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Issue Brief

AfD's Strategic Worldview

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Summary

Germany's foreign-policy orientation prioritises European integration, transatlantic security, multilateralism, economic interdependence, and restraint in the use of military power. The AfD's foreign and security policy positions and broader worldview differ substantially from this established cross-party consensus.

On 6 September 2026, the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) won a remarkable 43.8 per cent of the vote in the state election in eastern Germany's Saxony-Anhalt. A fortnight later, AfD continued its electoral momentum, emerging as the largest party in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with 38.2 per cent of the vote on 20 September. The AfD's rise could be attributed to a 'Rechtsruck' in German society, i.e., a societal shift to the Right, particularly in Eastern Germany, owing to socio-economic grievances and collective identities (shaped by post-unification experiences) of disadvantage and subsequent political alienation.[1]

The domestic intelligence service, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), had designated the AfD as an 'extremist' group in May 2025, citing the party's 'ethnicity and ancestry-based conception' of the German people and noting that its xenophobic, anti-minority, Islamophobic and anti-Muslim orientation is incompatible with the free democratic order of the German state.[2] Beyond implications for domestic politics, AfD's electoral consolidation could also affect Germany's post-war strategic orientation. The brief highlights some of the AfD's key foreign and security policy positions, given Germany's centrality to the EU and European security architecture.

AfD's Political Ascendance

Emerging against the backdrop of the Eurozone debt crisis, the AfD opposed then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Euro policies, particularly her advocacy for fiscal austerity and structural reforms aimed at preserving the integrity of the Eurozone. Interestingly, her apparent insistence that the reforms were 'without alternative' (alternativlos) paved the way for the AfD, which translates as Alternative for Germany.[3] The AfD participated in its first federal elections in 2013, securing merely 4.7 per cent of the vote, thereby falling below the 5 per cent threshold required to enter the Bundestag.

In the years that followed, growing conflicts within the party, between the economically liberal leadership and more radical forces, culminated in the departure of party spokesman Bernd Lucke and other moderates in 2015. Against the backdrop of Europe's refugee crisis and Merkel's open-door refugee policy in 2015, and under the new leadership of spokespersons Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen, the AfD underwent a programmatic shift, moving well beyond its Eurozone-centred agenda.

It was from this point on that the AfD adopted extreme anti-immigration and anti-refugee stances, and sharp Islamophobic rhetoric.[4] This, in turn, laid the

[1] F. Biskamp, **"A Societal Shift to the Right or the Political Mobilisation of a Shrinking Minority? Explaining Rise and Radicalisation of the AfD in Germany"**, *International Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2024, pp. 139–165.

[2] **"What is Germany's AfD, and What Does Its Rise Mean for Jews?"**, American Jewish Committee, 21 February 2025.

[3] **"What is the Significance of AfD's Win in Germany?"**, *The Hindu*, 8 September 2026.

[4] K. Arzheimer and C. C. Berning, **"How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013–2017"**, *Electoral Studies*, 2019.

groundwork for the party's entry into the Bundestag in 2017 with a 12.6 per cent vote share, and it eventually became the third-largest party in the German parliament. AfD's electoral stronghold, however, stems primarily from its enduring support base in the Eastern German states. Drawing upon the public discontent in East Germany rooted in the post-unification experiences of socio-economic deprivation *vis-à-vis* West Germany, political alienation and culturally embedded narratives of exclusion, the AfD has tactfully advanced its most controversial policy demands of 'remigration' (return of non-ethnic German citizens, particularly those from Muslim countries, to their country of origin), expansion of mass detention facilities, legalising homeschooling, school curriculum reforms, and establishment of separate classes/schools for children of asylum seekers.[5]

Barely a decade after its founding, AfD's consecutive electoral victories have transformed it from a newcomer party on the fringes of the German party system into a formidable political force. However, it remains too early to predict whether AfD's electoral triumph will translate into real executive power (i.e., forming the government), owing to post-war Germany's political principle of 'Brandmauer', i.e., a 'firewall' against the far-right, representing a non-negotiable consensus among established parties, namely the Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), as well as the Social Democratic Party (SPD), to refuse any cooperation, coalitions or legislative coordination with the far-right.[6]

AfD's Foreign and Security Policy Positions

The Federal Republic's foreign-policy orientation prioritises European integration, transatlantic security, multilateralism, economic interdependence, and restraint in the use of military power. The mainstream political parties in Germany share a consensus on the Federal Republic's foreign policy posture: Russia is viewed as an imminent threat to European security (a perception further reinforced by the Russia–Ukraine war); membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) constitute central pillars of its foreign and security policy architecture; a robust transatlantic relationship with the US remains a strategic imperative; and China is regarded, simultaneously, as an indispensable economic partner, and also a long-term systemic rival, owing to its poor democratic credentials and history of human-rights violations.[7]

Unsurprisingly, the AfD's foreign and security policy positions and broader worldview differ substantially from this established cross-party consensus. The key tenets of

[5] A.S. Heinze, S. Kailitz, G. Pickel and M. Weisskircher, **"The AfD and its Electoral Persistence in Eastern Germany: Causes, Issues, and Implications"**, *German Politics*, 2026, pp. 1–17.

