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LEFT OUT?: THE POLITICAL LEFT IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN POLITICS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
COLLEGE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the left wing in Germany is primed to form a governing coalition in Germany following ten years of center-right rule. Thuringia is the case study within this paper because of the unique position of the Left Party in that state that is different from its place in any other part of Germany. The Left Party in the state of Thuringia is the senior partner in a coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Alliance90/the Greens, the first time the Left Party has led a state government in the Federal Republic. This also unites all three left of center parties.

This thesis looks at the current government in Germany and the left-wing's reaction to ten years of center-right power. In order to do so, I look at the potential impact of a left-wing government on the state level on political taboos in Germany and the ways that the SPD and Greens have reacted to current issues in German politics. The SPD and the Greens are also both experiencing a change in their electoral fates. These parties are more successful on the local and state levels than nationally at present, but this could change as the Left Party and the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) forces changes in the political landscape. Amid media claims that Angela Merkel and her governing coalition are vulnerable due to their approach to the refugee crisis, which has been unpopular among many Germans, I argue that a left-wing coalition could be the answer in the future.

The Left Party's power in Thuringia is vital to the future of the Left Party, as it shows that that party is able to govern fairly and in a democratic system

and may help to repair this party's image nationwide. The left wing represents an important alternative to right-wing populism in Europe. This is important for the future because Germany is a leader in the European Union. As seen with the refugee crisis and rise of far right populism, when things change in Germany, consequences may be felt throughout Europe.

Introduction

After surviving the Euro crisis and global economic downturn of the early 2010s, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany looked unstoppable. Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government was very popular, and Germany's place as leader of Europe was secure. However, this changed following the influx of refugees into Germany over the course of 2015 and the change in the German political landscape. These changes saw a new right-wing party become popular as well as a reemergence of difficulties within the CDU's alliance with the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU). This thesis looks at the current government within Germany to determine the ways that the ruling coalition may be vulnerable and answer the research question: How has the left wing responded to contemporary issues in German politics? I argue that the German Left has the potential to form a ruling coalition due to its recent political stances, but must overcome some significant difficulties in order to do so. The unique role that the Left Party is playing the state of Thuringia despite the long-standing taboo against that party further supports this argument. To make this point, I use theory on left-wing politics, which claims that competition on the left is a favorable electoral condition for left-wing parties.[1] Other theory states that newer parties change more easily than established ones, so newer parties such as the Left Party are more likely to change their policies than older parties such

[1] Christopher J. Anderson and Pablo Beramendi, "Left Parties, Poor Voters, and Electoral Participation in Advanced Industrial Societies," *Comparative Political Studies* 45(2012): 715.

as the CDU or Social Democratic Party (SPD).[2] Therefore, newer parties could change policies more easily in order to become more palatable in the current political environment, which has made the far right more attractive to some voters.

The taboos in German politics constrain all parties. A formal taboo exists against neo-Nazism in Germany; to promote National Socialism is outlawed under Section 86 of the German Criminal Code.[3] This has bled over into a social taboo against working together with far right parties, even if they operate within the law. On the left, a similar social taboo exists concerning the Left Party because it is the successor to the East German Social Unity Party (SED).[4] Both of these taboos exist due to ideologies that have spawned dictatorships in Germany in the past. However, this taboo has become less and less relevant on the left as the Left Party has emerged from its isolation after significant internal reforms. The popularity of the Left Party and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has the potential to upend the political balance in Germany in the near future.

The taboos in German politics are related to larger taboos within European politics. Parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) have also experienced recent popularity despite their pariah status among the

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[2] Russell J. Dalton and Ian McAllister, "Random Walk or Planned Excursion? Continuity and Change in the Left-Right Positions of Political Parties," *Comparative Political Studies* 48(2015): 763.
[3] "Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB)," German Law Archive, accessed June 4, 2016, http://germanlawarchive.iuscomp.org/?p=752#86.
[4] Gerhard Spörl, "Der alte Schwefelgeruch," *Der Speigel*, December 1, 2014, https://magazin.spiegel.de/digital/?utm_source=spon&utm_campaign=centerpage#SP/2014/49/130630554.

political elite.[5] The FPÖ's Norbert Hofer came extraordinarily close to being elected president of Austria, which shows large-scale dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the mainstream party system.[6] Other countries, including the United Kingdom, Greece, Poland, and France, have also seen similar reactions to the political status quo.[7] Poland's leadership is increasingly autocratic.[8] The French National Front saw electoral gains following terrorist attacks.[9] Germany is but one example among many of how right-wing populism has become popular despite its taboo in contemporary Europe.

To research and write this multidisciplinary thesis, I relied on articles from popular news sources in both English and German as well as academic articles about the history of German political parties and political party theory. I also used economics to look at the current state of Germany as a whole. Statistical analysis was helpful in building charts and analyzing voter demographic information.

The first chapter looks at the current political situation in Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU/SPD coalition, including the current composition of state governments and the results of the state elections in the first quarter of 2016. The current situation is important in the long term as left-

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[5] Benjamin Cunningham, "Austrian Answers," *The Slovak Spectator*, May 27, 2016, http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20174498/austrian-answers.html.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Tim Wigmore, "Why are right wing parties thriving across Europe?," *New Statesman*, October 8, 2015, http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/observations/2015/10/why-are-right-wing-parties-thriving-across-europe.
[8] Jan Puhl, "A Polish Putin: Autocratic Power Grab Accelerates in Warsaw," *Der Spiegel*, March 30, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/poland-government-tightens-grip-on-power-a-1084499.html.
[9] Adam Chandler, "Le Pen Will Be Mightier," *The Atlantic*, December 14, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/marine-le-pen-front-national-france/420348/.

wing parties' reactions to current politics will dictate future voter opinion. The AfD has already impacted the politics of the CDU and its often strained relationship with the CSU in its attempt to pull German politics further to the right.

The second chapter looks at the current politics of the SPD and Alliance90/the Greens (the Greens). The two parties share views on many left-wing issues like climate change and education, but current topics such as the refugee crisis demonstrate the continuing differences between the two. The SPD's place in German politics, although never far from power, is currently experiencing a crisis due to the left-leaning policy choices the CDU has been making. The CDU has become left of center on several issues by accepting refugees and working to eliminate nuclear energy, which I argue makes it difficult for the SPD to carve out a unique space for itself in German politics because of competition both to the ideological right and left.

The final chapter analyzes the left-wing coalition government in the German state of Thuringia. The Left Party in the state of Thuringia is the senior partner in a coalition with the SPD and the Greens, which is historic because it is the first time the Left Party has led a state government in the Federal Republic. This also unites all three left of center parties. Thuringia is the case study within this paper because the Left Party is the senior coalition partner. The taboo surrounding the Left Party in German politics due to its past as the East German party-state is another reason why this government is important for contemporary analysis. This party has overcome its past to be begrudgingly

accepted into the circle of standard political parties in Germany. Every party must start somewhere, and the Left Party's place in the background over the past twenty-five years shows that this is not just a flash of populism which other parties such as the AfD are experiencing currently. On the contrary, the Left Party is slowly paying its dues to the political establishment even as the party retains some of its left-wing populist roots.

Chapter 1: Angela Merkel's Germany

After ten years of leadership by Germany's center right party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), doubts are emerging among the public about the effectiveness of this government and especially about Chancellor Angela Merkel's leadership. The vulnerability that Merkel and the CDU are facing is defined as the likelihood of the CDU losing substantial amounts of support among the German people. This loss of support could result in a non-CDU federal government being formed. Vulnerability also includes the significant divide that is reemerging between the CDU and the CSU. The critiques of Merkel and the perceived vulnerability of her party's place are exacerbated by strife within the CDU and the ruling "Grand Coalition" between the CDU and Social Democratic Party (SPD). This situation has been seized upon by the press and has the potential to cause the CDU to lose power in Germany in the upcoming federal elections of 2017.

Some analysts have already begun to imagine alternatives to this government with left- and right-coalitions, given the rise of those further to the right of the CDU as well as the role of the Left Party on the state level. Out of those to the right of the CDU, the populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the major new player in German politics. This party has experienced rapid growth over its short history, although it suffers from the taboo that the CDU has against working with those further to the right. The idea of the taboo in German politics has constrained the possible coalitions thus far; however, there is always the potential for these taboos to be broken, especially on the left.

Although Merkel's government is not as vulnerable as the media make it appear to be, a left-wing coalition could still capitalize upon the changes in German politics in order to gain more votes.

History of the CDU

The German Christian Democratic Party has its roots in the postwar European Christian Democratic movement.[10] This movement is important to understand because of its overall stability over the history of the Federal Republic, which makes any vulnerability even more significant than if the CDU were a new player in German politics. Many parties, including the CDU, were founded immediately following World War II in order to preserve conservative Christian values. The CDU also functioned as a more moderate conservative party as the far right was a pariah that was legally outlawed from existing in Germany, which served to fuel a taboo against working with far right parties that are not outright prohibited.[11]

The CDU's Bavarian sister party, the CSU, was founded by like-minded Bavarians during this time due to special regional issues in the large southern state of Bavaria.[12] The two parties began to work together in 1947 in a cooperation that continues today, although the two parties often disagree on issues that are of special interest to Bavarians.[13] This is in part due to Bavaria's wealth, especially in comparison to the new federal states that were once part

[10] "1945-1949: Gründungsphase der CDU," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.8753/.
[11] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 80.
[12] "Die 1940er," CSU, accessed January 16, 2016, http://www.csu.de/partei/geschichte/die-1940er/.
[13] "1945-1949: Gründungsphase," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

of East Germany, which results in very different priorities. The CSU and CDU have traditionally had some conflict, which is why the two parties have different leadership and never formed one unified party. In 1976, the CSU under Franz Josef Strauβ ended the partnership between the two parties until Helmut Kohl's CDU began to make plans to campaign in Bavaria, which threatened the CSU's regional power and motivated the party to reenter the union.[14] This means that today's Merkel/Horst Seehofer feud can be read as just another chapter in a long-running rivalry. The CDU/CSU disputes are an ordinary party of both parties' identities. On the federal level today, the CDU and CSU seats are both part of the CDU bloc. Despite the traditional closeness that the two parties share, in recent months the CSU has begun to operate more independently of the CDU, which shows an important vulnerability within the German center right.

The coalitions that the CDU has built have involved parties that are both liberal and conservative. Their long-time liberal partners, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), have recently suffered a drop in poll numbers; as a result they presently have no seats in the German *Bundestag.*[15] The party was therefore forced to ally with the SPD since their center-right partners were no longer an

[14] "Kalender: 19. November 1976," Konrad-Adenauder-Stiftung, accessed April 8, 2016, http://www.kas.de/wf/de/191.502/.
[15] "Endgültiges Ergebnis der Bundestagwahl 2013," Der Bundeswahlleiter, accessed January 21, 2016, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/BTW_BUND_13/ergebnisse/bundesergebnisse/index.html.

option. Since 2013, the CDU is the only nominally conservative party in the *Bundestag*; the other three parliamentary parties are all left of center.[16]

Analysis of Previous Elections

Using information from previous election results, electoral issues, and political party theory can help to understand the political situation that allowed the CDU to be so successful in the past. Government changes in Germany would have an impact on European politics, which could also impact German-American and EU-American relations. This information can also help to determine the conditions under which the CDU won a majority on the federal level, which can also help to inform views on the stability of the current government.

One important topic of note in previous elections that may be changing in the future is the political taboo among German political parties. The taboos are, with one exception, extralegal social barriers to working with certain parties due to their history or policy positions. The exception to this is the legal barrier to promoting National Socialism, with which the National Democratic Party (NPD) is currently battling.[17] The political taboo largely affects fringe parties without electoral power, although two large parties on the left and right are also harmed by this taboo. The Left Party faces considerable opposition from the CDU and SPD as it is the successor party to the East German Social Unity Party. Although the SPD has allowed its local and state branches to decide

[16] "Deutscher Bundestag – Fraktionen," Deutscher Bundestag, accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/fraktionen.
[17] "Germany's top court mulls banning extreme NPD," Deutsche Welle, March 1, 2016, http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-top-court-mulls-banning-extremist-npd/a-19083756.

individually whether or not to work with the Left Party, the national branch has not worked with the Left Party to date, despite statements that claim the party is open to ending this taboo.[18] The AfD, on the other hand, faces a taboo from every other parliamentary party due to their extreme right-wing positions on the European Union and the refugee crisis. This taboo has forced unlikely coalitions on the state level, such as Saxony-Anhalt's CDU/SPD/Greens compromise, because the AfD is popular among the people even if it is not popular among Germany's party elite.[19]

The last federal election in Germany took place on September 22, 2013. Since this election took place before the refugee crisis began, there are limits to how much it can inform us concerning current voter attitudes. However, the demographic information about these voters can be helpful to a certain extent in determining the potential electorate for the next elections, especially when combined with more contemporary polls of voter sentiment.

