamic terrorist groups hiding themselves among the refugees entering Europe, “losing” 130,000 of these migrants suggests that there are vast holes in the security net. These findings should also make U.S. officials wary of allowing refugees from areas of the Middle East where terrorism is rampant to enter the United States, at least until a more reliable vetting process can be developed.



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