

# **Deutschland Solidarisch Gestalten – Shaping Germany in Solidarity<sup>1</sup>**

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The group ‘Deutschland Solidarisch Gestalten’ – ‘Shaping Germany in Solidarity’ – is made up of academics, activists and artists who work in memorial sites, NGOs or educational institutions. It emerged from academic work on Germany’s most far-right party, the ‘Alternative für Deutschland’ – ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD), and their use of lies as a political tool. What started as a seminar and working group soon connected with other actors, grounded in the understanding that academia is not outside of society, as a supposedly ‘objective’ observer, but an active part of it. The authors came from academia, activism, and the arts, representing a range of age groups, professions, genders, and racialized positions.

While the seminar on the AfD and its use of lies began in April 2024, it took only a few months to connect with civil society actors, educators and other academics and to meet in a workshop format. The aim was clearly to inform and, through this work, engage in public education. Accordingly, the work focused first on identifying the main arguments that constitute the AfD’s rhetoric and then, in a second step, to counter them with facts. In doing so, we drew on and mobilized diverse areas of expertise. Our main aim was to equip people who wish to confront AfD voters with substantiated arguments; but we also kept in mind the possibility of addressing sympathizers of the far-right party directly. This goal was encapsulated in the collective umbrella term ‘Shaping Germany in Solidarity’ – ‘Deutschland solidarisch gestalten’ (DSG). We were eager to reclaim the concept of ‘Germany,’ while emphasizing both the potential of transformation – ‘shaping’ – and the necessity of solidary interactions. For this purpose, some actors involved had to move beyond the terminologies they would usually use.

The inaugural workshop was an inspiring experience for everyone involved. We quickly realized that we might not agree on many details, such as the root causes of the rise of the far right or whether to emphasize migration’s economic benefits for

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1 All content reproduced here is based on the work in collective authorship. But Mario Faust-Scalisi is solely responsible for the presentation and linguistic version here.

Germany. Despite all our differences, the co-working process was productive, inasmuch as we were able to agree to disagree in order to pursue our overarching goal. As a result, within just a few weeks, the first version of our brochure was ready. For the next step – outreach – we began presenting the brochure in small workshops and events across southeastern Germany. We also launched a website to make the brochure publicly accessible (Deutschland Solidarisch Gestalten, 2025b). Shortly after, we set up a social media account (Instagram, 2025). However, we lacked the resources to keep both platforms updated or to expand our reach through more connections and, therefore, more views and likes. Being aware of our limited resources and capacities, the idea was instead to publish the already completed brochure as a kind of light book, using networks and channels familiar to most of those involved. However, this also proved difficult. The original goal – to collaborate with a publicly funded educational institution – did not work out. To make this possible, we would have had to demonstrate that the publication was ‘neutral,’ essentially treating the far-right party like any other democratic party. Since the brochure was designed to challenge the AfD, it did not meet the criteria of ‘neutrality’ required by those overseeing releases publicly funded in public education in major German outlets. The group around DSG decided not to pursue this route, if it meant sacrificing sharpness and political intervention. Instead, we began searching for a publisher willing to publish the book – and we succeeded in the autumn of 2024. In as much as goal was to inform the public about the true aims of the far-right AfD by citing directly from their official programs, some publishing houses declined our request, unwilling to reproduce AfD content. Eventually, however, Unrast Verlag, agreed to publish the approximately 100-page book under the title “What the AfD claims and how we talk about it in society,” just ahead of Germany’s federal election in early 2025 (Deutschland Solidarisch Gestalten, 2025a).

This book is intended as a critical intervention grounded in analysis, a commitment expressed through communication. In the following, the main perspectives and encounters will be summarized and brought into dialogue with the central, unifying theme of the book.

The book begins with an introduction outlining its primary purpose: to critically examine the claims made by the AfD and to oppose them. This approach makes it possible to clarify what the AfD actually stands for. In essence, the book demonstrates that the AfD seeks to establish an autocratic state with a legally codified agenda of discrimination. It thereby reveals that the AfD is fundamentally a far-right party, and at least in part, a fascist one. The AfD promotes an agenda with sexism and racism at its core. In doing so, it becomes clear that the AfD represents a massive threat and is part of the broader pan-European resurgence of fascism and the far right. The party is actively contributing to a shift in Germany, and other European societies, aimed at undermining anti-discrimination measures. In this sense, the AfD is not a conservative force. On the contrary, the party is not interested

in preserving the status quo but in regressing by decades, if not centuries. The alleged conservatism of far-right political forces is, in fact, disrupting the still-recent progress toward more reflective and anti-discriminatory politics. This phenomenon is not new and can be described as a backlash: a targeted, structural attack by far-right forces against emancipatory movements and achievements. The aim is clear – to reassert *white*, ad heterosexual norms and exclusionary practices, making them loud, visible, and socially acceptable again.