The continuing East-West difference in voting trends is one of the biggest takeaways from the most recent federal voting data when one looks at the second vote. The first vote in this election was for a candidate for Chancellor; the second was a vote for a political party. Since the popularity of Chancellor Merkel resulted in many non-CDU members casting their first vote for her, the party voter data is of more use in this case. The population of

[18] Severin Weiland, "Koalitionsfrage 2017: Gabriels gewagter Coup," *Der Spiegel,* November 12, 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kommentar-spd-koalition-mit-der-linken-soll-kein-tabu-mehr-sein-a-933203.html.
[19] Jacob Alexander, "Coalition government in Saxony-Anhalt to exclude AfD," Deutsche Welle, April 19, 2016, http://www.dw.com/en/coalition-government-in-saxony-anhalt-to-exclude-afd/a-19199791.

eastern Germany remains much smaller than that of the western part of the country, with 28,575,572 fewer voters in 2013.[20] Therefore, the region's much larger support for the Left Party (22.7% as opposed to 5.6% in western Germany) is less influential on the national stage.[21]

The CDU is popular in all areas of the country. The party, along with the CSU, received 41.5% of the overall vote, although this support was slightly weaker in the East than in the West.[22] However, Merkel was popular across several parties; the majority of CDU, FDP, and AfD supporters believed she would be the best choice for chancellor. Surprisingly, 43% of Left Party supporters found Merkel a better choice than the SPD candidate, Peer Steinbrück. However, the majority of Left Party members voted for the Left Party candidate, Gregor Gysi, even though his odds of winning were slim.[23]

Previous Electoral Issues

The election of 2013 had different issues at the forefront than an election held today would. The Left Party campaigned on a platform aimed at reforming the "discriminatory Hartz IV" welfare laws and expanded educational opportunities for the young, as well as hanging signs that said "The East Votes Red. Understand?"[24] The Hartz welfare reform laws cut benefits for the

[20] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Bundestagswahl: Eine Analyse der Wahl vom 22. September 2013* (Mannheim: Institut für Wahlanalysen und Gesellschaftsbeobachtung, 2013), 9.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Bundestagswahl,* 25.
[24] Gregor Gysi, *100% Sozial: Wahlzeiting zur Bundestagswahl am 22. September 2013,* Die Linke, [2013], 2.

unemployed and are extremely unpopular in Germany.[25] This is important because the SPD was the senior partner in the ruling coalition that passed the Hartz IV welfare laws, making an attack against them an attack against the SPD. The SPD and CDU both campaigned on more complex platforms; both parties focused on social domestic issues, such as education and finance.[26] To the right of center, electoral strategies took a more nationalistic form, with the NPD and AfD both campaigning against the European Union and migration into Germany.[27] Finally, the FDP, which could be seen as the big loser in this election as they lost their parliamentary status, campaigned on a platform of job creation as well as a promise to work against higher taxes.[28] The takeaway from electoral promises made in 2013 is that migration had already become an issue for members of the AfD and neo-Nazi NPD, but it had not yet become a mainstream issue. Domestic issues clearly trumped concerns over European integration and non-ethnic German influence on German society for the majority of voters.

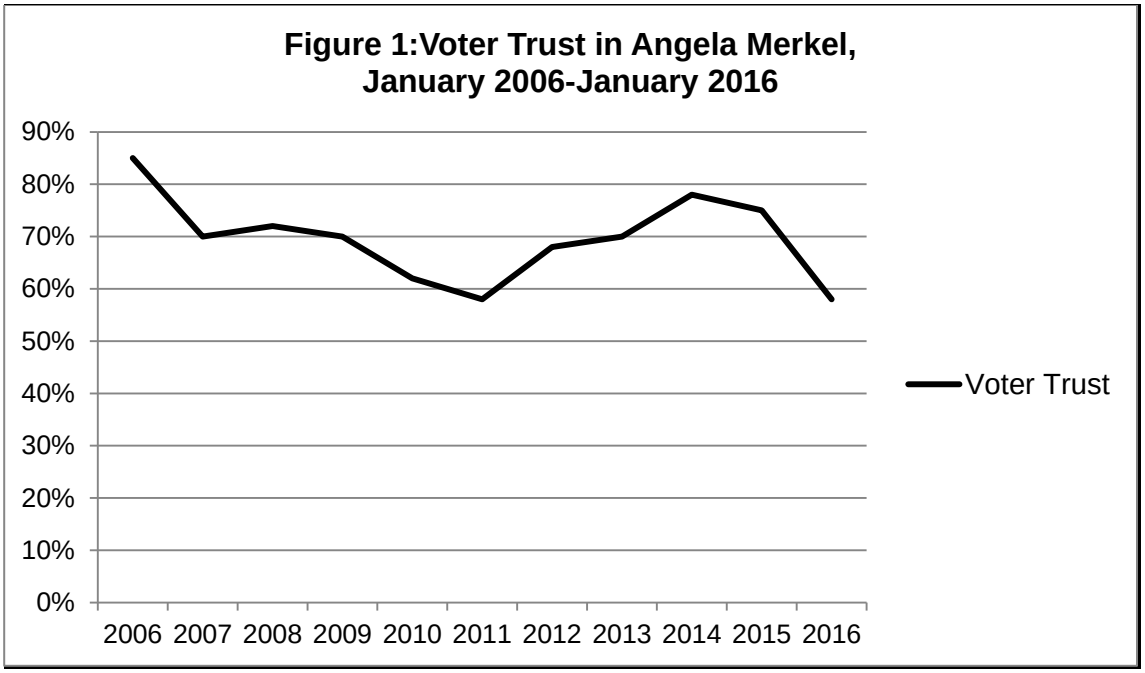
Recent Polls

The aforementioned migration and refugee issues have become a large political issue in Germany. A poll taken by German state broadcaster ARD in February 2016 shows that 81% of Germans believe that the federal government

[25] Ben Knight, "The much-hated Hartz IV," Deutsche Welle, February 9, 2010, http://www.dw.com/en/the-much-hated-hartz-iv/a-5221558.
[26] *Das WIR entscheidet. Kurz und Klar: Was wir wollen*, SPD-Parteivorstand, [2013], 4.
[27] "Werden die zu stark, wirst du zu schwach," NPD Landesverband Thüringen, Eisenach, [2013].
[28] "Nur mit uns," FDP-Erfurt, Erfurt, [2013].

does not have the refugee situation under control.[29] The approval rating for the federal government has dropped 19 percentage points from 57% in July 2015 to 38% in February 2016.[30] The final evidence of public dissatisfaction with the current political situation comes from the results of the party poll. February poll results suggested that the Euroskeptic AfD would win 12% of the vote, becoming the third strongest party in the *Bundestag*.[31] By June 2016, the poll numbers showed the AfD within four percentage points of the SPD in popularity.[32] If the NPD becomes an outlawed party under German law, this percentage could grow a bit higher as NPD voters are likely to turn to the AfD as the next best conservative option, as evidenced by a recent campaign encouraging NPD voters to vote AfD.[33] This shows an initiative by the NPD to circumvent the actual taboo concerning the far right in German law. The likelihood of the AfD being accepted as a coalition partner by any of the other parties, however, remains doubtful due to the social taboo still associated with the far right.

[29] Ellen Ehni, "AfD würde drittstärkste Kraft," ARD, February 3, 2016, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend-475.html.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Dietmar Neuerer, "SPD-Linke trommeln für Linksbündnis," *Handelsblatt,* June 1, 2016, http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/bundestagswahl-2017-spd-linke-trommeln-fuer-linksbuendnis/13667082.html.
[33] Tilman Steffen, "NPD dient sich der AfD an," *Zeit Online*, March 7, 2016, http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-03/landtagswahlen-npd-afd-allianz-koalition-erststimme.



Source: Markus Feldenkirchen and René Pfister, "Egal wie es ausgeht…," *Der Spiegel*, January 23, 2016, 14-15.

Paths to Left-Wing Power

Although the current ruling coalition in Germany is a Grand Coalition between the SPD and CDU, this is not an optimal configuration for either party. Especially since the refugee crisis has soured, there has been tension between the two parties within the coalition; both would rather be the senior leader in a coalition with another party that would make for a less even split of power. Given that the CDU still remains popular relative to other German parties, even with the current disapproval of their actions, it could be difficult for the SPD to form a governing coalition on the federal level. However, this is not an impossible task; this has happened as recently as 1998-2004, when the SPD and Greens formed a governing coalition in Germany.[34]

Theory

[34] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, e.V., *Bundestagswahl,* 72.

The literature on coalition formation and voting for left-wing parties indicates that certain types of voters are more likely to vote for a left-wing party under certain conditions. Germany's hybrid system, which combines a nominal and proportional system of voting, also contributes to voter turnout and voter strategy.[35] Since voters are allowed to vote for a candidate and a party separately, the two may not always come from the same party. Additionally, the mandate system means that the total number of seats, and therefore the number of seats needed for a majority, can shift from election to election. Since reunification, the total number of seats has fluctuated between 603 and 672.[36]

Left-wing parties are typically more likely to win low-income voters in conditions of competition on the left.[37] This means that the three left-wing parties in Germany could win more votes due to their competition. However, this also means that the parties could split the votes for Chancellor, which could work to the CDU's benefit since the right is more unified electorally. The hybrid system means that theories and strategies that apply to one system of voting do not necessarily apply to the other.

Additionally, the theory posits that the politics of a newer party are more easily changed than that of an established party such as the CDU or SPD.[38] The Greens and the Left Party are more likely to change their positions because they do not have as large of an established party base. This could

[35] Audrey Andre, Sam Depauw, and Shane Martin, "Electoral Systems and Legislators' Constituency Effort: The Mediating Effect of Electoral Vulnerability," *Comparative Political Studies* 48(2015): 473.
[36] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Bundestagswahl,* 70.
[37] Anderson and Beramendi, "Left Parties, Poor Voters, and Electoral Participation in Advanced Industrial Societies," 715.
[38] Dalton and McAllister, "Random Walk or Planned Excursion? Continuity and Change in the Left-Right Positions of Political Parties," 772.

have implications for a potential SPD/Left Party/Green government since the SPD has established itself as being against the Left Party due to that party's past. However, this theory does not guarantee inflexibility over time.

The idea of a minimal winning coalition also helps to explain some partnerships. This theory states that a party will look to form a government with the minimum number of parties possible to form a majority.[39] Additionally, a party with a relatively large percentage of the vote will work with a smaller party over a larger party in order to retain more power for itself. Minimal connected winning coalition theory takes this idea a step further to postulate that a party will work with an ideologically similar party out of all the options that comply with minimal winning coalition theory.[40]

Contemporary Discussion of Merkel's Leadership

Refugee Crisis

Contemporary discussion of German policy in the press has been focused on a few areas. The refugee crisis, terrorism, and the economy have dominated discussion, with implications for state governments and the federal coalition. The refugee crisis is of extraordinary importance in German politics today. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are currently living all over Germany, in conditions ranging from homes to temporary living quarters set up in an abandoned airport. As this crisis stretches on with no end in sight, many have come to doubt Chancellor Merkel's assertion that "*wir schaffen das"* ("we can do

[39] Christoph Steinert and Nikoleta Yordanova, "'Alliance with the Enemy': Why the CDU and the Greens Formed Their First Coalition in a Large German Federal States," *German Politics* 25 (2016), 56.
[40] Ibid.

it"). A few specific instances of crime by refugees have helped to fuel a reactionary movement against refugees in Germany.[41]

Both the German government and the German people's original reaction to the large number of refugees from the Middle East was to welcome them with open arms. Although there were always those on the fringe who did not want these people to live in their country, this view was originally limited to those on the far right, who launched attacks against refugee homes and were extremely outspoken on the internet.[42] Groups such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West) and their imitators were central to this movement, which was originally only embraced by a minority. However, Germany's open approach to refugee management was already starting to change by New Year's Eve 2015.

Germany was rocked by a series of attacks by those alleged to be refugees on New Year's Eve in several German cities, most notably Cologne. Large groups, mostly composed of men, surrounded the main train station in Cologne and attacked those who tried to enter the building.[43] These attacks raised questions about the refugee vetting process as well as the integration of refugees into German life. Following these attacks, 60 percent of Germans said that they doubted that their country could absorb the new refugee population.[44]

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[41] Marina Koren, "Angela Merkel's Response to New Year's Eve Assaults," *The Atlantic,* January 12, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/cologne-refugees-migrants-merkel/423708/.
[42] Anja Reschke, "Mund aufmachen, Haltung zeigen!," tagesschau, August 5, 2015, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/kommentar-fluechtlinge-101.html.
[43] Koren, "Angela Merkel's Response to the New Year's Eve Assaults."
[44] "Flüchtlingskrise: Mehrheit der Deutschen wendet sich gegen Merkel," *Der Spiegel,* January 15, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fluechtlinge-deutsche-wenden-sich-laut-umfrage-gegen-angela-merkel-a-1072192.html.

