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This Was the One for Me

AfD Women's Origin Stories

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Abstract: Next to the Alternative for Germany (AfD)'s nationalism and anti-immigrant attitudes, natalism and support for traditional gender roles are key components of the party's far right categorization. Women are not absent from parties like the AfD, though they support them at lower rates than men and at lower rates than they support other parties. In light of women's lower presence in far-right parties, how do women officeholders in the AfD explain their party affiliation, and how do their explanations differ from men's? An answer is discernible at the nexus between AfD officeholders' publicly available political backgrounds and the accounts that they offer for joining the party, termed "origin stories." Empirically, this article uses an original dataset of political biographical details for all the AfD's state and federal legislators elected between 2013 and late 2019. This dataset shows that AfD women at the state level are less likely than their men counterparts to have been affiliated with a political party, and they are less likely to have been politically active, prior to their participation in the AfD. Regardless of the facts of their backgrounds, however, women more than men explain their support of the AfD as a choice to enter into politics, and men more than women explain their support of the AfD as a choice to leave another party. The article argues that these gendered origin stories can be contextualized within the party's masculinist, natalist, and nationalist values.

Keywords: Alternative for Germany (AfD), career paths, gender performance, presentation of self, women

Introduction

We are closer to achieving gender equality in today's world than ever before.¹ In this context, new political parties on the right and far right are finding voters and willing office seekers among women in spite of policy agendas that are unambiguously opposed to women's equality. Many parties on the far right do not merely espouse different routes to gender equality, perhaps (as a libertarian party would) opposing state intervention to achieve it. Instead, they actively promote patriarchal messages and policies on women's rights.²

Feminism itself is of course not monolithic in Germany or elsewhere, and not all people received as women view themselves as feminist or support



feminism.³ Conventional wisdom, however, views political parties on the right, and in particular on the far right, as unlikely sites for advancing the rights and interests of women as a group. In terms of women's political preferences, women in western democracies are in the aggregate more supportive of policies and parties associated with the left.⁴ In terms of parties' policy agendas, parties associated with the right pay less attention than their left counterparts to issues that public opinion polling indicates women care more about.⁵ Further, the agendas that parties on the right (and in particular the far right) promote that do relate to these issues, such as family policy that promotes at-home child care rather than develop public infrastructure for child care, are more likely to reinforce than to challenge traditional gender roles.⁶ Worldwide, more women are elected into political office from parties on the left.⁷ This latter statistic is especially significant, because research on women's descriptive and substantive representation indicates that parties with fewer women officeholders are also parties less engaged in promoting women's rights and interests.⁸

In light of this characterization of far right parties, how do women officeholders in Germany's Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) explain their party affiliation, and how do their explanations differ from men's? An answer to these questions is discernible at the nexus between their publicly available political backgrounds and the accounts that they offer for joining the party, accounts that this article terms "origin stories." Gendered origin stories—explanations for joining the AfD that broadly differ between women and men—can be contextualized within the masculinist, natalist, and nationalist values of the party. An officeholder's origin story is especially informative when it diverges from the facts of their political background in order to make the story accord with these values.

In order to investigate gendered justifications that AfD officeholders offer for their party affiliation, this article draws from an original dataset of the 364 AfD officeholders (forty-nine women and 315 men) elected into state and federal legislatures since the parties' establishment in 2013. Its empirical findings address these questions in two ways. First, publicly available information about AfD officeholders' political backgrounds evince gendered patterns. At the state level, women are less likely than their men counterparts to have been affiliated with a political party, and they are less likely to have been politically active prior to their participation in the AfD. Second, an examination of public statements by AfD officeholders offers the opportunity to map this finding onto officeholders' origin stories. Women more than men explain their support of the AfD as a choice to enter into politics; men more than women explain their support of the AfD as a choice to leave

another party. These origin stories function as gendered explanations for AfD support, separate from officeholders' factual backgrounds.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it establishes the AfD as a masculinist, natalist, and nationalist political party. Second, it reviews the literature on political officeholders' career trajectories, highlighting that within-party variation is noteworthy. Third, it justifies closer attention to what the article terms officeholders' "origin stories," i.e., their explanations for running for office with the AfD. In subsequent empirical sections, it presents findings from an original dataset of AfD officeholders' political backgrounds and origin stories.

Women, Gender, and the AfD

As a formal political organization, the AfD's initial election program in 2013 was a small document that focused on opposition to the Euro.⁹ The party's evolution in the period leading up to the 2017 federal elections is clear in the rhetoric of party leadership, specific features of campaigns, and the text of the party manifesto. Through these messages, the AfD's agenda extended into a wider spectrum of issues that invite the characterization of far right populist.¹⁰ Even the 2014 European Parliament manifesto referred to the sexes' "different identities, social roles and life situations." By 2017, Thomas Klíkauer goes so far as to assert that "the AfD might indeed be called Germany's new Nazis," on the basis of party leaders' unabashed invocation of long-taboo nativist symbols and terminology, such as the word *völkisch*.¹¹