This must be exposed and explained as the true aim of the AfD and other far-right forces. To do so, the lies behind the AfD's rhetoric and claims must be clearly outlined and countered with well-founded facts. These facts are not only academic in nature but also grounded in the experiences and expertise of academic, activist and artistic actors of different age groups, professions and genders. Black people, People of Color and *white* people have all contributed to this project. The objective, as the name self-given name suggests – 'Shaping Germany in Solidarity' – is to help shape a more solidaric Germany, beginning with the mobilization of the research and lived experiences of the contributing authors. A key foundation for this effort, and a major ingredient for an intersectional solidarity, is to take seriously the threat posed by the AfD to BIJPoC that is Black people, Indigenous people, Jews and People of Color, as well as to queer people or those with chronic illnesses or disabilities. This includes respecting and adopting the self-perceptions and naming practices of those 'othered' by the AfD and similar actors. Doing so avoids reproducing discrimination through language and instead acknowledges exclusion as a process of being constructed as the 'other.'

The work of DSG and this book is grounded in the understanding that, while arguing based on facts is an important skill, you need to be willing to talk to one another and truly listen to trigger a shift in society in the sense of (re)shaping it. Empathy plays a key role in this process. To evoke constructive dialogue and positive engagement, we consistently began with the question: "What does the world you want to live in look like?" Bringing about social change requires both factual knowledge and an awareness of, as well as the willingness to confront the far right. It involves knowing how to argue with these facts and a willingness to use them in dialogue. This calls for a culture of debate but one of mindful, appreciative and empathetic communication. The publication itself, and the way it is presented, is part of this broader effort. Taking people's concerns seriously and explaining the aims of the far right without immediately judging potential voters is essential. For some, it is important that the achievements of anti-discrimination work and the related legislation are taken seriously, as they hope that this will lead to improvements in their own lives and those of others. Others, however, are provoked by precisely these developments and dismiss them as 'wokeness.' In this rapid judgement, anything labeled as 'woke' is automatically rejected, without the need for substantive engagement or debate (Gabler, 2024).

A frequently cited example of this is the use of gender-just language, which aims to represent all genders equally. However, many of the innovations introduced into the German language for this purpose have been faced strong resistance from large parts of society and even from some federal governments. For those in favor, gender-inclusive language affirms that their identities are recognized and respected. Others, however, perceive it as a threatening change. In fact, gender-inclusive language has been officially banned in schools and universities in some federal states in Germany (GEW, 2024). In this publication, we aim to pursue anti-discriminatory work while also acknowledging existing resentments rather than ignoring them. Maintaining dialogue, even when it is controversial, is important. That is why this publication exists: because the far right profits from societal divisions and knows how to instrumentalize them for their own purposes.

Against this, the AfD is committed to polarizing issues, particularly those that are open to and deserving of public debate. However, the party often appears uninterested in balanced, nuanced and fact-based discussions. This resistance to a fair exchange aligns with a far-right strategy of deliberately polarizing discourse, based on a constructed 'us versus them' logic. On the flip side, this gives the AfD the floor to present seemingly simple answers to complex questions and challenges. DSG aims to counter this. Guided by the insight that something changes whenever we speak, this publication serves both as an invitation and an intervention. Those who listen are influenced by what they hear – and in turn, shape those who are being listened to. Speaking and listening to one another, learning and unlearning, striving to understand and be understood – this is what it takes to be part of a continually evolving society.

However, this needs the recognition and acceptance that societies like Germany's are complex. The processes and interrelationships that make up our world are intricate. Accordingly, specific skills are required to understand these complexities. Nonetheless, we often need to simplify them in everyday life. This tension is best illustrated with an example: We all know what an apple is. If asked about its color, most people would probably say an apple is green, yellow or red. Strictly speaking, however, every apple has its own unique coloration. An apple that appears predominantly red may also have yellow or green spots. Nevertheless, we would not focus on such subtleties at the fruit counter – we'd simply ask for a red apple.' In everyday life, and especially in language, it is often extremely helpful to simplify complex relationships. This enables us to make decisions and act. Most people can deal with this function of language constructively. They are also capable of applying it to other areas, like medicine or climate change. At times, we must trust the expertise of those who understand given complexities, while relying on their ability to boil it down to simpler terms. Trust is needed here. Most people are aware of their abilities and limits, knowing and accepting that they have some or no expertise in certain matters. For this reason, in every social interaction, it is important to be

able to correctly assess one's own skills. We, for example, learn to trust that others know when apples are ripe for picking and can be sold at the fruit counter. This trust helps us enormously in everyday life. We trust physicians to know more about the human body than most patients do. And physicians, in turn, trust their colleagues when they seek advice or new findings at conferences and meetings. At the same time, each person carries knowledge about their own experiences of pain and thus imparts knowledge to physicians in treatment situations. Part of the overall picture is that knowledge and facts are not fixed but are constantly being renegotiated and further researched. These complexities and processes, these important skills, are often deliberately overridden by the political strategies and rhetoric of the far right. Parties and actors like the AfD intentionally reduce complexities to simplistic 'truths' designed to serve their own agendas. In doing so, they propose solutions that contradict expert opinions. The DSG group actively works to counter this through its efforts and in this publication.