This marks the first time that the majority of those polled voiced doubts about the likelihood of the refugees becoming integrated into German society. This polling was accompanied by attacks from the right, including the Alternative for Germany (AfD), who called for Merkel to resign over the issue.[45] CSU leader Seehofer went even further by referring to Merkel's policies as "unjust," a word that is not often used outside of describing situations such as the East German dictatorship.[46]

The media has focused on Merkel's response to the refugee crisis over all other issues since mid-2015. *Der Spiegel* posited that this was the first time that Merkel was truly fighting for her beliefs instead of "merkeling" her way to a decision, saying that "now the German people will meet the real Angela Merkel."[47] Merkel herself points to the refugee crisis as an example of people in need that a Christian party cannot ignore, although others in her party do not agree with this philosophy.[48] This rift, from the beginning of the refugee crisis seen between Merkel and finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, has since extended to other members of the party including many members of the CSU as the old rivalry between the two center-right parties has flared up yet again.

The reliance of the successful refugee policy on the cooperation of other EU countries as well as Turkey is another controversial subject in the press. Negative views of this policy, especially concerning Turkey and its leader

[45] Guy Chazan, "Migrant crisis fuels AfD's political ambitions in Germany," *Financial Times*, February 23, 2016, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3300b2b4-db07-11e5-9ba8-3abc1e7247e4.html#axzz44ViO4zw3.
[46] Philip Oltermann, "Bavarian leader lashes out at Merkel's handling of refugee crisis," *The Guardian*, February 10, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/10/bavarian-leader-horst-seehofer-lashes-out-merkels-handling-refugee-crisis.
[47] Feldenkirchen and Pfister, "Egal wie es ausgeht…," 14.
[48] Ibid.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, are common among conservative publications.[49] The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* points out that Merkel cannot successfully implement her policy while relying on undemocratic leaders such as Erdoğan and the belief that EU countries will follow Germany's lead no matter what. As a more conservative publication, this publication is already skeptical of European integration, even if it allows Germany to expand its regional authority, due to such situations as the country is encountering at present.

The EU summit in March 2016 was another important point in refugee policy. *Der Spiegel* lamented that Merkel "had no more partners" in her refugee policy, and invoked the controversial *Sonderweg* theory to describe Germany's special path that led to this refugee response.[50] At the same time, Merkel's policy was receiving praise from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon as being the "voice of morality" in Europe today.[51] Despite this praise, the CSU took the EU summit as an opportunity to further criticize Merkel's refugee policy and the deal with Turkey agreed upon.[52] Overall, the EU summit was an opportunity for all sides to try to increase their popularity while striving to come to a solution to this problem. The main source of strife was over the proper method of combating the refugee crisis and Syrian conflict, especially concerning the

[49] Berthold Kohler, "Die Schwachstellen in Merkels Formel," *Frankfurter Allgemeine,* March 1, 2016, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/fluechtlingspolitik-die-schwachstellen-in-merkels-formel-14097709.html.
[50] Diemar Riemer, "Merkel hat keine Partner mehr," tagesschau, March 8, 2016, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/merkel-1063.html.
[51] "UN-Chef lobt Merkel as "Stimmung der Moral schlechthin," *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* March 8, 2016, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/pressekonferenz-in-berlin-un-chef-lobt-merkel-als-stimme-der-moral-schlechthin-1.2896986.
[52] "CSU kündigt Widerstand gegen Türkei-Deal an," *Zeit Online*, March 8, 2016, http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-03/eu-gipfel-fluechtlinge-tuerkei-eu-angela-merkel-reaktionen.

proper balance between preserving the well-being of one's own citizens and protecting human rights.

Terrorism

Terrorism has become a greater concern in Germany following the attacks in Paris in November 2015, especially since one of the attacks was planned for a soccer match between Germany and France.[53] Although original concerns that those attacks were carried out by refugees proved to be unfounded, Germans remain concerned that some of the refugees may try to carry out attacks while in Germany.

The amount of concern over terrorism in Germany is clear through the country's recent actions, which include calling off a soccer game in Hannover shortly following the Paris attacks. The German Interior Minister, Thomas de Maizière, said that the reason for this action would "greatly unsettle the population," a statement that was greatly ridiculed throughout Germany.[54] *Der Spiegel* points out that few answers could have unsettled the population more than de Maizière's refusal to answer questions, although the magazine theorizes that the information must have been of a sort that would have caused a large magnitude of outrage in society.[55] Additionally, the German spy agency has received over one hundred tips that some of the refugees are, in fact,

[53] "France game with Germany overshadowed by Paris attacks," *The Guardian*, November 13, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/nov/13/france-germany-friendly-match-report.
[54] Stefan Kuzmany, "De Maizières Spielabsage: Was wir nicht wissen wollen," *Der Spiegel,* November 18, 2015, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/de-maiziere-zu-laenderspiel-absage-wuerde-die-bevoelkerung-verunsichern-a-1063439.html.
[55] Ibid.

Islamic State militants.[56] Whether or not these tips are related to actual attacks, the fact remains that Germans are much more concerned about terrorism happening within Germany than they were before the wave of refugees entered the country in 2015. This, coupled with uncertainty that the CDU-led coalition government is dealing with this threat in the best way, results in more vulnerability for Angela Merkel's government.

Economy

The German economy, despite a few recent high-level scandals, remains strong. The GDP grew in 2015 while unemployment reached record lows.[57] Since the economy and especially unemployment are always a concern for voters, the strong economy shows that despite turmoil in other areas of German governance, this may not be used as a bone of contention in next year's federal elections and this year's state elections. However, this means that the economic strength of individual states can be credited to the state governments, many of which are not CDU-led coalitions.

Another area where refugee policy intersects with the economy besides the practical side of taking care of those refugees within Germany comes in the form of foreign aid. Germany provides half the funds for the daily rations for

[56] Caroline Copley, "German spy agency says ISIS sending fighters disguised as refugees," Reuters, February 5, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-idUSKCN0VE0XL.
[57] Jana Randow, "German economy defied 2015 global slowdown as growth accelerated," Bloomberg, January 14, 2016, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-14/german-economy-defied-2015-global-slowdown-as-growth-accelerated.

Syrians in the Middle East; additionally, the European Union agreed on monetary assistance to Turkey in exchange for taking back some refugees.[58]

State Governments

These issues, although most important on the federal level, can also have implications for state politics. Although the CDU dominates the federal government, on the state level, coalitions that are not led by the CDU are fairly common. Thuringia, although unique in having a Left Party-led coalition government that will be discussed in the next chapter, is not the only state to have a non-CDU government at this time. However, the only other state with the Left Party in any sort of role is Brandenburg. The Left Party's past as the Social Unity Party makes it appear to be an anti-democratic government based on a dictatorship to many German voters, especially in western Germany, despite that party's reforms since 1989. Although the Left Party's shaky claims to legitimacy prevent it from having power in most state governments, other states have formed left-wing coalitions between the Greens and the SPD.

[58] "Entwicklungshilfe, Klimapolitik: Merkel fordert mehr Engagement in aller Welt," *Der Spiegel*, March 2, 2106, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/angela-merkel-deutschland-muss-sich-mehr-in-der-welt-engagieren-a-1080342.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter#ref=rss.

Figure 2: Map of Germany



Source: "Map of Germany with Cities and States," World Atlas Book, accessed April 28, 2016, http://www.worldatlasbook.com/germany/germany-political-map.html.

Including Thuringia and Brandenburg, nine of the sixteen federal states have a government comprised of left-wing coalitions without the help of the CDU.[59] Six of these coalitions are between the SPD and the Greens; Schleswig-Holstein has these two parties and a regional party in their coalition. Additionally, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania have grand coalitions at the state level where the SPD is the senior partner.[60] This leaves five states

[59] "Mitglieder des Bundesrates," Bundesrat, accessed February 4, 2016, http://www.bundesrat.de/SiteGlobals/Forms/Suche/Mitglieder/Mitglieder-Formular.html?resourceId =4650646&input_=4353230&pageLocale=de&m_search=linke&submit=Suchen.
[60] Ibid.

where the right is in control, including the large and rich state of Bavaria, where the CSU has enough seats to rule without a coalition.

Although the Thuringian governmental coalition was a source of controversy in Germany due to the Left Party's senior role, most state governments are run by a left-wing coalition. The Greens took the senior role in Baden-Württemberg in elections in March 2016, where the CDU and SPD took losses due to the rise of the AfD as well as a loss of esteem for the CDU.[61] In Rhineland-Palatinate, the CDU took losses while the SPD finished in first place.[62] The majority of German states already have left-wing parties in their state governments, with the exception of Bavaria. This suggests that members of left-wing parties already have experience working in governments, which could be important if they wish to be successful on the federal level independent of the CDU.

Despite the CDU's dominance in German politics under Chancellor Merkel, this party has looked more vulnerable of late. The CSU is wavering in its devotion to the conservative bloc due to concerns about the refugee crisis and their recurring wish to impose tolls on the Autobahn.[63] The drama between CSU leader Horst Seehofer and the CDU on the issues of refugees and border controls has been so public that the media refers to it as a "soap opera."[64] The

[61] "Grüne Macht im Landle, SPD siegt in Mainz, AfD stark," tagesschau, March 13, 2016, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/landtagswahlen-147.html.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Björn Hengst, "Merkel bei der CSU in Kreuth: Was kümmern sie die Kritiker," *Der Spiegel,* January 20, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/angela-merkel-bei-der-csu-in-kreuth-die-standhafte-a-1073051.html.
[64] Severin Weiland. "Seehofer gegen Merkel: Dauerfeuer ohne Schlachtplan," *Der Spiegel*, January 27, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/csu-horst-seehofers-dauerkritik-schadet-den-cdu-wahlkaempfern-a-1074169.html.

drama between the two included a trip by Seehofer to Russia, where he met with Vladimir Putin, who currently is on the outs with Germany due to the ongoing occupation of Ukraine.[65] Seehofer also made remarks comparing Merkel's rule to the East German dictatorship.[66] This inter-party strife also affected state elections in March 2016, which saw the CDU weakened in all three states that voted because the party was showing a non-unified front, which can make voters doubt its competency.[67] Merkel has had to face criticism not only from the CSU, but also from members of her own party who wish to make Germany less open to asylum seekers, especially after the New Year's Eve attacks in Cologne.[68]

The March 2016 elections in Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saxony-Anhalt as well as elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Berlin later in the year mean that members of the CDU must decide whether or not to distance themselves from Merkel in an effort to gain more votes. In Rhineland-Palatinate, CDU gubernatorial candidate Julia Klöckner has distanced herself from Merkel with her plan, "Plan A2," which advocates CSU-style reforms for Rhineland-Palatinate.[69] The CDU in that state did not campaigning on the issues of migration or the refugee crisis because they

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[65] Sebastian Fischer, "Seehofer bei Putin: Das falsche Signal," *Der Spiegel*, February 4, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bayerischer-ministerpraesident-besucht-putin-seehofers-fehler-a-1075639.html.
[66] "Der Missverstandene," tagesschau, February 10, 2016, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/seehofer-merkel-129.html.
[67] "Grüne Macht im Ländle," tagesschau.
[68] Severin Weiland. "Wien beschließt Obergrenze für Flüchtlinge: Es wird einsam um Merkel," *Der Spiegel*, January 20, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fluechtlinge-oesterreich-macht-symbolpolitik-kommentar-a-1073011.html.
[69] Matthias Bartsch, Jan Friedmann, and Steffen Winter. "Distanzieren oder verlieren." *Der Spiegel*, January 30, 2016, 49.

wanted to avoid being tainted by the CDU's national refugee policy.[70] This sort of action is being taken in several states; it had a chance of succeeding because German voters often view the state and national party organizations as different bodies. This campaign was ultimately somewhat successful; the CDU finished in second place in Rhineland-Palatinate, but the party lost 3% of the vote in comparison to the previous election.[71]

Those who wish to see a more conservative Germany have taken to the streets in protest. This sort of protest movement has been quite popular since the end of 2014, when Pegida began to organize weekly protests in Dresden.[72] This group and similar groups throughout Germany protest against migrants in Europe; several of its leaders have been forced to resign after ties to neo-Nazi groups emerged.[73] These groups demonstrate with slogans such as "Away with criminal foreigners!" and "Honor killings don't belong in Germany!"[74] The conservative populist AfD party has also become more popular among some conservative Germans following its founding in 2013, partly as a reaction to Merkel's moderate stances.[75]

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[70] Ibid.
[71] "Grüne Macht im Ländle," tagesschau.
[72] Ingo Schulze, "Pegida: Germany's useful idiots," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/01/pegida-germanys-useful-idiots/.
[73] A.K. "Where Pegida came from and where it is going," *The Economist*, February 23, 2015, http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/02/economist-explains-20.
[74] "5. PEGIDA Dreiländereck AU/CH/D in Schwenningen, Schwarzwald," PEGIDA, April 6, 2015, https://pegidaoffiziell.wordpress.com/2015/04/06/5-pegida-dreilandereck-auchd-in-schwenningen-schwarzwald/.
[75] Nikolaus Blome, "Merkel's right-wing temptation," Politico, January 5, 2016, http://www.politico.eu/article/merkel-tempted-alternative-deutschland-opposition-far-right-elections-refugees/.