Journalists and political scientists now consistently locate the AfD on the far right, where scholars argue that political parties are often constitutively opposed to the idea of social equality (see Barbara Donovan, this issue). This opposition takes form in two more specific ideological orientations: social traditionalism and hegemonic ethnic supremacy. On the right, advocacy for traditional social roles corresponds with support of policies that reinforce these roles (such as an insistence on child care in the home). On the far right, social traditionalism corresponds (to varying degrees of explicitness) with natalist policies that focus on women as reproducers of national identity.¹² Umut Erel's study of right-wing politics and gender in the UK notes that political parties in this ideological category value stereotypically feminized labor in the sense that the "work of social and cultural reproduction of the nation is undertaken by women, be it in the realm of the family or through educational institutions."¹³

Parties that are considered far right are further distinguished by elements of hegemonic-ethnic supremacy. Norberto Bobbio, Anne McClintock, and

Cas Mudde contend that far-right parties share a fundamental belief in natural inequalities, within families (men superior to women) and within societies (one ethnic group superior to others).¹⁴ Social equality—between genders as between ethnic communities—is not merely viewed as low priority; it is viewed as unnatural.

In short, far right parties are not generally expected to want to mobilize women supporters, for a variety of reasons. They may not expect to be able to do so, given women’s aggregate preference for the left. And they may not view mobilization of women as central to the party’s ideological goals, in particular if those goals include preserving traditional gender hierarchies in which women play a lesser role in public life. Finally, they may view mobilizing women into formal political activity as outright contrary to natalist goals.

“The right,” like “the left,” is a heterogeneous category, and it is ideologically possible in some settings for a party to defy general expectations about its likelihood of engaging in advocacy for women’s rights and interests. Nevertheless, the AfD is not an exception to these expectations. Although its origins were arguably relatively centrist and focused on opposition to the Europeanization of Germany’s economy, documents and public statements produced by key party figures simultaneously established it as a political movement opposed to social equality from its inception. Kai Arzheimer and Carl Berning and others trace the party’s shift towards the radical right over the course of the 2013–2017 period,¹⁵ but, ideologically, thinkers propounding natural inequalities wrote some of the party’s founding documents. Marc Jongen, AfD member of the Bundestag since the 2017 elections, is a philosopher by training. His 22 January 2014 manifesto for the AfD asserts that policies of equal treatment are contrary to liberal democracy.¹⁶ In other writings, Jongen defends the importance of “*thymos*,” one of Plato’s three parts of the psyche. Robert Kagan defines *thymos* as “a spiritedness and ferocity in defense of clan, tribe, city, or state,” arguing that a global rise in *thymos* motivates foreign policies that aim for “honor and glory.”¹⁷ *Thymos* has stereotypically masculine associations.

Philosophically, the idea that Germany requires protection against being overrun by the European Union and by culturally different groups—points central to the AfD’s agenda—is a thymotic project. This project extends to preserving traditional German familial culture. In this spirit, AfD documents and public statements by its officeholders assert opposition to what they term *Gender-Wahn*, i.e., “gender madness,” a negative term for efforts to alter traditional social arrangements through such policies as legally allowing a third gender and promoting paternal leave. For example, Thomas Prantl (AfD member of Saxony’s state legislature) voices this position in

his assertion that “gender ideology is an attack on the time-proven family model of husband, wife, and children, which is the way of life for most people in Saxony.”¹⁸

On the basis of this information, we can sum up the AfD’s gender values as masculinist, natalist, and nationalist. Further, women’s presence in office with the AfD is disproportionately low compared to the rest of the German party system. As of February 2020, women comprise approximately 13 percent of AfD state and federal legislators. In the Bundestag, women’s presence in the AfD is even lower, at 11 percent of the party’s seats. The party group in the Bundestag with the second lowest presence of women is the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), at 20.7 percent of the group’s seats. In turn, women occupy more than 50 percent of the seats held by two party groups in the Bundestag (the Left: 53.6 percent, and the Greens: 58.2 percent).¹⁹ As of November 2019 at the state level, all but two (of sixteen) state legislatures included at least 25 percent women, even including the AfD’s seats.²⁰

How do women explain their presence in this setting, and how do their explanations differ from men’s?

Research on Officeholders’ Backgrounds

This section discusses research on public officeholders’ (largely legislators’) backgrounds, in order to show how this information informs an interpretation of gendered explanations for holding office with the AfD. This literature finds consistently that legislators come from higher-status backgrounds. Donald Matthews writes, “few generalizations have been more exhaustively supported by empirical research.”²¹ Across advanced industrial democracies, officeholders come from a relatively short list of occupations. Although U.S. state legislatures and Congress include a disproportionate presence of lawyers, this pattern is replaced with other professional categories in other societies based upon time-use flexibility associated with occupations in different settings.²² In terms of their political background, people elected into office have typically been politically engaged, often at more local levels, prior to their election. People elected into office tend to have served at a lower level before, i.e., they ascend from more local office.