Following this introduction outlining the aims of the book as well as the major topics and concerns, DSG discusses key themes and areas of German far-right policies, claims and assumptions across ten chapters. The first chapter reflects on the initial thoughts that lead to the founding of DSG – specifically, the role that lies play for the AfD and their form of populism. Unlike the chapters focused on issues like sexism or ableism, this chapter is less topic-centered and adopts a more overarching and partly meta-perspective. It shows how, in the so constructed battle for votes and recognition, far-right parties are trying to position themselves in opposition to democratic institutions by relying on populism as a core political strategy. A basic idea of populism is that messages are communicated in a way that the majority of the population can easily see and understand. When framed positively, what is said appears simple and, often because of this, becomes convincing to many. Strictly speaking, however, this involves manipulation: complex issues are greatly simplified, significantly distorted or deliberately misrepresented. This is the true nature of populism. Marginal problems are repeatedly exaggerated. Issues that are already being debated in society are taken up and either oversimplified solutions are presented – with the far-right party portrayed as the only one capable of guaranteeing them – or the issue is framed as entirely unsolvable. There is no genuine interest in solving these challenges; rather, the problems are merely addressed to instrumentalize them. After all, problems and conflicts are the very lifeblood on which far-right populism thrives. It feeds on dissatisfaction, outrage and hatred – emotions that in turn foster division and insecurity. The widely articulated desire for security is exploited to incite fear. This includes, among other tactics, the delegitimization of politicians from governing parties, intellectuals and journalists by discrediting them as belonging to 'the establishment' – a group portrayed as acting against the interests of the so-called 'normal population.'

To discuss this further, the focus is on the use of fear to gain votes. Not only in Germany, but in many countries, people long for security and associate it with stability. But change does not necessarily mean greater insecurity – consider, for instance, reactions to the introduction of seatbelts or airbags. Nevertheless, many people experience change as a source of uncertainty that frightens them. One reason is that change often means having to learn new skills, which can be particularly stressful, especially for older people. As a result, many perceive change not only as a loss of security, but also as a scary prospect. Fear of the future, especially when combined with financial uncertainty, can make people more susceptible to false promises. The AfD knows how to make political capital out of this. It counters change – both programmatically and rhetorically – with so-called ‘consistency,’ in line with conservative politics. However, the AfD does not aim to be traditionally conservative. It does not seek to preserve the status quo; rather, it wants to turn back time – ultimately, to a time before democracy. To support this agenda, fear is fostered, and often first constructed and spread by far-right actors. Strictly speaking, the AfD is a ‘fear movement’ (Biess, 2019, p. 143), because it systematically fuels and stages threats to serve its own purposes. A major fear it exploits is the fear of injustice: the fear of being left behind, of losing out compared to others, or of not receiving enough recognition (Eckert, 2020). However, such stems from a subjective egoistic perspective and neglects the fact that a fair distribution must include not only one’s own needs, but also the needs of others. Parties like the AfD exploit this fear of scarcity and when people feel forgotten, or neglected, fear can easily turn into anger. This is precisely what the AfD seeks to provoke. It is vital to recognize that emotions and politics cannot be separated (Helfritsch, 2022). The core target of agitation over so-called ‘new’ injustices are so constructed ‘migrants,’ an unprecise term that primarily refers to BIJPoC. This rhetoric follows a long tradition of racism in Germany, especially the fear of migration, as popularized by the social democrat Thilo Sarrazin (2010). The underlying narrative portrays BIJPoC as taking advantage of the German welfare state and threatening the German ‘Volk,’ often by depicting them as ‘criminals.’ The focus is especially on Black and Muslim male-read persons, who are additionally stereotyped as ‘rapists.’ The ‘solution’ presented by the AfD – an ‘end to migration’ – is a lie, ignoring the complex realities behind migration procedures and, rather than providing a ‘solution,’ introduces even greater challenges.