Municipal elections in cities across the state of Hesse showed that the AfD has gained a greater share of the voters than previously expected.[76] The party gained 13.2% of the votes state-wide, making it the third-largest party in the state. This is a potential problem for coalition building in Hesse because no party will form a coalition with the Euroskeptic AfD at this time. The party also received 24% of the vote in Saxony-Anhalt's state election, which made it the second-strongest party after the CDU.[77] *Der Spiegel* refers to the party's triumph as "a sign of how wounded our democracy is."[78]

Reactions to Merkel's slow decision making style have also escalated as of late. The German response to the ongoing refugee crisis had been slowly shifting before January 2016, but took a sharp turn after the New Year's Eve attacks in Cologne. As other countries have made decisions concerning their borders and allowing new asylum seekers into the country quickly, Germans have become less patient with the sluggish response that their government is formulating. Merkel did quickly address some of the country's concerns by putting forth measures that would allow refugees and asylum seekers to be deported for some crimes. This is different from the country's previous laws that made it extremely difficult to deport refugees who had been convicted of crimes because it was previously thought that the danger involved in returning to a land of persecution was far greater than the ill caused by the crime.[79] From intraparty

[76] Michael Schlieben, "Sieg der Protestwähler," *Zeit Online*, March 7, 2016, http://www.zeit.de/politik/2016-03/hessen-kommunalwahl-afd-erfolg.
[77] "Grüne Macht im Landle," tagesschau.
[78] Jakob Augstein, "Erfolg der AfD: Die verwundete Demokratie," *Der Spiegel*, March 7, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-erfolg-der-rechten-versagen-der-etablierten-augstein-kolumne-a-1080978.html.
[79] Marina Koren, "Angela Merkel's Response to the New Year's Eve Assaults."

struggles to outside criticism, Merkel's CDU is facing perhaps its largest challenge to date.

Coalition Struggles

The CSU's current policies are pulling away from those of the CDU. This is in part motivated by fears that Merkel's policies will draw support away from the CSU in Bavaria and towards the AfD.[80] This could end the era of single-party rule by the CSU in Bavaria, which the government there is loath to see end. In order to prevent this from occurring, CSU leader Horst Seehofer is refusing to take a solid stance critical of Merkel's current policies. When asked if his party would support Merkel for Chancellor if she continued her current course of action, he responded by saying, "Next question."[81] The Bavarian *Süddeutsche Zeitung* took this as a sign that the coalition between the CDU and CSU is vulnerable.

The SPD and the CDU are the begrudging members of the Grand Coalition. This has become more and more controversial as the CDU becomes more conservative on the issue of refugee movement. Some within the SPD think the party should go along with the more conservative attitude of the CDU, while others believe that their place is to the left of the CDU no matter what. There are fears by some within the SPD that their party is becoming the midpoint between Angela Merkel and Horst Seehofer in this coalition, which is not a place where they want to be politically because it destroys their credibility as a moderate center-left party if the center-right party is espousing the exact

[80] Ralf Neukirch, "Ein Hauch von Strauβ," *Der Spiegel*, January 30, 2016, 41.
[81] Robert Roβmann, "Risse in der Koalition warden tiefer," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 28, 2016, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/koalition-nichts-gutes-nach-dem-maerz-1.2883477.

same policies.[82] Although some members of the SPD despair that Merkel has moved the CDU to a place left of center where the SPD wants to govern, others believe that they have an obligation to stay to the left of the CDU in order to pursue fair social policies.[83] This sort of coalition has greatly weakened the SPD; the *Tagesschau* deems the party well on its way to a "super disaster" due to a lack of self-awareness and earlier political mistakes.[84] The SPD's weak leadership is also deemed to be a fatal flaw that prevents the party from gaining greater power. Additionally, the SPD is associated with the current government, even though it is only the junior partner, which could do harm to the party come election time.

Uptick in Popularity

Although Merkel had been losing support in Germany, especially since the New Year's Eve assaults, her popularity has recently begun to climb again. This coincides with a drop in popularity for Bavarian Horst Seehofer, although many Germans still disagree with Merkel's government's refugee policy.[85] The SPD and its leader, Sigmar Gabriel, have also suffered a slight drop in popularity as German opinion returns to Merkel's side.[86] This marks an important turn-around for Merkel and the future of her party on the federal level. This is also due to the fading memory of New Year's Eve as new stories take

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[82] Sven Böll, Sarah Kempf, Horand Knaup, and Gordon Repinski. "Mal hü, mal hott." *Der Spiegel*, January 30, 2016, 42.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Wenke Börnsen, "Die Angst vor dem Montag dannach," *tagesschau*, March 8, 2016, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/spd-landtagswahlen-101.html
[85] "Merkel's approval ratings improve," Deutsche Welle, March 1, 2016, http://www.dw.com/en/merkels-approval-ratings-improve/a-19083943.
[86] "Die Popularität der Kanzlerin wächst wieder," *Zeit Online*, March 9, 2016, http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-03/angela-merkel-popularitaet-steigerung-umfrage.

over the media, especially as the threat of the far-right is foremost in German minds due to a court case that may see the far-right German National Party outlawed nationwide. The decline in Merkel's popularity may have been exaggerated by the media, who stand to benefit from a long national conversation over Merkel and the CDU's ability to govern, so the uptick in popularity represents a return to the normal state of affairs. No matter what the reasons for the rise in popularity for Merkel, it may prove to be an important factor in the 2016 regional elections.

Conclusion

The CDU has been massively popular in Germany over the past ten years. However, various domestic and foreign policy situations have caused a great shift in German attitudes towards their government in the past year. The refugee crisis in particular is driving some German voters to the right, while others within the governing coalition are becoming less sure of Merkel's leadership.

Although the CDU appears to be more vulnerable now than it has over the past ten years, recent poll data that shows a rise in Angela Merkel's popularity is a sign that the party is not actually as vulnerable as the press makes it out to be. The political taboos in German politics are also important for the future of coalition-building. The Left Party is poised to emerge from their pariah status as the populist AfD works to differentiate itself from other parties by taking controversial positions. The Left Party as well as the CDU is seeing

some of their voters leave to support the AfD.[87] Voters who are dissatisfied with the way the government is handling the refugee crisis are, overall, moving further to the right, not to the left.

One political outcome that is often overlooked on the federal level is a left-wing coalition. The current uncertainty facing the political right could be a boon to those on the left, especially if the AfD continues to rise in popularity and take votes away from former CDU voters. Therefore, it is useful to look at the SPD and the Greens' place in contemporary German politics. In Thuringia, the left-wing has already taken advantage of the vote loss the AfD caused the CDU to form a broad coalition. The Left Party in particular is often cast aside when discussing federal German politics due to the political taboo, the Left Party's small size, and its past as the party-state in East Germany. However, this party has recently come to power as the senior partner in a coalition in the German state of Thuringia that could serve as a model nationwide.

[87] Melanie Amann, et al. "Im Schützengraben," 20.

Chapter 2: The SPD and the Greens

The German Social Democratic Party and Alliance '90/the Greens are the two major players in left-wing German politics. These parties have both been in power on the federal and state levels as partners. This chapter examines these parties, how they differ from one another, and how the two have reacted to ten years of CDU rule in Germany as part of this paper's attempt to analyze the current trends in left-wing German politics and to add to the argument that the left-wing in Germany can exploit the current situation to create a governing coalition.

A Short History of Both Parties

The SPD was founded in 1863. This makes it the oldest of the parties in modern Germany.[88] The SPD also made up the majority of left-wing votes cast on the national level in the last election.[89] Although it started as a left-wing populist movement, over time the party has become more centrist, which was one reason why the Greens organized into a separate party.[90] The SPD had its first taste of governing Germany from 1969-1983, although the party is much more accustomed to sitting in the opposition on the national level.[91]

[88] "23. Mai 1863 – Die Gründung der SPD," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, accessed May 12, 2016, http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.12335/.
[89] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Bundestagswahl,* 6.
[90] Helga Grebing, "Zur Programmgeschichte der Sozialdemokratie," in *Sozial Demokratie im 21. Jahrhundert: Lesebuch zur Programmdebatte der SPD*, ed. Kurt Beck and Hubertus Heil (Hg.) (Berlin: vorwärtz buch, 2007), 31.
[91] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Bundestagswahl,* 72.

The Greens only began to split from the SPD following World War II, a move that was formalized when the Greens creating their own party in 1980.[92] The founding of the Greens is important because it shows the ways in which the two parties differ and issues on which the parties disagree, most significantly on the importance of the environment and globalization in their electoral program. This split came as more and more members of the radical Left felt alienated from the more moderate SPD, especially as the German Communist Party (KPD) was discredited and surrounded by a taboo in the postwar period, removing the only path to power for the radical left in Germany.[93]

The Greens merged with East Germany's environmental party, Alliance90, in 1990 after German reunification to formally become Alliance90/The Greens.[94] The West German Greens saw reunification as a type of globalization and opposed it on ideological grounds. However, once reunification occurred the two parties merged to form one environmental party. Although the Greens were originally a hodgepodge of left-wing ideologies that were not being addressed by the SPD, the party has become more centrist over time.[95] Philip Oltermann from *The Guardian* says that in some states "the

[92] "35 Grüne Jahre in 35 Geschichten," BÜNDNIS90/DIE GRÜNEN Bundespartei, accessed June 2, 2016, https://www.gruene.de/ueber-uns/35-gruene-jahre-35-gruene-geschichten/35-gruene-jahre-1-gruendung-der-gruenen.html.
[93] Gayil Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties: From the Politics of Nature to Redefining the Nature of Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 53.
[94] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties*, 153.
[95] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties*, 169.

Greens have re-interpreted the environmental movement as a decidedly centrist project."[96]

The Greens are divided into two fundamental camps: the Realos and the Fundis. The Realos stand for progressive reform, while the Fundis are the "revolutionary" wing of the party which is much more dogmatic than the Realos.[97] Unlike in Marxist dogma, the revolution that the Fundis seek concerns the ecological crisis, not the idea of workers uniting.[98] Although the Fundis are not seeking a workers' revolution, they are still more Left radical than Realos, who are more moderate.[99] The split means that some are more open to compromising their beliefs in order to work towards change in a coalition, while others are firm in their core beliefs.

Practically, both the CDU and SPD denied that the Greens were a mainstay of German politics until the mid-1980s, when the political situation in Hesse called for an alliance between the Greens and the SPD.[100] The CDU continued to ignore the Greens until the Chernobyl disaster, which made the cause of ending nuclear power more important in German politics.[101]

The parties reached their joint peak national influence in 1998, when a red-green coalition ruled Germany. In 1998, both the Greens and the SPD

[96] Philip Oltermann, "How one German region is bucking the rightwing trend by going green," *The Guardian,* March 12, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/12/german-greens-bucking-rightwing-trend-baden-wurttemberg.
[97] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties*, 109.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties*, 113.
[101] Ibid.

focused on running a positive campaign.[102] The SPD in particular was careful to use sophisticated polling techniques throughout the election season in order to ensure that their message would resonate with a large number of voters. The campaign strategy also included the motto “new center” in order to try to pull voters away from the CDU. However, this resulted in a campaign that was not focused on concrete issues and campaign promises.[103] Despite this shortcoming in election techniques, the SPD won the largest percentage of seats in that election and formed a coalition with the Greens.

Differences in Policy

Although the Greens and the SPD take similar stances on some issues, such as the importance of reducing dependence on fossil fuels, on other issues the parties differ.[104] In some places, the Greens are more conservative than the SPD. In Germany, regional and local parties can differ from the national party’s views to a certain extent. Refugee politics have caused both parties to make interesting decisions. A prime example of this is in Baden-Württemberg, where the Greens have made themselves into a centrist party with support for big business and openly support Angela Merkel’s approach to the refugee crisis.[105] In Essen, the local SPD organization attempted to demonstrate against a new refugee housing center until the state and national party stepped in.[106]

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[102] Charles Lees, *The Red-Green coalition in Germany: Politics, personalities and power* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 94-95.
[103] Ibid.
[104] “Grüner Wirtschaften,” BÜNDNIS90/DIE GRÜNEN Bundespartei, Accessed May 13, 2016, https://www.gruene.de/themen/gruener-wirtschaften.html.
[105] Oltermann, “How one German region is bucking the rightwing trend by going green.”
[106] “Essen: SPD-Verbände organisieren Protest gegen Asylberwerberheime,” *Der Spiegel*, January 23, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fluechtlinge-spd-in-essen-will-fluechtlingsheime-blockieren-a-1073540.html/.