The size of the party is likely to affect the primacy of previous political experience. Writing about factors that explain the ordering of candidates on Romanian political parties’ closed-list European Union ballots, Sergiu Gherghina and Mihail Chiru show that personal wealth often explains higher list placement

across parties, but parties vary in the salience of previous political experience. In a pooled model, previous national level service makes a candidate 1.5 times more likely to be placed one spot above the average spot.²³ This is not the case for all political parties, however. In particular, larger parties appear to drive the pattern of seasoned candidates' higher list placement, an effect that holds when controlled for gender.²⁴ For a small newcomer like Germany's AfD, Gherghina and Chiru's findings might suggest a more general party-wide deemphasis on previous experience. As subsequent empirical sections show, women in the AfD appear to be different from their men counterparts.

Other findings emphasize correlates of varied political experience. Susan Scarrow's study of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) examines variation in MEPs' tenure in office, distinguishing between "long-termers" (i.e., EP careerists) and "short-termers."²⁵ She argues that the EP's increasing empowerment relative to the national legislatures of member states is happening in concert with MEPs' longer-term commitments to the legislative body. This analysis of MEPs' career paths finds that MEPs either have held no previous elected office, or have substantial, serious (such as national legislative service) previous experience.²⁶ Career MEPs show signs of being most invested in the EP as an institution.

Scarrow's findings have several implications for the AfD. AfD officeholders at the state level who have a record of extensive prior political activity may be using the party as a stepping-stone to other or different office. These are more seasoned politicians. Regardless of the level of office (state vs. federal), AfD officeholders who are "short-termers" or otherwise newcomers may have different career trajectories ahead of them. A gendered difference between seasoned officeholders and shorter-termers therefore suggests different career trajectories for women compared to men, and the literature suggests these correspond with different vote- and policy-seeking goals.

In another study of the European Parliament, Christina Xydias finds that cross-national variation in MEPs' age distribution correlates with women's rates of election into the EP.²⁷ Greater interest in EP service—which the study measures as MEPs' ages, with older ages signaling that the EP is more desirable—reduces the translation of the pool of women eligibles into MEPs. In other words, some member states send older, longer-time politicians to the EP than others; these countries do not elect as many women as we would expect from other national-level indicators of women's engagement in politics (women's presence in the national legislature, and their labor force participation). Extrapolating to this study of the AfD, we might expect that the very small supply of women who aspire to run for office as AfD members

and then do so may indeed be quite different in their backgrounds from their men counterparts.

A related research program examines whether legislators' career features correlate with their behavior in office. For example, Stephen Meserve et al. use MEPS' ages as a proxy for where they are in their career, and they find that earlier career politicians are more likely to break from leadership and vote against their parties.²⁸ They interpret this behavior as a signal to domestic, rather than European, political ambitions. Those authors' findings may rely upon stable party positions from which a legislator could diverge, i.e., if legislators in the AfD exhibit low policy cohesiveness, this may simply be that the party is new with a relatively uncrystallized agenda, not that legislators vary in their career ambitions.

Demographic studies of German politicians indicate that many of these global findings hold for Germany, as well. Melanie Kintz's analysis of the 2013 federal elections—in which a large proportion of federal legislators retired and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) lost all of their seats in the Bundestag—shows persistent patterns.²⁹ Members of the Bundestag are typically better educated than the general population; Kintz's data show that 82.5 percent of legislators elected in 2013 have a college degree. In the German system, politicians disproportionately rise into federal office from a career in the civil service. Although this remains the case, Kintz identifies a growing trend in Germany of Bundestag members having worked as professionals with political organizations, such as political party infrastructure, unions, etc. These findings underscore yet further how unexpected it is to identify a cohort of officeholders who are not only under-professionalized, they are under-professionalized compared to other members of their own political party.

The literature on officeholders' backgrounds agrees that these patterns generally persist across gender. The principal gendered pattern in trajectories to political office is obviously that women hold office at lower, and in some settings considerably lower, rates than men counterparts. Among officeholders, some studies discern minor gendered patterns within these trajectories to political office but in the main, legislators are overwhelmingly professionals with a record of political activity.

In sum, extensive research shows that officeholders' backgrounds are meaningful. Cross-party variation in backgrounds offers information about how political parties' gatekeeping practices and preferences differ. Cross-national variation among officeholders within a regional decision making body such as the EP suggests divergent perceptions of the significance of the office or legislative body. Finally, within-party variation in backgrounds is outright unusual.

Origin Stories

Alongside biographical facts that are often part of their public record, candidates and officeholders promote accounts of their political backgrounds. They do so through media such as personal websites, public speeches, and published interviews with journalists. Here, officeholders' accounts of how they joined the AfD are termed origin stories. This section briefly justifies taking origin stories seriously.

A body of sociological theory dating to Erving Goffman argues that individuals create and recreate their identity in how they choose to appear and behave to others, i.e., through their “presentation of self.”³⁰ This theory finds ready application in political science. In his study of political representation in the U.S. Congress, for instance, Richard Fenno describes how House members “cultivate their constituencies.”³¹ Central to cultivating constituencies are legislators' presentation of self and how they explain their legislative activities to their district. Legislators choose which issues to highlight, and how to draw their constituents' attention to their priorities.³²

More specifically, gender may be understood as a performance. Judith Butler, Goffman, Candace West and Don Zimmerman, and others argue that individuals perform or “do” gender, reaffirming social constructs of gender through their interactions with one another.³³ This approach emphasizes that individuals' presentation of gender, and how they prioritize signals through which they communicate with others, is more important than a “fact” of sex or gender. Sheri Kunovich and Amanda Wall, for example, examine U.S. Congressional websites for gendered variation in presentation of self.³⁴ They argue that online autobiographies “contain both personal and professional details that the politicians believe the public wants to know,” making them “important documents through which we can examine how female politicians strategically do or do not use gender to appeal to voters.”³⁵

In the context of a masculinist, natalist, and nationalist setting like the AfD, both women and men officeholders may do gender by promoting stereotypically gendered origin stories, i.e., origin stories that conform with the gender values of their political party.