This is exemplary of the AfD’s style of working with lies while claiming to be the only ‘honest’ party. Ideally politicians are expected to make truthful statements and act based on facts, to be trustworthy. The AfD and other far-right actors claim they alone speak the truth, while all others are lying. However, these claims are riddled with contradictions – such as accusing all other parties of monopolizing power, while itself promoting an autocratic state where it would be the only ruling party. The same holds true for their stance on ‘freedom of speech’: they denounce the ‘established press’ as the ‘lying press’ (‘Lügenpresse’), while simultaneously advocating

for censorship, as in the case of gender-sensitive or anti-racist language. The close links to Trumpism are evident here (Bittner, 2024). The paradox lies in the fact that the AfD undermines trust in politics and at the same time increases the credibility of its own falsehoods. Strictly speaking, the AfD deliberately uses lies as a political strategy. In many interviews AfD politicians contradict themselves within minutes. In one example from 2023, Alexander Wiesner, an AfD member of the Saxony state parliament, made conflicting statements in the span of a 5-minute interview on 'Sachsen-Fernsehen': he claimed that women do not earn less than men (Sachsen-Fernsehen, 2023, 1:00-1:04), but also stated that it is good that women earn less than men (ibid., 4:47-4:52). In fact, the gender pay gap in Saxony was 8% (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2023). However, the far-right rhetoric of the AfD does not merely consist of contradictions; its politicians also fabricate figures, statistics and facts. For example, during a televised debate on 'Welt-TV' on April 11, 2024, Björn Höcke falsely claimed that 110 billion euros are spent on development aid and asylum policy. In reality, expenditure on public development aid only amounts to around 34 billion euros (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2024), and between 17 and 27 billion euros for asylum policy (Statista, 2024a). These lies are key to justify policies that promise simplistic solutions but fall apart on closer scrutiny. To rectify its demand to leave the European Union, the AfD must claim that Brexit was a 'success,' contrary to all available statistics. Similarly, fabricated numbers and misrepresentations are needed to sustain the narrative of 'criminal migrants.' Without these lies, the AfD and its political agenda would not be viable.

Social media plays a major role in promoting these claims, serving as both a central outlet and communication platform. The AfD remains dominant on these platforms, although other parties are slowly gaining ground (Hillje, 2024). There are clear reasons for this, as DSG has emphasized through extensive and diverse research on the topic. Social media platforms are especially effective for establishing quick and easy connections. One key factor is that polarizing posts tend to enjoy a longer lifespan on average and are favored by platform algorithms. The AfD has learned to exploit these algorithms to its advantage. With populist statements linked to current trends and often presented in emotional videos, the AfD is able to generate enormous numbers of views, which in turn lead to higher interaction rates and help amplify its reach (Steinwachs, 2024). In addition, social media platforms are the perfect place to reach a young audience. This does not always occur through direct or overtly political messages. Instead, seemingly harmless content – such as memes, lifestyle or fitness videos – is used to convey discriminatory or populist ideologies, gradually introducing viewers to fascist ideas, attitudes, claims and lies. In many cases, it is not just the official AfD accounts that are involved, but also AfD-affiliated individuals, influencers, groups and magazines. And this has an effect, as more young voters for the AfD can be linked to these developments without directly

claiming responsibility. It is no coincidence that student representatives in several federal states are increasingly reporting far-right incidents at schools and warning against them. Further, comment functions on posts by 'established' media are used extensively to spread hatred, prejudice and lies – less by the party itself, but rather by sympathizers who use the same slogans, messages and falsehoods promoted by official AfD posts. Many highly active commentators can be linked to well-organized groups tied to the AfD and the 'Identitarians.' As a result, the impression of the average opinion of the population is distorted to the right, which can lead to a false weighting in politics and the media (Eckert & Gensing, 2019). Since posts on social media platforms do not require reliable sources, they provide an ideal framework for spreading lies. In addition, artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to manipulate information, further blurring the boundaries between reality and lies and making it increasingly difficult for audiences to categorize statements accurately (Bieß & Pawelek, 2020). This weak point is exploited by the AfD, using lies as their main asset.

Taking these findings into account, DSR stresses the need to check news multiple times, to research sources, and to ask who is spreading the news and what potential benefits might be behind it. However, this requires media literacy, which is neither widespread nor sufficiently taught. A first step towards fostering such literacy is the publication of DSR itself offering arguments for a different way of dealing with the questions the AfD raises and popularizes. These arguments do not claim to be exhaustive, but they can provide food for thought. The aim is to prevent unproductive arguments and strengthen a culture of debate. This has to be a debate that is respectful, open-ended, and based on arguments, with a willingness to trust and listen to one another. Democracy thrives on dialogue, on the exchange of ideas, values and perspectives. For this, it is important how we talk to and treat each other. Every conversation offers an opportunity to get to know the other person better, to understand what moves their heart and what worries are on their mind. Contrary to the claims and constructions of the AfD, conversations are not a competition to be right, but an opportunity for interpersonal exchange. It is therefore important to remain honest, to avoid generalizations, and to take other people seriously.