[6] W. Schroeder, D. Ziblatt and F. Bochert, **"Brandmauer—is Still Alive! Empirische Ergebnisse zur Unterstützung der AfD in den ostdeutschen Kommunen durch etablierte Parteien (2019–2024)"**, WZB Discussion Paper, No. SP V 2024-503, 2024.

[7] **"China: Still No Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity in Xinjiang, Three Years After Major UN Report"**, Amnesty International, 28 August 2025.

the AfD's vision for Germany's foreign policy orientation can be discerned from the party's election manifestos for the 2025 federal elections.[8]

- Germany is a 'middle power', making it susceptible to security threats in Europe while simultaneously positioning it as a 'bridge to the East'.[9]
- 'Realpolitik' Essence: The AfD advocates a 'Think German' approach to replace the pre-existing 'Think Modern' belief system,[10] while strongly criticising former governments for subordinating Germany's interests to multilateralism. It asserts the primacy of national interests over a values-based foreign policy.
- Economic Pragmatism: AfD adopts a 'Germany First' strategy to secure its role as a trading and industrial nation and to ensure its energy security needs. It is thus also critical of EU climate and regulatory policies that constrain German industries.
- European Strategic Autonomy: AfD makes a clarion call for greater European sovereignty and strategic autonomy, particularly in security policy, aspiring for Europe to emerge as an independent power centre in the evolving world order. However, it prefers Germany to work with its European partners to shape and guarantee a stable future international order.[11]
- Reform of Multilateral Institutions: AfD seeks a reform of multilateral institutions such as the UN, and calls for permanent membership for Germany in the UN Security Council, and abstention from several UN initiatives related to migration and refugees.[12] It also promotes greater cooperation with the BRICS states.

These overarching principles provide a broader framework for understanding the potential impact AfD may have on the Federal Republic's posture on the following foreign-policy issues confronting Germany.

The European Union

AfD's consecutive victories in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, two of Germany's 16 federal states, within one of the EU's 27 member states, do not, per se, imply the emergence of anti-European Germany in the near future. However, AfD's advocacy for the supremacy of national sovereignty, coupled with its conception of Europe as a 'Europe of fatherlands', reflects a vision of European cooperation fundamentally different from the essence of 'deeper political integration' traditionally associated with the EU framework.[13]

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[8] **"Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 21. Deutschen Bundestag"**, Alternative für Deutschland, 2025.

[9] A. Engström, **"Germany's AfD on Foreign Policy – Competing Visions and Internal Fragmentation"**, Report No. FOI-R--5946--SE, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 1 July 2026.

[10] **"German Far-Right Party Targets Iconic Bauhaus School Ahead of Landmark State Election"**, *U.S. News & World Report*, 3 September 2026.

[11] **"Zeit für Deutschland"**, Alternative für Deutschland, 2025.

[12] **"Manifesto for Germany: The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany"**, Alternative for Germany (AfD), 2017.

[13] **"Wahlprogramm: EU & Europa"**, Alternative für Deutschland.

The AfD's genesis is rooted in Euroscepticism. It believes supranational institutions cannot replace self-governing nation-states and vibrant democracies and thus asserts that the EU is counterproductive to a prosperous and peaceful Europe.[14] Along these lines, AfD has highlighted the EU's failure in handling the migration crisis and its shortcomings in combating the Covid-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, AfD has criticised the EU's climate and energy policies and subsidy packages, claiming such measures place an implicit tax burden on German citizens.[15] The party not only disfavours defence cooperation among member states but also rejects reliance on security assurances from non-European countries. An AfD-influenced Germany could pave the way for a more sovereignty-conscious Europe, where the political consensus needed for collective action on defence, migration, energy, climate change, and overall continental security and stability may become increasingly difficult to build and sustain.

Russia

The Ukraine War in 2022 resulted in a fundamental shift, a 'Zeitenwende' (meaning 'historical turning point') in the words of former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. In his address to the Bundestag on 27 February 2022, Scholz announced a €100 billion off-budget fund to modernise the German armed forces, reversing Germany's previously cautious defence policy.[16]

The German government has since emerged as the largest state donor to Ukraine, accounting for more than €43.3 billion in civilian and other assistance, alongside military aid amounting to approximately €57.6 billion. Chancellor Merz said Germany stood "firmly by Ukraine's side" on Ukraine's 35th Independence Day on 24 August 2026.[17] AfD representatives consider NATO's eastward expansion in the post-Cold War period as the primary cause behind Russian aggression. Further, AfD has consistently advocated for discontinuing all support to Ukraine since they believe that it is not in Germany's national interest to support Ukraine politically, economically, or militarily. Instead, it not only proposes a neutral Ukraine outside NATO and the EU, but also the restoration of trade relations with Russia.

Before the war and the subsequent sanctions imposed on Moscow, Russia accounted for more than one-third of Germany's crude oil imports and nearly half of its natural gas imports.[18] Consequently, after the war, Germany's energy-intensive industrial sector not only suffered major losses but was further crippled when the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was shut down after explosions in September 2022. AfD leader Weidel has since called for an end to the boycott of Russian oil and gas and the reopening of the

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] P. Fuhrhop, **"Germany's Zeitenwende and the Future of European Security"**, IAI Commentary, No. 23/08, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), March 2023.