Data and Methods

This article's dataset covers all legislators at the state and federal level elected into office as members of the AfD through late 2019. Thus it includes individuals in seats won in state legislative elections that have taken place between the

party's establishment in 2013 and the end of 2019, as well as individuals who won their seats in the Bundestag's 2017 election. Germany's state legislatures hold elections every four to five years, and their timing is staggered, meaning that the AfD has had opportunities to win seats in "new" settings as time has passed. The dataset's unit of analysis is the individual officeholder, i.e., the small number of AfD officeholders who have won multiple seats are in the dataset just once, for their office at the time that data collection concluded (February 2020).

The AfD also won seven seats in the European Parliament's 2014 elections and eleven in 2019, but these individuals are not included in this dataset unless they have separately occupied state or federal legislative office. For example, Beatrix von Storch served in the European Parliament 2014–2017, leaving in order to enter the Bundestag in 2017. She is in this dataset as a member of the Bundestag.

Data were drawn from these officeholders' online biographies, published on their respective legislatures' websites (e.g., www.bundestag.de); from their German-language Wikipedia entry; and from at least two Google-search pages, including news coverage. The resulting dataset includes basic biographical information (birthdate and gender), whether these sources show evidence of a record of party affiliation (prior to the AfD) and political officeholding (prior to their current office), and what those prior parties and offices were, when applicable. A separate variable indicates whether the officeholder has explicitly disavowed prior party affiliation, in order to highlight when individuals do so in spite of publicly available information to the contrary.

Finally, news coverage of these officeholders occasionally includes public statements regarding their support of, and campaigning with, the AfD. These accounts constitute origin stories. Origin stories gleaned from news coverage are then supplemented with qualitative material from a limited number of personal interviews with AfD women legislators conducted by the author in May 2017. Even while it does not establish frequency in a statistical sense, a qualitative analysis of visible origin stories points towards gendered strategies for "presentation of self." Paired with publicly available facts, these origin stories inform a characterization of how women and men explain their selection of the AfD.

Several caveats regarding internet data collection are needed. Data collection was undertaken via web searches in two waves: August 2018 and February 2020. Although information provided by official online biographies (birthdate; gender; prior party affiliation and officeholding) is unlikely to have changed in this timeframe, the publication and availability of news coverage are time-dependent. Therefore, again, visible origin stories are suggestive rather than conclusive.

AfD Officeholders

Overview

By the end of 2019, the AfD held seats in all sixteen states, as well as in the Bundestag. Tables 1 and 2 show that women comprise 14.0 percent of AfD state-level legislators, and 12 percent of the party's seats in the Bundestag,³⁶ the lowest percentages of any major party in contemporary Germany. In this dataset, women and men elected into state legislatures share an average birthyear of 1967.³⁷ In the Bundestag, AfD women's average birthyear of 1970 is statistically significantly different from men's average of 1965, but these cohorts are still broadly generationally similar. Women's and men's birthyear ranges are also similar, spanning the early 1940s to the early 1990s. In terms of their ages, therefore, AfD women and men have had similar timeframes for developing careers, political or otherwise. Some research has shown that women across parties in Germany enter politics later in life, perhaps after a *Familienphase*.³⁸ This is not the case for AfD women.

AfD State Legislators

The AfD is new, established in early 2013. The youngest sitting legislator with the AfD was just 20 years old at that time, but most were in their forties. It might be reasonable to expect, especially in Germany's "apprenticeship" politician model, that elected legislators would have worked with parties prior to joining the AfD.³⁹ On the other hand, the AfD markets itself as an alternative to the political establishment. For example, the AfD party group in the state legislature of Hesse proclaims on its website, "With one exception, none of us were career politicians."⁴⁰ However, this holds true differently for women and men.

In this dataset, just five of the thirty-nine AfD women (13.2 percent) in state-level legislative seats identify prior political party affiliation. All of the parties that they identify are right-leaning: the CDU, the Deutsche Soziale Union, the Deutsche Partei, Die Freiheit, the FDP, Freie Wähler, and the Ökologisch-Demokratischen Partei. One of these women, Gudrun Petzold (Saxony), reports that she was active with the CDU's Junge Union from 1970 to 1980. After what appears to be a thirty-three-year gap, Petzold indicates that she joined the AfD in 2013. In this vein, state-level women officeholders' biographies suggest a greater likelihood of jumping into political office shortly after their joining the AfD. Their professional vitae do not include extensive prior political office, with 26.3 percent of them (ten women) indicating it.