A second chapter then presents the history, roots, and origins of the current threat of fascism and the far right. It delves into the history of racism and colonialization as major pillars underlying contemporary racism, which itself is a central pillar of far-right actors and parties such as the German AfD. In doing so, the 'positive' narrative of 'civilization' eagerly promoted by the AfD is countered, revealing the cruelty, harsh economic realities, and exploitative aims behind historical colonialism and contemporary neocolonialism. However, the presentation and analysis do not stop there; instead, links are drawn between colonial racism, National Socialism, and the current far right, not only in Germany but elsewhere as well. Following the question of whether all this is merely a thing of the past, the chapter

clearly rejects this notion, showing how the AfD today deliberately links its claims and rhetoric to historical racism, fascism and National Socialism. It examines the AfD's construction of itself as positioned against National Socialism, for example, by absurdly claiming that Adolf Hitler was a 'communist' and that National Socialism was 'left-wing,' while portraying the AfD as 'conservative-right' (Metzger & Schneider, 2025). These counter-factual narratives are deconstructed in this chapter and it is shown how the true roots and origins of the AfD and their thoughts and claims can be seen in their asylum policies and narratives.

This then allows for the discussion to move in the next chapter to one of the major fields of AfD rhetoric, which forms the basis for its claims against 'migrants.' These claims are actually rooted in racism but are presented as 'rational' and 'fact-based.' The AfD portrays People of Color as a major source of insecurity for Germany. However, as shown in the chapter, it is racialized people who no longer feel safe. According to German law, there can be no distinctions between people in Germany and beyond; as human beings, all have inviolable dignity. Contrary to this fact, the AfD claims to make politics for 'citizens' first, without even clarifying who is meant by 'citizens.' This ambiguity is linked to statements by AfD politicians who deny 'true citizenship' to those they construct as 'migrants.' Taking this rhetoric seriously, the AfD has no aim of protecting every person living in Germany, but only those who fit their ideal of being 'German' – that is, predominantly white Germans. To better understand the policies they advocate, it is important to bear in mind the impact of the AfD's policies: the so-called protection of German citizens not only leads to disadvantages for others, but in the most extreme cases can even result in their death. It can be shown that the AfD does not treat all human lives equally but instead prioritizes those it considers more worthy of protection. This, once again is grounded in history. The specific racism of the far-right AfD brings together spatial, religious and physical concepts, with 'Islam' serving as a central point of reference. In both the rhetoric and policies of the AfD, 'Islam' is often equated with Islamism. Perceived Muslim men and so-called 'clan criminality' are portrayed as threats to white Germans. Within this context, the AfD claims that they alone can take effective action. Once again, these claims are built on lies and misleading associations. Most people involved in organized crime hold German citizenship (Bundeskriminalamt, 2023). Furthermore, most terrorist attacks carried out in Germany cannot be traced to any particular ideology. And when they can, they are usually motivated by extreme right-wing ideology (Tuschhoff, 2016). These facts are often ignored or concealed. The AfD distorts reality and misrepresents the threat situation. This is analyzed and demonstrated by examining quotes from AfD programs in detail, contrasting their claims with the factual situation in Germany. This in the end allows for the deconstruction of AfD's major claim of 'criminal migrants.'

This is followed by a chapter on the sexism of the AfD and another on the AfD and ableism. Both chapters clearly demonstrate that the AfD is a sexist and ableist

party, and show how deeply sexism and ableism are rooted in its far-right policies and rhetoric. Claims suggesting otherwise critically examined and revealed to be mere rhetoric, not reflected in the actual programs and aims of the AfD. It is clearly outlined that the AfD's programs and the world view they present are deeply misogynistic and directed against gender equality (Lang, 2017, p. 61 ff.). Instead, time and again, the "traditional family" (AfD, 2016, p. 09, translation by the author) is emphasized as a core value. Even though this may sound harmless it leads to expectations regarding a 'normalcy' that is to be achieved – or 'preserved,' as the AfD would claim – at all costs. In the end, this justifies misogynistic, anti-LGBTIQ+, and ableist policies, combined with outright racism, because it is 'white Germans' who are expected to have more children. All of this is aimed at preventing Germany from 'abolishing itself' (Sarrazin, 2010) and creating 'Germany – but normal' (AfD, 2021) – as the AfD rhetoric goes. Once again, these aims are hidden behind seemingly 'positive' messages. Yes, families are to be supported, and so are those with severe disabilities – but only under certain conditions: the latter are to be separated from the rest in 'special' schools, while the former are supported only if they are heteronormative white German families. Regarding the AfD's ableism, the issue of inclusion in schools is of particular concern and is therefore discussed in depth in the relevant chapter. With the simple rhetorical twist of declaring 'inclusion' an 'ideology' and portraying 'special' schools as the best solution for all, brutal ableism is justified and camouflaged at the same time. An example of this is the far-right AfD's opposition to plain language, quotas or specific support measures. The desired so-called 'normalcy' is nothing more than a pseudo-Darwinist struggle, framed as 'personal responsibility,' and used to attack state support or communitarian ideas. Here, as with anti-racism or other measures against discrimination, the narrative is simply reversed – quotas for those who are discriminated are portrayed as discriminatory themselves, and special supportive treatment is labelled 'unfair,' as if it provides an undue advantage in competition. Explaining these rhetorical tricks helps to expose how deeply sexism and ableism are embedded in the aims of the AfD.