Ideologically, the Greens accepted communist-sympathizers at a time in the late twentieth century when communists and the radical left were not welcome in the SPD.[107] The ideology of ecosocialism, which combines regard for the environment with the idea of social transformation, is another important way that the SPD and Greens differ.[108] The people who would later create the Greens were also supporters of the student protests of 1968, which the SPD did not approve of despite their origins in the SPD's student organization, German Socialist Student Organization (SDS).[109] This organization was abolished in 1970, and student members were discouraged from joining the SPD proper.[110]

State Level Politics

The left wing is present in the majority of state-level governments. Although the SPD is the most common coalition leader, the Greens and Left Party lead one coalition government each. While both the Greens and SPD have been open to working with the CDU, the Green/CDU alliance in Baden-Württemberg has recently made news as Winfried Kretschmann, the first Green governor in Germany, was reelected in March 2016.[111]

The current government compositions show that the SPD, Greens, and Left Party are all more successful on the state level than on the national level at present. This points back to the theory that Germans view state and national branches of political parties as distinct entities; although they may support their

[107] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties*, 57.
[108] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties,* 60.
[109] Talshir, *The Political Ideology of Green Parties*, 53.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Oltermann, "How one German region is bucking the rightwing trend by going green."

local left-wing party, on the national level they still warm to Angela Merkel's CDU.

Table 1: Left-Wing Leadership in German Coalitions, May 2016

State	Coalition Government
Baden-Württemberg	Greens/CDU
Berlin	SPD/CDU
Brandenburg	SPD/Left Party
Bremen	SPD/Greens
Hamburg	SPD/Greens
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	SPD/CDU
Lower Saxony	SPD/Greens
North Rhine-Westphalia	SPD/Greens
Rhineland-Palatinate	SPD/FDP/Greens
Schleswig-Holstein	SPD/Greens/SSW*
Thuringia	Left Party/SPD/Greens

* SSW (South Schleswig Voters' Association) is a regional party representing Danish and Frisian interests.
Source: "Mitglieder des Bundesrates," Bundesrat.

National Politics

Both the SPD and the Greens have had experience in national governance, most recently from 1998-2005 for the Greens and at present for the SPD.[112] In the *Bundesrat*, both parties enjoy a high level of representation

[112] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, e.V., *Bundestagswahl,* 72.

because seats on this council are dependent on the composition of the state governments.

It is possible for the SPD to be the senior partner in a government that cannot be defined as a left-wing coalition. This has occurred in the past when the SPD partnered with the FDP from 1969-1983.[113] It is unlikely that this coalition would be repeated nationally in the near future, both due to the FDP's current weakness that prevents it from being seated in the *Bundestag* and a shift in both parties' politics that make such a coalition unlikely according to minimal connected winning coalition theory.[114]

Either the SPD or the Greens could form a winning coalition it the future. The Greens especially stand to gain from the loss of support for the SPD as well as the split in the right-wing vote that result from the AfD's recent success. This could pave the way for the Greens to leverage their success on the state level in a federal election, especially as their views are conservative on some topics but liberal on others.

A left-wing coalition would benefit from a strong, well-known leader who could bring out a variety of voters on election day. As the Left Party could not hope to gain a large enough vote share to name the Chancellor this must fall to the SPD or the Greens. This truth is acknowledged by Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht, who says that "no one expects that we can build a

[113] Ibid.
[114] Lees, *The Red-Green coalition in Germany,* 97-98.

coalition without a specific partnership."[115] In 2013, Left Party co-chairperson Bernd Riexinger spoke of the "obligation that the left of center parties have to participate in serious talks to promote social change."[116] Currently, the most likely candidate for the SPD in 2017 is current Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel.[117] His political experience makes him a decent choice for left-wing voters, although his involvement in the current government has the potential to hurt him in a national election. This decision is by no means final. The SPD's ongoing search for a chancellor candidate has been widely covered in German media, with *Der Spiegel* creating a facetious job ad for the position.[118]

One of the hurdles that would need to be overcome in order to form a left-wing coalition nationally would be the taboo within the SPD against working with the Left Party. Some progress has already been made on this front as the national SPD leadership has allowed state parties to decide individually whether or not to work with the Left Party. The official national taboo was vaguely denounced in 2013, but no actual action has come from this shift so far.[119] Since the left-wing government in Thuringia is going well, this could help to sway national leadership away from the national taboo to help bring their party to federal power. However, this may not be enough to keep the SPD from

[115] Günther Lachmann, "Rot-Rot-Grün im Bund? Die Linke hegt groβe Zweifel," *Die Welt,* March 30, 2015, http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article138903536/Rot-Rot-Gruen-im-Bund-Die-Linke-hegt-grosse-Zweifel.html.
[116] Bernd Gräβler, "Die (noch) unmögliche Koalition," Deutsche Welle, September 27, 2013, http://www.dw.com/de/die-noch-unm%C3%B6gliche-koalition/a-17115205.
[117] "Natürlich will ich Bundeskanzler werden," *Die Zeit*, October 28, 2015, http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2015-10/sigmar-gabriel-spd-kanzlerkandidat-bundestagswahl.
[118] Annett Meiritz and Philipp Wittrock, "SPD: Kanzlerkandidat dringend gesucht," *Der Spiegel*, May 17, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/spd-kanzlerkandidat-gesucht-a-1092673.html
[119] Weiland, "Koalitionsfrage 2017: Gabriels gewagter Coup."

working with the CDU or FDP over the Left Party, especially since the initial voter outcry in Thuringia was severe. The protests against the red-red-green government there were not directed at the Left Party; they were directed at the SPD with demonstrators who claimed that "we're not right-wingers. Most of us are SPD members."[120] In states of western Germany, working with the Left Party would be even harder than in Thuringia. The main draw for the SPD in this situation would be the opportunity to be much larger than their coalition partner, in line with minimal connected winning coalition theory.[121]

The SPD and the Greens are also dealing with issues of trust that have been ongoing since Gerhard Schröder was Chancellor from 1998-2005.[122] These issues stem from the Hartz welfare reforms and Agenda 2010, both of which cut social benefits as well as taxes in Germany.[123] As the SPD tends to focus on social electoral issues, this hurt their image as a social democratic party, and is an issue on which they are often attacked today as the reforms have been fairly unpopular. This is partly because the Hartz reforms were only expected to succeed if every aspect succeeded. The reforms promised new full-day schools and daycare, but when this did not go as planned, the cutting of unemployment benefits was seen as especially harmful.[124] These issues drove

[120] Ferdinand Otto, "Thüringen: Im Lodenmantel gegen Ramelow," *Der Spiegel,* December 4, 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/thueringen-demonstration-gegen-rot-rot-gruen-in-erfurt-a-1006710.html.
[121] Steinert and Yordanova, "'Alliance with the Enemy': Why the CDU and the Greens Formed Their First Coalition in a Large German Federal States," 56.
[122] Thorsten Denkler, "Fünf Gründe, warum die Lage der SPD so schwierig ist," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 4, 2016, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/spd-vor-den-wahlen-fuenf-gruende-warum-die-lage-der-spd-so-schwierig-ist-1.2892405.
[123] "A Quick Guide to 'Agenda 2010,'" Deutsche Welle, October 17, 2003, http://www.dw.com/en/a-quick-guide-to-agenda-2010/a-988374-1.
[124] Ludger Volmer, *Die Grünen* (München, C, Bertelsmann, 2009): 373.

a wedge between the SPD and the Left Party because of the Left Party strongly supports social programs and uses this against the SPD in each election cycle since the reforms passed.[125] Additionally, the SPD is present in most of the state governments, but has not been particularly successful in any one according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung.*[126] This means that even in places where the SPD candidate for governor may be extremely popular, the SPD still faces an uphill battle due to its record.

Relationship with the Left Party

The Left Party has a more complicated relationship with the SPD and the Greens than the two parties have with each other. Part of this is due to continuing east-west differences within Germany. The Left Party is traditionally a more eastern party while the Greens are more successful in western states despite efforts from both parties to reach across this boundary.

The taboo that the SPD still has on the national level to a certain extent is a hindrance to SPD-Left Party relations. The beginnings of this taboo being broken occurred in October 2000, when the Left Party's Bisky met with Chancellor Schröder to finalize a tax plan in the first meeting between the PDS and the SPD.[127] However, some of the SPD's younger members believe that the SPD's future lies with the left-wing instead of the CDU. Youth party chair Johanna Uekermann stated that the SPD "needs a red-red-green coalition. You

[125] Lachmann, "Rot-Rot-Grün im Bund? Die Linke hegt große Zweifel."
[126] Denkler, "Fünf Gründe, warum die Lage der SPD so schwierig ist."
[127] Jonathan Olsen, "The PDS after Gysi: A Report from the PDS Congress in Cottbus," *German Politics and Society* 19 (2001): 65.

can't have a social program with the CDU."[128] These views are shared by some in the SPD's higher ranks as well. Federal party vice chair Ralf Stegner has said that he would be willing to work with the Left Party, but "the Left Party must finally decide whether it wants to remain in the opposition…or make serious compromises and develop itself into a federal party."[129] Even the SPD chair Sigmar Gabriel showed the party's openness to breaking the taboo as early as 2013, when he stated that the SPD "would not eliminate any party on principle" from coalition talks in the future.[130] Gabriel's statement was taken as a vague promise meant to pacify the left wing of the SPD because it has not had the opportunity to be put into play yet. This promise also does not guarantee that the SPD membership will be open to such a coalition; a sort of "*Mauer im Kopf*" ("mental Berlin wall") may prevent SPD-Left Party cooperation.

The Magdeburg Model, in which a SPD-Green coalition was tolerated by the PDS, was in control in the state of Saxony-Anhalt from 1994-1998.[131] From 1998-2002 the SPD was only able to form a ruling coalition with direct support from the PDS.[132] However, this coalition was controversial at the time; the national SPD leadership condemned the state party for allowing a cooperation that was completely out of the question for them.[133] Since then, the SPD has mellowed in their views; the Thuringian coalition is not as controversial as the

[128] Neuerer, "SPD-Linke trommeln für Linksbündnis."
[129] Ibid.
[130] Weiland, "Koalitionsfrage 2017: Gabriels gewagter Coup."
[131] Ed Turner, *Political Parties and Public Policy in the German* Länder*: When Parties Matter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 170.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Jesse and Lang, *Die Linke – der smarte Extremismus einer deutschen Partei*, 148.

Magdeburg Model because it successfully demonstrated how a left-wing coalition could function.

An unsuccessful red-red-green coalition was discussed following state elections in Hesse in 2008.[134] Since neither the CDU nor the SPD had enough votes with its preferred coalition partner to form a government, the SPD began talks with the Hessian Left Party. This proved to be a poor choice because the SPD was unable to form a coalition; ultimately new elections were called and the SPD lost votes after trying to work with the Left Party. A similar situation occurred in Thuringia in 2009; red-red-green coalition talks were unable to produce a viable coalition, in part due to the SPD's national party discouraging such a coalition at that time.[135] Eventually, the CDU was successful in forming a coalition and the Left Party was placed in the opposition.

Reactions to CDU Power

In the western state of Baden-Württemberg, the Greens have thrown their support wholeheartedly behind Chancellor Merkel, who was accused of supporting a Green candidate in regional elections over the candidate from her own party.[136] This opens up the idea that the CDU and Greens could possibly work together in the future, as was discussed following the national election of 2005. The CDU has indicated that it would be willing to create such a coalition following the election of 2013.[137]

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[134] Silvia Bolgherini and Florian Grotz, "Multilevel Party Politics," in *Germany after the Grand Coalition: Governance and Politics in a Turbulent Environment*, ed. Silvia Bolgherini and Florian Grotz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 64.
[135] Willy Jou, "The 2009 Thuringia Landtagswahl: Exploring a New Coalition Formula," *German Politics* 19(2010): 222, http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.1080/09644001003774156.
[136] Oltermann, "How one German region is bucking the rightwing trend by going green."
[137] Weiland, "Koalitionsfrage 2017: Gabriels gewagter Coup."

The SPD has been losing support for quite some time, dropping to historic lows in May 2016, when German broadcaster ARD reported that public approval for the party stood at twenty percent.[138] The SPD, according to Deutsche Welle, is suffering because the CDU has moved into many center-left positions.[139] The SPD cannot respond by moving further left because that place is already occupied by the Greens and the Left Party. Such a move could also cause the SPD's centrist core to change its support. Even though the SPD is currently in the federal coalition government, it is still struggling with its identity and place in German politics more than any other party today.