By contrast, seventy men (29.9 percent) indicate prior party affiliation, which is statistically significantly different from their women counterparts. Further, these prior parties are all over the ideological map. Although right-leaning parties are more heavily represented, the list includes the CDU, Die Freiheit, FDP, Freie Wähler, Grüne, KPD, Neues Forum, Die Republikaner, the SED, and the Social Democrats (SPD). This constellation of prior parties corresponds with data on voting supporters of the party.⁴¹ A low percentage of men (1.28 percent, just three officeholders) state in their official online biographies that they were *vorher parteilos* (previously without party affiliation). In turn, AfD men at the state level also have statistically significantly higher rates of prior political officeholding. Of the 234 AfD men in state legislatures, 43.6 percent indicate prior office. These positions include, for example, city and community councils. This is a considerably higher percentage than the rates of prior political office among women at the state level, and it is more in line with the findings of previous research on political careers.

This biographical information points towards gendered differences in AfD state legislators' pathways to political office. In the aggregate, it characterizes women's entry into office with the AfD as their entry into politics, full stop. Later sections discuss how officeholders' origin stories may aim to contextualize these patterns in the political party's gender values.

AfD Members of the Bundestag

The AfD won ninety-two seats in the Bundestag in Germany's 2017 federal elections, ushering it into position as the third largest party group.⁴² This represents a significant event in the German party system, including the first successful bid for Bundestag seats by a party to the right of the CDU/CSU since 1957.⁴³ The AfD's success had the additional effect of contributing to lowering percentage of women's overall membership in the Bundestag (from 37.1 percent in the preceding legislature to 31 percent), because women won just eleven of these ninety-two seats.

Table 2 shows that, of the eleven women elected into the Bundestag as members of the AfD, just one woman (9.1 percent) identifies a previous party, and one woman (9.1 percent) expressly states that she was *vorher parteilos*. Beatrix von Storch identifies herself as having been a member of the FDP from 2011 until 2013, when she joined the AfD. Von Storch's own story about the origins of her political activity, however, downplay formal party membership, as later sections address.

The rate at which AfD men in the Bundestag report prior party affiliation is higher than their women counterparts, though this difference is not statistically significant: twenty-four men (29.6 percent) indicate a prior party. As

Table 1: Women and Men AfD Officeholders at the State Level, Elected 2014–2019

The AfD in State Legislatures	Women N=38		Men N=234	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Range	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Range
Year of birth	1967 (11.370)	1945/ 1988	1967 (11.319)	1942/ 1993
Member of a political party prior to AfD	13.2% – 0.132 (0.343)*	0/1	29.9% – 0.299 (0.459)*	0/1
Political officeholder prior to current role in the state legislature	26.3% – 0.263 (0.446)**	0/1	43.6% – 0.436 (0.497)**	0/1
Explicitly states no prior party affiliation	0	0	1.28% – 0.0128 (0.113)	0/1

* Rate of prior party membership is statistically significantly different between women and men, $p < 0.032$ (Fisher's Exact).

** Rate of prior political officeholding is statistically significantly different between women and men, $p < 0.051$ (Fisher's Exact).

subsequent sections address at greater length, reporting this information is significant both in terms of factual political background as well as in terms of how officeholders frame it when offered the opportunity to elaborate. Sometimes the omission of details seems a bit coy. For example, now-AfD member Martin Hohmann (Hesse) served in the Bundestag 1998–2005 as a member of the CDU; his current Bundestag biography mentions this prior service but omits his party affiliation.⁴⁴ As for explicit rejection of prior party attachment, AfD men in the Bundestag exhibit a rate that is not statistically significant different from women's: of eighty men, three (3.7 percent) expressly assert that they had no prior political affiliation.

Unlike in state legislatures, AfD women and men in the Bundestag do not appear to differ statistically in their rates of prior officeholding. These rates, while not statistically significantly different, reverse what we see at the state-level. In the Bundestag, AfD women appear to have higher rates of prior officeholding than their men counterparts. These results may be due to the small sample size of women; alternatively, they may reflect findings from existing research showing that a higher level of office (federal vs. state) corresponds with more extensive prior officeholding. The possible difference in

Table 2: Women and Men AfD Officeholders in Bundestag, Elected 2017

The AfD in the Bundestag	Women N=11 [†]		Men N=81	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Range	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Range
Year of birth	1970 (9.872) ^{**}	1945/ 1983	1966 (12.173) ^{**}	1940/ 1991
Member of a political party prior to AfD	9.1% – 0.091 (0.302)	0/1	29.6% – 0.296 (0.459)	0/1
Political officeholder prior to current role in the Bundestag	36.4% – 0.364 (0.505)	0/1	18.5% – 0.185 (0.391)	0/1
Explicitly states no prior party affiliation	9.1% – 0.091 (0.302)	0/1	3.7% – 0.0370 (0.190)	0/1

[†] This includes Frauke Petry and Verena Hartmann, because they were elected into the Bundestag with the AfD.

^{**} Women’s birthyear is statistically significantly later than men’s, $p < 0.094$ (1-tailed t-test).

prior officeholding between women and men may be attributable to gendered gatekeeping processes in the AfD, but there is insufficient information to know.