Another major concern of the AfD is 'social justice' in terms of economic justice, not least because the constructed category of 'workers' represents a particularly valuable voter group for the party and is a major pillar of its electoral success. The AfD likes to present itself as a party that is close to the people, that fights for those left behind by society or by the so-called 'established parties.' However, despite this rhetoric, the policies it pursues would actually work against a large proportion of its own voters and further widen the gap between rich and poor (Fratzscher, 2023). Elon Musk's increasing support for the AfD underlines the party's neoliberal orientation. But it also shows that even though many of the AfD's voters are poor, the forces behind the party and its success are quite different. In fact, extremely wealthy individuals and think tanks are driving the rise of the far right. This is evident, for example, in the policy field of education. Like other far-rights parties and groups,

the AfD is in favor of the merit principle' in schools and universities (AfD, 2016, p. 11). According to this principle, not everyone should have the same opportunities or even start life from the same starting line. Considering that many people are already disadvantaged through no fault of their own before they even begin school, the AfD policies would cement and worsen these inequalities rather than solve or reduce them. If the AfD had its way, social inequality would only worsen. The AfD does not support the promotion of children and young people who are disadvantaged. Instead, it seeks to bolster an elite that is *white*, male-read and able-bodied. Part of this approach – which aligns with the AfD's ableist positioning – is the replacement of support structures in schools with early screening processes. However, these screenings are not intended to support those in need, but rather to sort them out. Research shows that, without appropriate countermeasures, parents' levels of education and wealth are decisive factors in their children's educational trajectories. Many AfD voters would be adversely affected by these measures and would struggle even more as a result. Beyond being unjust, such policies are also economically unreasonable. In 2022, around 19% of 20- to 34-year-olds did not have a formal vocational qualification, which equates to 2.86 million young people (BIBB, 2024) – roughly the combined population of Cologne and Hamburg. At the same time, there is an enormous shortage of skilled workers. Early supportive education could counteract this shortage, protect people from economic risks and poverty, and enable social integration and stronger communities. However, none of this aligns with the aims of the AfD. Instead, its educational ideal is one of discipline and order – an approach focused on forming and sorting individuals. This is not only contrary to the needs of modern societies but also against the very interests of its own voters. Yet again, this is camouflaged by lies and rhetorical reversals of logic. These dynamics are explored in greater detail in the chapter on the AfD as a neoliberal party, despite its claims of being the 'true' workers' party.

But it is not only a challenge to clarify and outline the true aims of the AfD; the counter-narratives against the AfD are to be taken into perspective. Probably the most significant of these is the narrative framing of the AfD as an 'East-German-phenomenon,' which tends to explain away its roots and challenges in those parts of Germany that were part of the Federal Republic of Germany. To address this, DSG critically examined the relationship between the AfD and Eastern Germans. First, factual data was considered: in local, state and federal elections, the AfD is voted for across all generations. There is a marked difference between men and women, with men tending to support the AfD more. It is also clear that the AfD is more popular in rural areas than in cities. As far as the federal states are concerned, the farther south and east the ballot boxes are located, the higher the outcomes for the AfD in general. The AfD was, and still is, more popular in Eastern Germany than in Western Germany. Eastern Germany is a focal point of the AfD's presence and, in particular, of far-right radicalization in Germany. The reasons for this are complex, as outlined

in the respective chapter. Part of it is that many East Germans still feel like 'second-class citizens.' The disappointment of the transformation years goes hand in hand with a general disenchantment with politics. This has led some East Germans to vote for the AfD as an anti-Western and anti-establishment party. In addition, the AfD advocates for an authoritarian state constitution. According to the assumption that the AfD is an 'East German phenomenon,' the majority of East Germans would consider this model more suitable than democracy for addressing upcoming challenges (EFBI, 2023). However, this has to be linked to the experience of the GDR as a dictatorship, as well as to the long history of West German racism and far-right developments. The discussion in the DSG clearly shows that considering the AfD an 'East German phenomenon' is no better than simply accepting the rhetorical claims of the AfD itself. This is a dangerous simplification and, in large parts, counterfactual. The AfD is powerfully facilitated by far-right actors from West Germany, a fact neglected by the narrative of it being solely an 'East-German-phenomenon.' Such simplifications explain away the real danger of the AfD, ultimately allowing the far right to gain more influence and power. All this is shown and discussed in the chapter on East Germany and the AfD.