Conclusion

The SPD and the Greens have become mainstays in German politics. Both parties, however, are more accustomed to sitting in the opposition on the national level than being in power. On the state level both parties have achieved much more success. Slipping SPD poll numbers could in the future lead to changes within the left-wing of German politics and indicates a current lack of confidence in the party among the public, which could lead to the Greens becoming more influential as well as finding these two parties in the need of Left Party support. However, the status of the parties at present leaves the SPD as the major leftist player on the national level with all three left-wing parties achieving some measure of success regionally.

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[138] Ellen Ehni, "SPD sackt ab auf 20 Prozent," ARD, May 4, 2016, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend-547.html.
[139] Ben Knight, "German analysts: Gabriel and SPD won't be lurching left," Deutsche Welle, May 13, 2016, http://www.dw.com/en/german-analysts-gabriel-and-spd-wont-be-lurching-left/a-19256958.

The Left Party's place in German politics is different than that of the other two parliamentary left-wing parties because it is much shorter, less experienced with power and more closely related to the history of the German Democratic Republic. The SPD and Greens are long-suffering players in German politics on every level; the Left Party is just beginning to rise above their small populist roots.

Chapter 3: Testfall Thüringen

Although Germany has been overwhelmingly led by the center left and center right since the end of World War II, in some cases other parties have had luck in being junior coalition partners as well as being the senior partner in one recent case. Due to continuing issues of trust with the Left Party in Germany, it was not possible for that party to lead a coalition beyond the local level until quite recently. In the Thuringian state elections in September 2014, the CDU won the largest number of seats in the state's parliament, but the party was unable to form a ruling coalition. This allowed the Left Party to form the first state-level governing coalition in that party's post-1989 history.[140] The election results and voter polls from this election can also help to determine whether Thuringian voter interests line up with overall German interest in a way that makes the results an acceptable case study for the Federal Republic. Although not without controversy, this coalition has since been in office for more than a year and has not confirmed naysayer fears that the party would attempt another dictatorship. Despite the unlikelihood of such an event occurring, members of the CDU including Angela Merkel were so upset at the prospect of a Left Party-led coalition that such fears were publically aired.[141] This leftist coalition, sometimes viewed as a model for future federal coalitions because the SPD

[140] Isabelle De Pommereau, "Stasi-linked party is back in power. Is Germany ready?," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 5, 2014, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/1205/Stasi-linked-party-is-back-in-power.-Is-Germany-ready.
[141] "Merkel wirft Thüringer SPD "Bankrotterfklärung vor," *Thüringer Allgemeine,* December 9, 2014, http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/startseite/detail/-/specific/Merkel-wirft-Thueringer-SPD-Bankrotterklaerung-vor-731289128.

and CDU's places in national politics have become less certain, has become known in the media as *Testfall Thüringen,* or Test Case Thuringia.

The formation of the left-wing coalition government in Thuringia was controversial not only locally, but on the national and international levels as well. The CDU in particular had many harsh words concerning this coalition. Others in left-wing parties and the media have postulated that the left-wing coalition is a model that could be altered to create a left-wing path to power on the national level in Germany.[142] This claim is supported by the Thuringian government's normal governance so far, which is serving to disappoint fears that the Left Party remained too radical to oversee the practical governance of a state.

The controversy over this coalition was not limited to German media, which both criticized and praised the Thuringian case. *Der Spiegel* pointed out that this was an historic event that would set the stage for future Left Party success if the coalition governed well.[143] The historic nature of the Left Party being the senior coalition partner brought international attention to Thuringian politics. *The Financial Times* deemed the East German government to be among the worst in Europe, but also allowed that the experiment could be good for German politics because it allows difference voices to be heard on the state level; the idea is that more parties being viable coalition partners increases civil discourse.[144] *The Times* was less sympathetic to the experiment, focusing on

[142] Spörl, "Der alte Schwefelgeruch."
[143] Ibid.
[144] "Germany's Left should be Brought in from the Cold," *Financial Times*, October 27, 2014, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1628110935?accountid=12964.

Thuringia's relative poverty and the unjust actions taken by the East German state as well as the criticism that German President Joachim Gauck had for the state government.[145] Overall, English language publications seemed wary of expecting too much from this coalition, although they acknowledge that cooperation between the SPD and the Left Party may be necessary to knock the CDU out of federal power. Regional German elections do not often make international news. This coalition was cause for attention due to the Left Party's senior status and for the wider implications it has for German politics.

This chapter will look at the case study of Thuringia as part of current German politics. I examine the specific policies that the Left Party-led coalition has pursued in order to determine that the Left Party can govern successfully within the political mainstream. The idea of a leftist coalition is not without precedence, with state governments having such coalitions in several cases, albeit without the Left Party. Such a government on the federal level could include a combination of the Left Party, the SPD, or the Greens, with a SPD/Green coalition being more likely than one involving the Left Party. In fact, a SPD/Green coalition was the governing national coalition from 1998-2005.[146] Despite a lack of experience in governing on the federal level, the Left Party is now twenty-five years removed from the Social Unity Party and East Germany, which makes it more viable now than ever before. This sets the Left Party apart from other small parties such as the AfD, which is more of a flash of populism

[145] David Charter, "East German communists back in power," *The Times*, November 5, 2014, http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4257748.ece.
[146] "Bundestagswahlen 1949-2009," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, accessed April 9, 2016, http://www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/bundestagswahlen/62559/bundestagswahlen-1949-2009.

than a long-term party with steady growth, among several differentiating factors. This could be vital in breaking the national taboo against working with the Left Party by other left-wig parties. I argue that Germany's left-wing parties could exploit the idea of the CDU being vulnerable under Angela Merkel in order to create a new federal government in 2017, an opportunity that the Left Party has not had since 1989.

The Left Party

The Left Party in Germany has had a long road from pariah status in the early 1990s to being a federal parliamentary party today that could potentially become part of a governing coalition. The party evolved from East Germany's SED to the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) after German reunification. The SED led the party-state dictatorship in East Germany which made its successors unappealing to voters in western Germany, despite the party's expulsion of hardline socialist in 1989.[147] Additionally, the original members of the PDS were those who opposed reunification because they wanted an opportunity to govern East Germany as an independent, democratic country, which further hurt their chances to grow in the western part of the country. Other members who were only involved in the SED for the benefits, including university educations for their children and job choice, left as soon as these benefits disappeared.[148] However, the idea of the PDS being the successor party to the SED implied that it was holding up the "tradition of the German workers' movement of the twentieth century, which continues to prioritize the

[147] Peter Thompson, *The Crisis of the German Left: the PDS, Stalinism and the Global Economy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 1.
[148] Ibid.

social over market freedom" in addition to the negative connotations.[149] Members grew disillusioned and left the party for others that had a better chance at actual political power. One of the effects this had on the Left Party was a series of reinventions that saw the SED change to the PDS and from the PDS to the Left Party.PDS to the modern-day Left Party.

By 2000, the party was in a state of turmoil as two of the party's leaders, Gregor Gysi and Lothar Bisky, resigned their posts.[150] Both men remained part of the PDS; Gysi remained a leading politician for the Left Party until late 2015.[151] In 2001, PDS chair Gabriele Zimmer apologized for the forced combination of the KPD and SPD to form the SED following World War II.[152] This is one in a series of steps the PDS took to set itself apart from the SED, which started when the PDS deleted mentions of Lenin and Marxism from their party platform in 1990.[153] This evolved as the PDS's 1993 program said "there were mistakes, wrong tracks, sins of omission, and even crimes" in East Germany.[154]

Electoral results for the PDS started out low and grew over time as the residents of eastern Germany adjusted to life in a democratic society and the differences that their new freedoms wrought in their lives.[155] Initial votes for

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[149] Thompson, *The Crisis of the German Left,* 93.
[150] Olsen, "The PDS after Gysi: A Report from the PDS Congress in Cottbus," 61.
[151] Ben Knight, "German leftist firebrand Gregor Gysi bids farewell to the Bundestag," Deutsche Welle, October 2, 2015, http://www.dw.com/en/german-leftist-firebrand-gregor-gysi-bids-farewell-to-the-bundestag/a-18758198.
[152] Jesse and Lang, *Die Linke – der smarte Extremisums einer deutschen Partei*, 61.
[153] David F. Patton, *Out of the East: From PDS to Left Party in Unified Germany* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 40.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Eckhard Jesse and Jürgen P. Lang, *Die Linke – der smarte Extremismus einer deutschen Partei* (München: Olzog Verlag GmbH, 2008), 123.

West German parties fell as the changes in East German lives became evident. Although the PDS was expected to fade away as the older generation in charge who opposed German reunification died, the party instead experienced a renaissance as it became popular with blue-collar workers in eastern Germany as well as former SPD members who felt that the party had moved too far to the right.[156] The SPD's move to become the "*neue Mitte"* ("new center") was beneficial to the PDS, although it was also beneficial for the SPD itself.[157] The shift to the center pushed some left-wing members of the SPD out of the party. Former SPD chairman Oskar Lafontaine left the party to form the Electoral Alternative for Labor and Social Justice (WASG).[158] The WASG was a party that remained loyal to more left-leaning social democratic policies.

Table 2: PDS Election Results

Year	Percentage of Vote
1990	2.3%
1994	4.1%
1998	4.9%
2002	4.3%
2005*	8%

* In 2005, the Left Party ran as Left Party.PDS in the federal election.
Source: "Results of the Bundestag Elections 1949-2013," Der Bundeswahlleiter, accessed May 9, 2016, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/.

[156] Patton, *Out of the East,* 8.
[157] Patton, *Out of the East*, 10.
[158] Steven Weldon and Andrea Nüsser, "Bundestag Election 2009," in *Between Left and Right: the 2009 Bundestag Elections and the Transformation of the German Party System,* ed. by Eric Langenbacher (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 72.

Die Linke, or the Left Party, was formed in 2007 from the PDS, which had the majority of its support in eastern Germany, and the WASG, which was based in western Germany.[159] Since the PDS was widely considered a regional party and was associated with the East German state, their electoral success was quickly outstripped by that of the Left Party. The Left Party was successful in elections on the state, national, and European levels throughout 2009 and became the largest party in the opposition to a grand coalition in Germany's *Bundestag* in 2013. This is especially significant for the Left Party because with ten percent of the seats in the *Bundestag,* their influence has increased enough to make them a viable coalition partner if a larger party comes only a few seats shy of a majority.[160] The proportional representation and two-vote system gave the Left Party 2% more seats in the final *Bundestag* than they received through direct election. However, the CDU and SPD have been unwilling to work with this group on the federal level thus far because of concerns among the population and the party leadership about their ability to govern fairly in a free society; CDU and SPD leadership is also worried about the ramifications from voters that could result from working with the Left Party.

[159] Patton, *Out of the East*, 125.
[160] "Deutscher Bundestag – Fraktionen," Deutscher Bundestag.

Table 3: Left Party Federal and European Election Results, 2009-2016

Year	Election	Percentage of Vote
2009	European Parliament	7.5%
2009	Federal Election	11.1%
2013	Federal Election	8.2%
2014	European Parliament	7.4%

Sources: "Results of the Bundestag Elections 1949-2013," Der Bundeswahlleiter. "Seats by Member State," European Parliament, accessed May 9, 2016, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-member-state-absolut.html.

The Election of 2014

In the German state of Thuringia, the Left Party had long been more popular than it was in states in western Germany. The PDS's lowest election result in the state was 9.7% of the vote in the first state elections following reunification in 1990, but by 2004, that percentage had increased to 26%.[161] Despite this, Thuringia had always been ruled by the CDU or a CDU-led coalition since the state was given back its administrative power following German reunification.[162] In the September 2014 elections, the Left Party received 28% of the vote, second only to the CDU.