AfD Officeholders’ Origin Stories

Goffman and others argue that individuals perform their identity in context, for an audience.⁴⁵ These presentations-of-self seek to produce a specific impression. This section offers a qualitative analysis of illustrative AfD officeholders’ origin stories to support the broader claim that women and men may view their support for this party as requiring different kinds of justifications. Public figures make choices about which details to include or exclude in their accounts, and they may choose to misrepresent details. Earlier sections of the article argued that the AfD’s gender values consist of masculinism, natalism, and nationalism. Thus, for members of the AfD, origin stories may be gendered in ways that reflect the gender values of the party, whether or not these officeholders’ actual political backgrounds conform.

For the AfD woman officeholder, the generic origin story appears to be that the party wooed her into politics. She was persuaded to run for office in spite of avowed resistance to formal politics. This is her story, even if facts indicate otherwise. Regardless of their actual political or professional

backgrounds, AfD women in office may choose to present traditionally gendered origin stories.

For example, current member of the Bundestag Frauke Petry used to introduce herself on her website with the following opening words: "... In 2012 when I decided, as a mother of then four children, to become politically active, I committed to fighting for citizens' interests"⁴⁶ In these words, Petry emphasizes her role as a mother, and she portrays herself as someone who became political. The facts of Petry's political or professional background prior to the AfD are separate from her assertion that the AfD was the party for her. Petry herself subsequently left the AfD to form the *Blaue Partei*, but she has framed her entry into politics as synonymous with the AfD.

On her personal website, Bavarian state legislator Katrin Ebner-Steiner explains that she got involved in politics, because she "could no longer remain inactive." She continues: "In the AfD," she feels like she is "at the right address."⁴⁷ Like Petry, Ebner-Steiner portrays her entry into politics and her support for the AfD in the same breath. Further, she locates her party affiliation in the home—"at the right address." Sabine Barthel (Brandenburg Landtag) asserts that she first joined the AfD in 2016, because she was dissatisfied with politics.⁴⁸ Combined with an apparent absence of prior party affiliation, Barthel's origin story resonates with Petry's and Ebner-Steiner's. Together, these origin stories emphasize the desire to change politics with the AfD. They do not explain prior parties' inadequacy.

Petry, Ebner-Steiner, and Barthel's origin stories depict them in their "first marriage" in politics, and they resemble the stories of two AfD women interviewed by the author in May 2017. These interviews were in the context of a broader effort at speaking with women to the right of center in Germany, and they were conducted in the state legislative buildings of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Saxony. The women were several decades apart in age, and they differed considerably in their social traditionalism, but they offered strikingly similar accounts of becoming political when and because the AfD was established. The younger interviewee stated that she had been upset about European bailouts of Greece, and the AfD provided an organization for becoming involved in politics. When asked about the AfD's orientation towards gender and sexual politics, she asserted that families come in many forms, and that the AfD was not backwards in this area. The older interviewee similarly described entering into politics because of the AfD's emergence. She said that she had attended local AfD meetings in her community, drawn by a shared opposition to Europeanization. This latter interviewee stated that she had never wanted to run for office, and she described needing to be persuaded to run. In contrast to the other interviewee, she asserted that children need

a father and a mother, and she offered several other observations in favor of traditional family roles. In short, these women expressed divergent opinions on matters of social politics, but they converged in their origin stories.

Even publicly known past connections to other parties do not preclude origin stories to the contrary. Although von Storch was previously a member of the FDP, she is quoted in interviews as disavowing formal party affiliation. In an English-language May 2017 interview, she stated: “I’ve been active in politics for twenty years without being a member of any party or any parliament ... I thought that the political parties would not take care of the changes we need. They’re only focused on the next election, not the real problems we have.”⁴⁹ Von Storch’s disavowal of former political parties is disingenuous, given her family history: her grandfather served as Adolf Hitler’s finance minister.⁵⁰ This inconsistency between von Storch’s biographical facts and the account that she offers underscores that origin stories provide intentional framing.

The origin stories that are available for AfD men officeholders differ from those of their women counterparts. Numerous AfD men pointedly express dissatisfaction with earlier political experiences. Indeed, a key feature of founding AfD members’ rhetoric was that specific existing political parties were not serving Germany well. Konrad Adam, Alexander Gauland, and Bernd Lucke (three men) were all public figures firmly associated with the CDU prior to promoting the “Wahlalternative 2013.” Newspaper headlines referred to the trio explicitly as “disappointed CDU politicians.”⁵¹

Another gendered metaphor is unambiguous in some AfD men’s origin stories. Karl Hermann Bolldorf (now in Hesse’s state legislature), a forty-year CDU member and former mayor, describes his departure from the CDU like a divorce: “Like in a marriage ... At first, you insist that just a few things bother you.”⁵² Along the same lines, Jörg Kühne (in Saxony’s Landtag) states that “he now sees his time in the CDU as a political mistake; this is why he switched to the AfD in 2014.”⁵³ Similarly, Jan Schiffers (in Bavaria’s Landtag) states that he “previously supported the CDU and CSU but became increasingly dissatisfied with their politics ... this new party spoke to [him].”⁵⁴ To varying degrees, these origin stories depict prior parties as unsatisfying.