Lines from this flawed narrative must also be drawn to another strong but equally false narrative of the AfD being a 'democratic' party or one that has been 'democratically confirmed.' This narrative follows a similar pattern of simplification as explaining away the AfD as an 'East German phenomenon.' DSG shows and stresses that the AfD plans to establish a state that corresponds to its fascist worldview. It seeks an autocracy, a 'strong state' in which a few rule over the majority and central democratic laws are abolished. To allow for this seemingly 'democratically elected' 'wish of the majority' discrimination against minorities is legitimized, along with the persecution of all those constructed as 'political enemies.' For this the desired 'strong state' needs to be a police state based on state violence and repression. This is not a hidden plan but one that is openly presented by far-right publicists and politicians such as Maximilian Krah (2023). It is based on collaborations with other fascists, especially within German speaking countries. A major actor in this planned 'regime change' through 'democratic election' is the Austrian fascist Martin Sellner. These actors outline how to 'overtake,' and 'reconquer,' especially through a 'cultural war' and by gaining influence, for example, in universities (Sellner, 2023). Their clear goal is to establish a different state, justified by 'observations' that the current state reacts 'too slowly' due to the many rules and controls constraining decisions. Instead, the state they envision needs to act and decide authoritatively and autonomously. This clearly includes limiting the rights of those who oppose this 'new state.' The endgame is to abandon what is inscribed in every liberal concept of freedom as a lesson of history: the principle of equality. The liberal state also treats those who reject it according to the same criteria as everyone else (as long as constitutional principles are respected) and, as a rule, also supports the interests

of so-called minorities. The AfD exploits this by working against the liberal state while being protected and supported by it at the same time. However, this is not something the AfD intends to maintain once it has power itself. The autocratic state planned by the AfD is committed only to its own fascist norms and would rigorously turn against anyone who does not conform. This applies to BIJPoC as well as non-binary and trans people, but also to 'political enemies.' Far-right actors call for nothing less than a police state that takes preventive action and suppresses dissenters and minorities. At the same time, they advocate coming to power legally. But this is not democratic; a party aiming to abolish democracy cannot have a 'democratic vote' to do so, since democracy is much more than a majority of votes. Reducing democracy to the majority vote is a dangerous tendency that explains away the true dangers posed by the AfD. In this context, it is the task of democracy to prevent the AfD and other far-right actors from gaining the power to abolish the very system that enables them to partake in power sharing. For the AfD, democracy is merely a tool to gain power. Therefore, it is misleading to continue calling their votes and their party 'democratic' when they work against democracy itself. All of this is explained in detail in the respective chapter by DSR, to enable an understanding of what power in the hands of the AfD would mean. This also serves to counter those who argue that the AfD would deconstruct itself once it gains power. Such an experiment is much too risky for democracy to survive.

These chapters finally allow some conclusions to be drawn. They focus on two major points: that the AfD is a party of the far right and that the AfD seeks to turn back time to fascism. For the first point, the insights and explanations of the chapters are brought together. It is clearly stated that although the AfD may be democratically elected, that alone does not make it democratic. The AfD presents itself as a right-wing party that represents conservative values. To allow for this self-positioning, it claims that all other parties represented in the Bundestag are 'left-wing,' including the CDU/CSU. However, this is incorrect. The CDU/CSU, especially amidst the general shift to the right in the 'center of society,' is clearly conservative and center-right, not at all 'left.' Accordingly, the AfD is neither conservative nor simply right-wing. As shown, the AfD does not seek to preserve a status quo. Rather, it represents a worldview based on racism and seeks a return to the past. This makes the AfD a far-right and, at least in part, fascist party. Precisely because of this, important parts of the AfD are classified by the 'Verfassungsschutz' as 'confirmed right-wing extremist,' while others are at least considered 'suspected right-wing extremists' (Statista, 2024b) in the moment of writing the collectively authored book. This means that there is no longer merely a suspicion that significant parts of the AfD are extreme and far-right, but that this is now taken to be certain. It is clearly emphasized that just as the NSDAP was not a democratic party simply because it won a relative majority democratically in 1932, the AfD is not a democratic party just because it is electable. To further underscore this point, it is shown that many AfD politi-

cians had far-right biographies prior to joining the AfD party. For example, it has been proven that from 2021 to 2025, the AfD parliamentary group employed over 100 people from the far-right milieu, including so-called ‘neo-Nazis’ (Tagesschau, 2024). Top politicians such as Maximilian Krah and Björn Höcke ignore German war crimes and deliberately use National Socialist language and symbols. The democratic parties in Germany have so far shied away from pursuing the juridical process of banning the AfD as being unconstitutional. Moreover, the hurdles involved are very high, and there is a fear that a failed attempt could potentially result in even more harm done. Meanwhile, the AfD does its best to present itself as ‘only right-wing.’ However, those who vote for the AfD are not simply voting for a ‘right-wing’ or ‘conservative’ party. In reality, anyone who votes for the AfD is supporting a police state that relies on racism and sexism, a neoliberal project that persecutes those who think differently. Considering all of this, it is entirely justified to call the AfD a far-right or even fascist party. Nonetheless, in German political discourse, other descriptions still prevail, such as labelling the AfD a ‘populist party’ – a term that obscures its very essence. The AfD is not merely a ‘populist party,’ but a far-right, and at least partially, fascist party that employs populism as a rhetorical strategy. It seeks to abolish democracy and establish an autocratic state. All of this is outlined and emphasized in the publication, which aims to show potential voters exactly what they are voting for.