The Left Party campaigned on a platform that was largely comprised of social issues, including more daycare facilities, better educational opportunities for young Thuringians, opposition to right-wing extremism, increased protection for refugees, and strengthening the economy by allowing for increased

[161] Jesse and Lang, *Die Linke – der smarte Extremismus einer deutschen Partei*, 123.
[162] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen: Eine Analyse der Landtagswahl vom 14. September 2014* (Mannheim: Institut für Wahlanalysen und Gesellschaftsbeobachtung, 2014), 56.

collective bargaining rights for employees as well as better regulation of government funds.[163] Some of these stances mirror official positions of the SED during the Cold War; however, positions including the equality of the sexes and universal daycare are no longer coupled with authoritarian rule and a one-party regime. Voters in this election listed work and education as the two most important issues to them; the Left Party as well as the other parties campaigned heavily surrounding these issues.[164]

These issues were important to the current events of the time; refugees had been trickling into Germany from Syria for over a year at that point, although the flood of refugees was still to come. The Left Party always campaigns on a platform of anti-right wing sentiment. In some elections, the anti-Nazi sentiment seems to overpower the actual policy positions that the party has, although in this case it can be argued that the right wing helped them come to power. The CDU was unable to form a majority government in part because the Alternative for Germany (AfD) received ten percent of the vote and eleven seats in the Thuringian state parliament.[165] The AfD is a relatively new party that is further to the right than the CDU; their campaign drew some votes away from the CDU and served to pull some CDU views a bit further to the right, which further hurt their appeal to more moderate voters. The CDU is also a bit more constrained than any of the parties on the left because it cannot

[163] "Thüringen sozial regieren," Die Linke Thüringen, September 11, 2014, http://www.die-linke.de/nc/die-linke/nachrichten/detail/browse/8/artikel/thueringen-sozial-regieren-kernprojekte-der-thueringer-linken-fuer-die-ersten-100-tage-einer-neu/.
[164] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen,* 7.
[165] "Wahlen in Thüringen," Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik, accessed January 22, 2016, http://www.wahlen.thueringen.de/datenbank/wahl1/wahl.asp?wahlart=LW&wJahr=2014&zeigeErg=Land.

easily form coalitions with the parties to its right in order to create a coalition without compromising some of its core beliefs and its historical stance towards extremism. Additionally, the CDU's preferred coalition partners of the Greens and the FDP do not always receive enough votes to form a coalition with the CDU; the FDP is currently not seated in the Thuringian parliament, while the Greens were unable to cobble together a coalition with the CDU following the previous election because the two groups together did not have a majority of seats.[166]

Voter Analysis

Understanding the types of voters who turned out for the election in Thuringia is important for understanding what kinds of voters might make a left-dominated government possible on the federal level again. On September 14, 2014, 954,927 voters cast their ballots.[167] This was only fifty percent of the eligible voters in Thuringia; the vote was the last in a series of four votes as part of the *Superwahljahr* (super voting year) which included elections for local, state, federal, and European representatives. In real terms, all of the parties sustained a net loss of votes except for the AfD; percentagewise, only the CDU, Left Party, and AfD experienced a growth.[168]

Overall, the CDU received 33.5% of the vote, while the Left Party received 28.2%.[169] Combined, the conservative parties received 50.2% of the vote, but two of the conservative parties did not reach the five percent hurdle to

[166] "Deutscher Bundestag – Fraktionen," Deutscher Bundestag.
[167] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen,* 7.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.

be seated in the state parliament. These two parties, the FDP and the neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD), received 6.1% of the vote together, which is a small percentage, but accounts for 57,408 votes.[170] This shows that over 50,000 voters do not currently have their views represented in the state parliament.

A pre-election demographic poll showed both opinions towards parties in Thuringia as well as those nationwide, which is important for discerning whether Thuringia is an outlier in German politics or a valid example to use as a model for future coalitions. In Thuringia, positive opinion for the Left Party is higher than in the rest of the country, while Thuringian approval of the SPD and the Greens is slightly lower than the average German approval rating.[171] The exact poll question, however, asked about the opinion of the federal parliamentary fractions of the party. Since many Germans differentiate between the party on the state and federal levels, this may not be as useful in gaging opinion towards Thuringian parliamentary parties as a poll on individual state parties, although the actual election results show that the poll was accurate on this subject.

More interesting is the data looking at the ability of the Left Party to rule a state. Forty-eight percent of those asked did not trust the Left Party to govern their state; this percentage was higher among CDU, SPD, and AfD voters and demonstrates the political taboo against this party.[172] Since the question specifically named Left Party politician and current governor of Thuringia Bodo Ramelow, who is originally from Lower Saxony, as the potential governor of the

[170] Ibid.
[171] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen*, 14.
[172] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen,* 17.

state under the Left Party's government, the results cannot be discounted as fear of an East German leader, which is one concern that some voters have concerning the Left Party. This distrust could be higher on the national level since the national approval for the Left Party is lower than it is in Thuringia.

The actual demographics for those voting in Thuringia can also help predict national paths to power. The CDU is more attractive to Catholic and Protestant voters, with 55% of Catholic and 41% of Protestant voters favoring that party, while those who do not practice Christianity are more likely to vote for the Left Party.[173] Since 57% of the voters in Thuringia do not identify as Christians, this is less important than it might be in western Germany, where religion was not censured by the government.[174] Younger voters did not turn out as heavily as older voters did for this election. This is important because older voters in Thuringia are more likely to vote for the Left Party as a result of some nostalgia for East Germany's social benefits. Although younger voters are more likely to vote for the CDU than the Left Party, their low voter turnout meant that the Left Party had the opportunity to form a governing coalition. Other factors, such as education level or gender, did not appear to be significant factors in determining voter preference.

Coalition Formation

After the election of 2014, the coalition forming process took place. The CDU was unsuccessful in its attempts to form a coalition with other parties; the Left Party was successful in creating a one-vote majority through its coalition

[173] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen,* 38.
[174] Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, e.V., *Wahl in Thüringen,* 73.

with the SPD and the Greens. This was not the first time that the Left Party had come in second to the CDU; it was simply the first time the Left Party had come in second to the CDU and successfully formed a ruling coalition. In 2009, negotiations to form a left-centric government were underway in Thuringia, but the parties were unable to come to an agreement.[175]

Until recently, the SPD was forbidden from forming a coalition government with the Left Party in the lead by the national SPD leadership because the SPD did not trust the Left Party to govern democratically. This coalition was possible because of a shift in the SPD's national views that allows each state's party to decide such issues on its own. In part, this was influenced by the success of the Magdeburg Model.[176] The members of the SPD in Thuringia were sent ballots and allowed to vote either in favor of or in opposition to forming a coalition government with the Left Party and the Greens.[177] However, since many German voters do not have membership in a party, Thuringians who voted for the SPD without being a member were quite upset that the party decided to enter into a taboo-breaking coalition with a party that is still strongly associated with East Germany in many minds. This resulted in protests at the steps of the cathedral in Erfurt, the Thuringian capital, which mirrored protests that took place twenty years prior against the SED.[178]

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[175] Ibid.
[176] Turner, *Political Parties and Public Policy in the German* Länder*: When Parties Matter,* 170.
[177] Florian Gathmann, Veit Medick and Philipp Wittrock,
"Folgen von Rot-Rot-Grün: Das Thüringen-Problem," *Der Spiegel*, October 21, 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/thueringen-rot-rot-gruen-ist-zaesur-fuer-die-grosse-koalition-a-998328.html.
[178] "Kerzenwachs der Demo gegen Rot-Rot-Grün ruinierte Domstufen," *Thüringer Allgemeine,* November 20, 2014, http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/startseite/detail/-/specific/Kerzenwachs-der-Demo-gegen-Rot-Rot-Gruen-ruinierte-Domstufen-130141234.

Protesters help up banners with slogans such as “Who has betrayed us? The Social Democrats!” and “Stasi in the state house – is this the voters’ will?” to show their dissatisfaction with the SPD’s decision to join forces with the Left Party.[179]

As a part of the coalition talks, the three parties that formed the coalition known as R2G (red-red-green after the colors of the three parties) signed a document recognizing the dictatorship that the SED had in East Germany.[180] This issue is still very controversial within the Left Party because some members do not believe that East Germany was a dictatorship and are reluctant to denounce their former government, especially if they were members of the SED themselves. This is one reason why the Left Party has found it difficult to participate in coalition governments with other left-wing parties in the past. Nationally, the party has refused to totally denounce the East German state as a dictatorship, which makes the Thuringian branch’s reluctant agreement to sign this document even more important. The document signed by the Thuringian coalition gave a list of reasons why East Germany was “consequently a dictatorship,” which some from other parties found to be a bit cagey due to the noncommittal tone of the piece.[181]

[179] Ibid.
[180] ““Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar” Zur Aufarbeitung der DDR-Geschichte (Sondierungen 2014),” Die Linke Thüringen, September 23, 2014, http://www.die-linke-thueringen.de/fileadmin/LV_Thueringen/dokumente/14-09-23_protokoll-anlage-1.pdf.
[181] Ibid.

After all the votes were counted, the Left Party was officially the leading partner in the new coalition government that took control in December 2014.[182] This is the first time this has happened on the state level in reunified Germany; in previous coalitions the Left Party was always the junior partner. As such, the leader of the Left Party in Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, became the governor.

Ramelow was raised in West Germany and came to Thuringia after the Berlin Wall fell. This means that he avoids some problematic associations with the SED since he first joined the PDS in 1999.[183] His leftist views are still the source of some controversy in Thuringia since some criticize him for being a member of a party that oppressed a country in which he did not reside. However, it seems unlikely that the other two parties in the coalition would consent to join forces with a former member of the SED. This would not be tolerated by voters; past lives as Stasi collaborators have come back to haunt more than one member of the Left Party.[184] Despite this and the poll showing a low level of confidence in a Left Party governor before the election, Ramelow has now led Thuringia for over a year.

R2G in Office

Since this coalition took office, the refugee crisis has greatly increased all over Germany; right wing parties have been demonstrating in large numbers against the flow of immigrants into the country. The Left Party in Thuringia has countered by welcoming refugees while also calling for lasting solutions to the

[182] "Reaktionen auf Ramelow-Wahl: "Thüringen ist ein Signal für den Bund,"" *Der Spiegel,* December 5, 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/thueringen-afd-csu-und-cdu-kritisieren-ramelow-a-1006794.html.
[183] Jesse and Lang, *Die Linke – der smarte Extremismus einer deutschen Partei*, 186.
[184] De Pommereau, ""Stasi-linked party is back in power. Is Germany ready?".

problem. As the ruling party in Thuringia, the Left Party has continued to campaign against the far right by promoting anti-right wing rallies. The Left Party also made May 8 a state holiday to commemorate the German surrender in World War II.[185] The coalition government's actions in foreign policy, the refugee crisis, social policy, and federal legislation form a picture of the government's first year in office. However, despite the controversy accompanying the coalition building process in Thuringia, the government has not taken any steps that represent a serious deviation from policy under the Christian Democratic government, which serves to bolster the reputation of the Left Party. Despite claims from the opposition to the contrary, the Left Party is capable of ruling successfully within a democratic system. The following sections will look at foreign policy, social policy, the refugee crisis, and Thuringian representation in the *Bundesrat* in order to determine that the current government is not operating outside the political mainstream.

Foreign Policy

Although foreign policy is not the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of state governance, Thuringia has had an impact on foreign policy under the current administration. In particular, the state has focused on its relationship with Israel over the course of the past year, which is part of the Left Party's policy of supporting Israel due to their policy of opposition to the Nazi government. Ramelow, along with other members of the government, travelled to Israel. This trip was important symbolically as Ramelow's first foreign trip in

[185] "8. Mai wird in Thüringen staatlicher Gedenktag," *Sächsische Zeitung*, October 2, 2015, http://www.sz-online.de/nachrichten/8-mai-wird-in-thueringen-staatlicher-gedenktag-3214272.html.

office, as well as practically important because the trip was the final step in an effort to start more exchange programs between the University of Erfurt as well as Albert Schweitzer Gymnasium and Israeli institutions in Haifa.[186] As a member of the Left Party, this trip is especially important because it shows that the Left Party is balancing their practical approach to governance with gestures that are based on party ideology. Although the party's ideology is built upon condemnation of the Holocaust, others say that the party's views toward the Israel-Palestine dispute border on antisemitism.[187]

The program was also meant to spur economic cooperation between Thuringia and Israel. The state of Thuringia is looking to grow its economy overall due to the availability of industrial lands left vacant since German reunification as well as the Thuringian capital of Erfurt's location on a new train line between Berlin and Munich. The Israeli economy's focus on electronic and optical technology is also similar to the Thuringian economic focus.[188] However, this trip was not completely a Left Party idea; the mechanics behind the university and school exchange programs were already underway before the Left Party took power.

The state's foreign policy has also included interactions with both China and the Holy See. A state economic delegation was sent to Guangdong in September 2015 in order to attend a conference on Chinese-German

[186] "„Erinnerung bewahren, Zukunft gestalten" - Delegationsreise des Thüringer Ministerpräsidenten Bodo Ramelow nach Israel vom 25. bis 29. Oktober 2015," Freistaat Thüringen, accessed February 4, 2016, http://www.thueringen.de/th1/tsk/aktuell/veranstaltungen/86951/.
[187] Martin Machowecz, "Hört mal her, so geht das nicht!," *Die Zeit*, October 29, 2015, http://www.zeit.de/2015/44/bodo-ramelow-israel-thueringen.
[188] "„Erinnerung bewahren," Freistaat Thüringen.

relations.[189] The Laser World of Photonics exhibition in China in March 2016 was listed as one of the major events in Thuringian trade this year.[190] In February 2016, Bodo Ramelow and a delegation from Thuringia were granted a private audience with Pope Francis, although the state's hopes that Pope Francis would visit Thuringia as part of Reformation Jubilee Year in 2017 were quickly dashed.[191] Both of these foreign policy actions have been criticized, the first from the Left Party itself and the second by those in the opposition, because the Left Party is historically against religion and in favor of better relations with communist states over free Western societies. Despite these criticisms, both of these policies are continuations of previous policy even though they were carried out under the current government, showing the ability of the left-wing coalition to work under conditions that others had already set up while putting their own politics into play. Therefore, they do not represent a serious departure from the CDU's foreign policy while in office in Thuringia. In particular, the steps the left-wing coalition has made towards working with diverse religious groups shows that is willing to embrace diversity not only as a campaign promise, but as actual policy.