AfD men are in the aggregate more likely to identify a prior party affiliation than women, but not all available origin stories adhere straightforwardly to the same metaphor. For example, an origin story expressed by Mario Beger (in Saxony’s Landtag) mirrors Petry’s language (above): “I became politically active, because I saw the consequences of the introduction of the Euro in Spain.”⁵⁵ In turn, Jan-Oliver Zwerg (in Saxony’s Landtag) goes so far as to frame his entry into politics in family terms. He is quoted as stating that “as a businessman he would far rather stay at home at the end of the

workday ... but Germany is in danger.”⁵⁶ Zwerg’s emphasis on Germany needing protection engages Jongen’s philosophical theme of *thymos*. Zwerg does not describe the inadequacy of his first political marriage; instead, he asserts his responsibility to protect.

Although available origin stories for AfD men vary, none outright contradicts a publicly visible biography, as some women’s origin stories do. One interpretation of this finding is that AfD women confront distinctive questions about their party affiliation. Women in the AfD may be more likely to offer a stereotypically gendered (feminized) origin story, and in particular a story that emphasizes the AfD as the only party for them, because they are so few in number, and because the party does not champion gender equality. Further, likely AfD voters may respond more positively to women’s origin stories when those accounts resonate with more traditional gender values.

Conclusions

This article draws from AfD officeholders’ biographies and from their visible origin stories to generate two sets of claims. First, in the aggregate, AfD women and men officeholders at the state level have distinctive political backgrounds. Men more than women report prior party affiliation and have held prior political office. The literature on political career trajectories shows that within-party variation in background like this is unusual. At the federal level, by contrast, women and men appear report statistically similar in their rates of prior party affiliation and officeholding. Although it is not statistically significant, one finding is reversed for AfD members of the Bundestag compared to the state legislators: women appear to have higher rates of prior officeholding than their men counterparts. This finding may be due to low sample size (just eleven AfD women elected to the Bundestag in 2017), or it could be due to systematic processes. Future research on AfD political recruitment can shed light on the role of party gatekeepers in producing these effects.

Second, regardless of the facts of their political backgrounds, women and men appear to offer gendered explanations for their affiliation with the party. Among AfD women, the performance of self that these origin stories comprise is especially noteworthy when it diverges from publicly available details about their backgrounds. In light of conventional assessments of far right parties’ commitment to promoting women’s rights and interests, how do AfD women explain their party affiliation? They may do so in terms of their party’s gender values, which emphasize social traditionalism.

At the same time, a number of AfD women for whom interest in the AfD was synonymous with their entry into politics have very publicly moved onward. Most visibly at the federal level, Petry left the party when she left her leadership position in 2017, and Franziska Schreiber, Petry's former assistant, published a memoir of her time in the AfD that has garnered extensive attention.⁵⁷ In addition to these especially public exits, one more woman (Verena Hartmann, as of January 2020) and three men (Lars Herrmann, December 2019; Uwe Kamann, December 2018; and Mario Mieruch, October 2017) are now *fraktionslos* (without a party group) in the Bundestag, having left the AfD. Petry and Hartmann's exits represent 18.1 percent attrition (two of eleven) among women; Herrmann, Kamann, and Mieruch's exits represent 3.7 percent attrition (three of eighty-one) among men. These rates of exit from a party that so rapidly gained entry into federal politics suggest considerable instability. In some senses the AfD's agenda is uncrystallized. This incoherence is visible in officeholders' departure from the party, and in public disagreements between party leaders over whether and how explicitly to violate long-held taboos. As time passes, the AfD is evolving, and relative newcomers (in fact or in origin story) may remain politically active by turning to alternatives to the alternative. This study suggests that we will see officeholders' origin stories evolve, in turn.

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Notes

1. The author thanks Louise Davidson-Schmich, organizers and participants in the German Studies Association 2018 seminar entitled "The Rise of the Alternative for Germany and the Transformation of German Politics," colleagues in Bucknell University's Department of Political Science, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback on earlier drafts. All errors that remain are the author's. Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, *The Logics of Gender Justice: State Action on Women's Rights Around the World* (Cambridge, 2018). Htun and Weldon show that these aggregate global advances obscure significant crossnational variation, as well as variation across issue areas (e.g., gender equitability in divorce law vs. gender

- equitability in workplace law). However, overall, the twenty-first century is a friendlier home to historically marginalized genders than earlier eras.
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 3. Myra Marx Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (Palo Alto, 2012); Judith Squires, *Gender in Political Theory* (Hoboken, 2013).
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 5. Valerie O'Regan, *Gender Matters: Female Policymakers' Influence in Industrialized Nations* (Westport, 2000); Michele Swers, *The Difference Women Make* (Chicago, 2002); Christina Xydias, "Women's Rights in Germany: Generations and Gender Quotas," *Politics & Gender*, 10 (2014): 4–32.
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 7. Miki Caul, "Women's Representation in Parliament: The Role of Parties," *Party Politics*, 5 (1999): 79–98; Miki Caul Kittilson, *Challenging Parties, Changing Parliaments* (Columbus, 2006); Diana O'Brien, "'Righting' Conventional Wisdom: Women and Right Parties in Established Democracies," *Politics & Gender*, 14, no. 1 (2018): 27–55; Andrew Reynolds, "Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World," *World Politics*, 51 (1999): 547–572.
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 11. Thomas Klikauer, "Alternative for Germany: Germany's New Right-wing Extremists," *Journal of Labor and Society*, 21 (2018): 611–629, here 611.
 12. Umüt Erel, "Saving and Reproducing the Nation: Struggles around Right-wing Politics of Social Reproduction, Gender and Race in Austerity Europe," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 68 (2008): 173–182; Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Woman-Nation-State* (Berlin, 1989), 7.
 13. Erel (see note 12), 174.
 14. Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Chicago, 1996); Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism, and the Family," *Feminist Review* 44 no. 1 (1993): 61–80; Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge, 2007).