[17] Ibid.

[18] **"Annual Report 2022/23: Energy Crisis and Structural Change: Prospects for German Industry"**, Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, 2022.

Nord Stream pipeline to bolster the underperforming German economy.[19] In essence, AfD views Russia as a legitimate and stable partner in international politics and argues that the relationship should be understood in the long term, beyond the current Russian political leadership.

NATO

The AfD conceptualises NATO as a security apparatus that aligns with the Federal Republic's foreign and security policy interests and thus does not outright oppose Germany's membership. However, AfD favours Germany's continuation in NATO only as long as it remains a "defensive alliance". Further, it advocates that all NATO operations outside the alliance's territory in which German armed forces participate be carried out only under a UN mandate, and only if German security interests are involved.[20] In recent times, the AfD has also called for the withdrawal of all allied troops still stationed on German soil (with particular reference to US troops), and in particular their nuclear weapons.[21] The AfD also makes a case for vehement opposition to Germany's participation in 'foreign wars', as reflected in its calls for reducing support to Ukraine and rejecting the provision of military equipment for conflicts.[22]

Such scepticism towards NATO stems partly from its pro-Russia stance, as inferred from co-leader Tino Chrupalla's arguments such as "a defensive alliance (NATO) must accept and respect the interests of all European countries, including Russia's".[23] This also stems partly from its anti-American leanings, since a considerable segment of the party believes that under US leadership, NATO has historically acted offensively and continues to do so, and thus fails to behave like a defence alliance.

AfD is disenchanted with plans to permanently station the German brigade in Lithuania from 2027 onwards under NATO's regional defence plans (approved at the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023), viewing it as an unnecessary escalation of tensions with Russia and a departure from a defensive foreign policy posture.[24] While Germany's defence expenditure has risen owing to its European and transatlantic commitments in a world order increasingly characterised by military conflicts and economic coercion, AfD's 'Germany-first' outlook could generate differences and tensions over burden-sharing within NATO.

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[19] J. O'Donnell, **"AfD Leader Vows to Restore German-Russian Ties as She Eyes Chancellery"**, *Reuters*, 30 June 2026.

[20] **"Manifesto for Germany: The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany"**, no. 12.

[21] O. Towfigh Nia, **"Germany's Far-right AfD Demands Withdrawal of US Troops"**, *Anadolu Agency*, 30 March 2026.

[22] **"AfD's Ulrich Siegmund's Comments on Arms and 'Remigration' Spark Fierce Criticism"**, *Euronews*, 12 September 2026.

[23] Agence France-Presse, **"German Far-right Leader Questions NATO Membership"**, *Voice of America*, 15 December 2024.

[24] J. Juozaitis, **"Germany Moving in to Keep Russia Out: Implications and Challenges of the Bundeswehr's Permanent Deployment in Lithuania"**, *Journal on Baltic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2023, pp. 29–64.

Transatlantic Order

AfD's criticism of the US draws on a peculiar mix of traditional left- and right-wing critiques. While the former camp calls out US hegemony and imperialism, the latter remains sceptical of American liberalism being too supportive of immigration and multiculturalism.[25] AfD has also asserted that US geopolitical and economic interests often override the strategic interests of Germany and other European states, ultimately drawing them into unrelated conflicts in other regions. As mentioned in the preceding segments, AfD perceives the war in Ukraine to be a result of the US-dominated NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe. Furthermore, AfD's anti-immigration wing upholds US interventions in the Middle East as the primary cause of the refugee crises, the consequences of which have affected Europe in particular.[26]

However, views have shifted notably since Donald Trump's re-election in 2024. The AfD's anti-immigration, anti-liberal, 'Germany for Germans' orientation aligns closely with Donald Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) vision. AfD representatives have also built networks in the US, enhancing ties with American conservatives and participating in events hosted by groups like the New York Young Republicans Club.[27] The party's recent electoral success has been acknowledged and hailed publicly on social media by the American president.

Conclusion

The AfD's rise to prominence as Germany's most electorally significant far-right party in the post-war era coincides with a global resurgence of the political right. Nationalism, anti-immigration sentiment, economic protectionism, and cultural majoritarianism are increasingly salient and overlapping in contemporary political discourse. The AfD's growing electoral salience can plausibly influence the political agenda and the positions adopted by mainstream German political parties. This could potentially shape debates over European strategic autonomy, further complicating the balance between national and European sovereignty in an already contested international order.

[25] T. Greene, **"Natural Allies? Varieties of Attitudes Towards the United States and Russia within the French and German Radical Right"**, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2023, pp. 1321–1337.

[26] C. Gatt, **"AfD Leader Demands the US Withdraw Troops from Germany"**, *Brussels Signal*, 3 March 2026.

[27] K. Brady and A. Wiener, **"Germany's Anti-immigrant AfD Party Finds Open Door in Trump's America"**, *The Washington Post*, 11 December 2025.

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