All of this is finally brought together to show more clearly and with nuance the historical lines of the AfD and its policies, and how the AfD embodies the danger of history repeating itself. Past and present fascist and far-right politics have relied on populism for manipulation and emotionalization, on fear and hatred, as well as lies and simplifications. Far-right actors in Germany glorify violence as ‘necessary mean’ for transforming society into an autocratic system and bringing it inline. In such a structure, only an elite of leaders would be able to live self-determined and free lives. Dehumanization is not just a reality of the past. It can once again become a guiding principle at any time. And this is what the AfD stands for.

But even though this is a warning, the book, as well as the work of DSG, do not stand only for warning and showing dangers. In line with the chosen title of shaping Germany in solidarity, the aim is to offer something against this danger and warning – to end the book with hope and possibility, and to guide the collective’s work towards a positive message of solidarity and potential. For this, it is key to understand the need to resist from the very beginning. A diverse democracy is hard work, but it is worth it – for everyone. Germany benefits from exchange with other parts of the world. Isolationism, on the other hand, as propagated by the far-right AfD, is not only morally wrong but also the opposite of taking responsibility. What’s more, isolation is simply impossible today, not least because of the colonial past, which paradoxically created its own ghost by globally linking everything together. Anyone who wishes for all borders to be closed again, or who longs to return to the apparent

greatness of the colonial era and therefore strengthens far-right parties, must not only ask themselves what suffering this has caused, is causing, and would cause for other people, but also what it could mean for themselves. Even white Germans who have yet not felt threatened by the AfD's future scenarios should take a closer look. Efforts to bring people into line and homogenize them are always directed against members of their own group if they are identified as 'enemies.' Politicians, activists and other people who speak out and engage publicly against the far right or racism have been persecuted with increasing aggression, hatred, and agitation for years, and are increasingly also victims of acts of violence. Whether a person is subjected to this violence politically or ideologically does not depend on their self-designation or self-perception, but on the attributions made by the far right, by the AfD, and its radical supporters. This must be clearly kept in mind when writing or speaking about the AfD and German far right. Yes, there is hope in a solidaric confrontation, but there is also great danger.

We are currently standing at a historical crossroads, and everything seems to be repeating itself. In 2023, an EU survey revealed that Germany is currently the most racist country in the EU in terms of anti-Black racism (Tagesschau 2023). Anti-Semitism is also on the rise and anti-Semitic incidents are increasing significantly (Bundesverband RIAS, 2024). However, the rigorous prosecution of anti-Semitism in Germany should be part of a consistent assumption of responsibility for the past, present and future. 'Never again' also means leaving no space for any form of racism. But the opposite is currently happening. The same applies to anti-Muslim racism, which most of the *white* population not only tolerates but even openly and loudly supports. Anyone who actively and visibly protests against all these forms of racism is defamed. However, it is not only racism in its various forms that is becoming increasingly acceptable, but also sexism, for example. Instead of taking the protection of the legally recognized third gender seriously, the state governments in Saxony, Hesse and Bavaria have banned gender-inclusive language. The same applies to the exclusion of people with disabilities, which is once again becoming more widespread. In this situation, the middle of society must decide: does it want to follow the AfD to the far right, or to actually and effectively fight fascism? The future of the AfD will be decided in the so-called – and also statistically defined – center of society. It is not only about those voting in favor of the AfD, but mainly about those who are not voting for the AfD and who are not often enough actively standing against the party and far-right activists.

That is why the book and the work of DSG are an appeal to all those who have settled into their comfort zones, merely pointing their index finger at the AfD as if that were enough. 'Resist the beginnings' does not work from a rocking chair. And the future does not simply happen. The future is shaped. Nothing just occurs; everything is made. And that is a reassuring thought. Those who want to shape the future

will have more than just a say in where the AfD and its influence are headed. This is the appeal of DSG.

DSG and its work stand both as a solicitation and an example of commitment against the far right – originating in academia and reaching far beyond those active in the collective as a call to action. This call to action is not only the concluding message of the published book but is also emblematic and symbolic of the cooperation itself: there are many of us standing against the aims of the far right. We are the majority. Together, we can build real firewalls and dig trenches to drain the brown swamp – not only in upcoming elections but within society itself, in Germany and beyond. DSG intends to be an active player and facilitator in this urgent endeavor.

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