15. Kai Arzheimer and Carl Berning, "How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Their Voters Veered to the Radical Right, 2013–2017," *Electoral Studies* 60 (2019).
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19. See "Abgeordnete in Zahlen: Frauen und Männer;" available at https://www.bundestag.de/abgeordnete/biografien/mdb_zahlen_19/frauen_maenner-529508, accessed 5 February 2020.
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24. *Ibid.*, 543.
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26. *Ibid.*, 256–257.
27. Christina Xydias, "Discrepancies in Women's Presence between European National Legislatures and the European Parliament: A Contextual Explanation," *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2016): 800–812.
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31. Richard F. Fenno, "US House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration," *American Political Science Review* 71, no. 3 (1977): 883–917, here 890.
32. See also Justin Grimmer, *Representational Style in Congress: What Legislators Say and Why It Matters* (Cambridge, 2013).
33. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Abingdon, 2002); Erving Goffman, "Gender Display," *Studies in Visual Communication* 3, no. 2 (1976): 69–77; Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (1987): 125–151.
34. Sheri Kunovich and Amanda Wall, "Internet Autobiographies: Female Politicians' Representations of Gender," *Research in Political Sociology* 20 (2012): 49–72.
35. *Ibid.*, 50.
36. This percentage includes Frauke Petry and Verena Hartmann among AfD members of the Bundestag, even though they have subsequently left the party, because they were originally elected under its banner.

37. Six men do not list their birthdates. This average was calculated without those data.
38. Beate Hoecker, "Parliamentarierinnen im Deutschen Bundestag 1949 bis 1990: Ein Post-skriptum zur Abgeordnetensoziologie," *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 25, no. 4 (1994): 556–581.
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40. See <https://www.afd-fraktion-hessen.de/ueber-uns>, accessed 7 February 2020. Original text: "Wir waren alle bisher—mit einer Ausnahme—keine Berufspolitiker."
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42. See Bundestag election 2017 results; available at <https://www.bundestag.de/bundestagswahl>; Jefferson Chase, "Far Right AfD Enters German Parliament: What it Means for German Politics," *Deutsche Welle*, 24 September 2017; available at <https://www.dw.com/en/far-right-afd-enters-german-parliament-what-it-means-for-german-politics/a-40664281>, accessed 5 February 2020.
43. Dilling (see note 10).
44. In other readily available biographical blurbs, Hohmann is described as a CDU member 1980–2004. He left that party for the final years of his time in the Bundestag, serving without a party group.
45. Goffman (see notes 30 and 33), Fenno (see note 31), Butler (see note 33).
46. See <https://www.frauke-petry.de/>, accessed 22 August 2018. Original text: "... Als ich mich 2012 entschied, als Mutter von damals vier Kindern politisch aktiv zu werden, habe ich mir fest vorgenommen, für Bürgerinteressen zu kämpfen, für eine ehrliche Diskussion über offensichtliche Probleme und dafür, dass der gesunde Menschenverstand und vorausschauendes Handeln auch in der Politik wieder eine Rolle spielen."
47. See <https://katrin-ebner-steiner.de/ueber-meine-person/warum-ich-in-der-afd-bin/>, accessed 20 February 2020. Original text: "Weil sich das Land seit Jahren in eine immer verhängnisvollere Richtung entwickelt, konnte ich nicht länger tatenlos zusehen. Da musste ich mich selbst in die Politik einmischen. Bei der AfD fühle ich mich an der richtigen Adresse und erlebe dort viele gleichgesinnte Mitstreiter."
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51. See, for example Günther Lachmann, "Enttäuschte CDU-Politiker Gründen Wahlalternative," *Die Welt*, 4 October 2012; available at <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article109606449/Enttaeuschte-CDU-Politiker-gruenden-Wahlalternative.html>, accessed 10 February 2020.

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56. Quoted in “Von Pegida in Den Sächsischen Landtag: Der Neue Starke AfD-Mann Heißt Zwerg,” *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 8 September 2019; available at <https://www.dnn.de/Region/Mitteldeutschland/Von-Pegida-in-den-Landtag-Der-neue-starke-AfD-Mann-in-Sachsen-heisst-Jan-Zwerg>, accessed 14 February 2020. Original text: “Er würde als Unternehmer viel lieber zu Hause seinen Feierabend genießen, als Politik zu machen, fügt Zwerg an. Doch Deutschland sei in Gefahr”
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