Social Policy

The social policies of the current government have been underwhelming in comparison to election promises, which falls in line with political theory.

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[189] "Thüringer Wirtschaftsdelegation zu Kurzbesuch in China," Freistaat Thüringen, last modified September 9, 2015, http://www.thueringen.de/th6/tmwwdg/service/pressemitteilungen/86040/index.aspx.

[190]"Thüringen auf der LASER World of PHOTONICS China 2016," Thüringen International, accessed February 4, 2016, http://www.thueringen-international.de/laser-china/.

[191] "Papstbesuch 2017 unwahrscheinlich," domradio.de, February 26, 2016, https://www.domradio.de/themen/papst-franziskus/2016-02-26/thueringens-ministerpraesident-ramelow-bei-franziskus.

Political parties are expected to campaign on a more extreme platform than they actually rule with in order to differentiate themselves from other parties.[192] Part of this is due to the first hundred days in office being spent as an organizational time by the R2G coalition. Only the ministers from the SPD had experience in state government, so the representatives from the other two parties had to adjust to their new roles.[193] Part of this new government included sticking to the Left Party's rhetoric about gender equality; the cabinet is divided equally between men and women, a first for Thuringia.[194] The transition from a CDU to Left Party-led government has been widely considered a success as the day-to-day operations of the government have been smooth and no scandals have developed.

The local mayors have had some problems with the state government. Andreas Bausewein, the mayor of Erfurt, said communication surrounding the municipal economic packages was not going well.[195] Other mayors, especially those in rural areas, have highly criticized the government for not adhering to its campaign promises, in which they promised to undo the €242 million cuts in the

[192] Dalton and McAllister, "Random Walk or Planned Excursion? Continuity and Change in the Left-Right Positions of Political Parties," 763.
[193] Martin Debes, "Ein Jahr Rot-Rot-Grün: Probezeit bestanden," *Thüringische Landeszeitung,* December 5, 2015, http://www.tlz.de/startseite/detail/-/specific/Ein-Jahr-Rot-Rot-Gruen-Probezeit-bestanden-1440316150#.VmKFFzERmew.twitter.
[194] Martin Debes and Michael Backfish, "100 Tage Koalition: So gut sind Thüringens Ministerinnen," *Thüringer Allgemeine,* March 11, 2015, http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/web/zgt/nachrichten/detail/-/specific/100-Tage-Koalition-So-gut-sind-Thueringens-Ministerinnen-1812090369.
[195] Martin Debes, "Erfurts Bürgermeister Bausewein: Kommunalpaket lief suboptimal," *Thüringer Allgemeine,* March 14, 2015, http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/web/zgt/nachrichten/detail/-/specific/Erfurts-Buergermeister-Bausewein-Kommunalpaket-lief-suboptimal-620786143.

municipal budgets.[196] The funding of private schools is another area where the government has only partly lived up to its promises. The state allocated more money to private schools, but the increase in the number of students attending these schools means that the government is actually contributing a smaller percentage of private school funding than before.[197]

These issues of social policy show that the left-wing government is attempting to prove itself as a social-minded coalition that is effective and true to its word, but this has not been totally successful in practice, which could serve as a hindrance to this coalition as others look to it as a model for future alliances.

Refugee Crisis

As in the rest of Germany, the refugee crisis has been a major issue in Thuringia over the course of the past year. Although Thuringia was criticized for taking in a lower percentage of refugees than other states at first, the government was highly supportive of refugees once they began to arrive. Ramelow in particular jumped on the issue by personally welcoming the first batch of refugees to Thuringia, calling it “a great day for Thuringia and a great day for Germany,” while the CDU was waiting to form their opinion based on the

[196] Martin Debes, “100 Tage Rot-Rot-Grün: Brutto statt netto – Warum die Gemeinden mit dem Land streiten,” *Thüringer Allgemeine,* March 14, 2015, http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/web/zgt/nachrichten/detail/-/specific/100-Tage-Rot-Rot-Gruen-Brutto-statt-netto-Warum-die-Gemeinden-mit-dem-Land-st-1508041234.
[197] Martin Debes, “100 Tage Rot-Rot-Grün: Wie steht es um die freien Schulen in Thüringen?,” *Thüringer Allgemeine,* March 13, 2015, http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/web/zgt/nachrichten/detail/-/specific/100-Tage-Rot-Rot-Gruen-Wie-steht-es-um-die-freien-Schulen-in-Thueringen-477473181/.

views of most Germans.[198] This delay in action may have damaged the CDU's standing in Germany and was highly criticized in the press. Although the refugee crisis has since become less popular to the public at large, the Left Party in Thuringia, as in the rest of Germany, continues to stand by its policy of accepting refugees as part of their social program.

The crisis has also been met with demands for more federal funds for refugees by the Thuringian government.[199] These demands were made in April 2015, at which point in time the highest estimates for incoming refugees nationwide was 300,000.[200] The number turned out to be over 800,000. Despite this, the Left Party in Thuringia still stands by its decision to support refugee resettlement, and has requested more refugees in order to fill vacant jobs in the state.

Bundesrat

The *Bundesrat*, Germany's federal council, is composed of representatives from each of the state governments. This means that the Left Party is enjoying a new level of representation in the *Bundesra*t, although the impact is diminished because the number of votes in this council is determined by population, and Thuringia is one of the smallest federal states. The only other state with Left Party representation in this body is Brandenburg.[201]

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[198] "Wir werden das schaffen," tagesschau, September 5, 2015, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/ramelow-interview-101.html.
[199] "Länder fordern mehr Flüchtlingshilfe," tagesschau, April 11, 2015, http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/fluechtlinge-ramelow-101.html.
[200] Ibid.
[201] "Mitglieder des Bundesrates," Bundesrat.

Although the *Bundesrat* is less well-known than the *Bundestag*, this body still has legislative powers and can check the other federal bodies, especially on issues concerning state interests.[202] Recently, the issue of a change in law concerning refugees caused a rift in the Thuringian delegation. The Left and Greens were against the measure that would prevent refugees in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro from gaining asylum in Germany, but the SPD was in favor of the measure. In the end, the delegation abstained from the vote, which successfully passed.[203] This demonstrates that although the members of the coalition may disagree on some issues, a left-wing coalition can come to a reasonable alternative that everyone can agree on.

Another measure the Thuringian delegation to the *Bundesrat* has promoted is increased WiFi for public spaces.[204] Additionally, the delegation is moving to change the legislation which makes WiFi network operators responsible for the actions of their users, including illegal downloads and criminal activity. This is related to another *Bundesrat* issue that Thuringia campaigned against: the compulsory retention of user data by telecommunications companies.[205] These actions represent the new Left Party and its motivations to distance itself from Stasi surveillance-like measures, as well as trying to engage with students and other young voters who have come

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[202] "Responsibilities," Bundesrat, accessed February 4, 2016, http://www.bundesrat.de/EN/funktionen-en/aufgaben-en/aufgaben-en-node.html.
[203] "Thüringen enthält sich bei Abstimmung im Bundesrat," Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, October 13, 2015, http://www.mdr.de/thueringen/bundesrat-asylrecht-abstimmung-thueringen100.html.
[204]"Thüringen will Hürden für öffentliches WLAN weiter senken," *Focus*, October 25, 2015, http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bundesrat-thueringen-will-huerden-fuer-oeffentliches-wlan-weiter-senken_id_5038369.html.
[205]" Vorratsdatenspeicherung: Thüringen will im Bundesrat Vermittlungsausschuss anrufen," *Der Spiegel,* November 5, 2015, http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/vorratsdatenspeicherung-thueringen-will-vermittlungsausschuss-anrufen-a-1061363.html.

to regard internet access as a right. Within the *Bundesrat*, the Left Party and its coalition partners have acted as a perfectly respectable political faction.

The formation of Germany's first Left Party-led state government was a controversial issue across Germany. However, the coalition's actions while in office so far do not represent a dramatic departure from the CDU's policies while in office in Thuringia. The Left Party has not attempted to re-establish the German Democratic Republic inside Thuringia, as some in the CDU suggested following the September 2014 election.[206] The red-red-green government has instead focused on moderately leftist policies during its first year in office. This approach to a left-wing coalition could, therefore, serve as a model to German voters as well as political party members who were previously concerned about sharing power with the Left Party.

Significance of R2G

As coalition talks concluded, criticism of the coalition came all the way from Chancellor Merkel; she berated the SPD for forming a coalition with the Left Party.[207] Multiple members of the CDU, especially from the state party in Thuringia, termed this coalition to be a disaster that would result in another German Democratic Republic, complete with the surveillance state and shortages of consumer goods. The late night talk show scene in Germany was not so apprehensive; one comedian said that the risks of such a coalition were suited to Thuringia because "80% of the state is a forest, and the rest is just trees," a dig at Thuringia's status as a rural state that is mostly covered with a

[206] "Merkel wirft Thüringer SPD "Bankrotterfklärung vor," *Thüringer Allgemeine.*
[207] Ibid.

protected forest.[208] The criticism of R2G from the CDU is at least partly a result of worry about their loss of power in Thuringia. The belief, stated in *Der Spiegel* as the R2G government took office, that a red-red-green coalition on the federal level could take the CDU out of national power is another reason why the CDU reacted so strongly to this coalition.[209]

The Thuringian R2G experiment has been seen by some as proof that Germany can be governed without the CDU, with sources from *Der Spiegel* to the state news broadcaster calling it a possible model for the country.[210] Some say this could be the SPD and Greens's ticket to knocking Chancellor Angela Merkel and the CDU out of the national governing slot in 2017. This may prove important as Euroskeptic and right wing parties such as AfD continue to influence German politics and thus pull the CDU's politics further to the right, which could clear the way for the SPD to become the most moderate party.[211]

Wider Impact of Thuringian Government

The wider impact that the Left Party's place in the Thuringian government has on German politics should not be overstated. This coalition would be of greater note if it had not happened in a former East German state. Enduring perceptions of differences between those who grew up in East and West Germany extend to politics as well. West Germans have little to no nostalgic sentiment towards the Left Party, which causes some to view Left

[208] Oliver Welke, "14.11.2014," *heute show,* aired November 14, 2014, http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek#/beitrag/video/2283704/heute-show-vom-14112014.
[209] Spörl, "Der alte Schwefelgeruch."
[210] Matthias Reiche, "Thüringen als Modell für den Bund," MDR, October 22, 2014, http://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/politikimradio/audio-6203.html.
[211] "Thüringens Ministerpräsident Ramelow: Geschafft," *Der Speigel*, December 5, 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bodo-ramelow-in-thueringen-was-auf-den-ministerpraesident-nun-zukommt-a-1006820.html.

Party supporters with disdain because they are considered to be deluded in voting for a former dictatorship.[212] However, the Left Party is working to leave its past behind and be received as a responsible, legitimate party by both the media and the German people.

At the same time, the cries that the Left Party's place in office would bring back a return of the German Democratic Republic were greatly exaggerated. The Left Party's government has so far acted in a way that is more business as usual than implementing extreme policies. The day-to-day governance is so normal that the uproar over this government has for the most part died down in other German states. Overall, the impact of this government seems to be the way that the Left Party has normalized itself as a governing party; now that it is out of the opposition in Thuringia, it has changed some of its policies in that state because criticism is much easier than action. As a result, it has shown itself to be a normal party that operates on the left side of the political spectrum.

Left Party vs. AfD

On a basic level, the Left Party and AfD share some defining qualities. Both parties are small, populist organizations. They both are against further integration with the West and favor a turn to Russia.[213] Both also wish to change a fundamental part of German society and appeal to those who feel betrayed by the mainstream party system. These parties are also experiencing

[212] "Ost und West: der groβe Check," ZDF, aired November 9, 2015, http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/beitrag/video/2495322/Ost-und-West---der-grosse-Check#/beitrag/video/2495322/Ost-und-West---der-grosse-Check.
[213] Neuerer, "SPD-Linke trommeln für Linksbündnis."

historically high levels of popularity, given the AfD's poll numbers and the Left Party's power in Thuringia.[214] Both parties may benefit from the chaos afflicting the major mainstream parties on the federal level and suffer from taboos surrounding their place in government. The disruptive nature of these parties in contemporary politics is their most important quality. However, the Left Party and the AfD are very different parties with different priorities.

The Left Party and the AfD disagree on most major issues; the Left Party is pro-refugee, while the AfD is against letting non-ethnic Germans into the country.[215] The AfD's views on many issues, including taxation and abortion, are close to those of other right-wing parties like the Republicans in the United States.[216] The Left Party, on the other hand, espouses a strong social program for Germany with increased taxation to fund welfare programs, schools, retirement, and daycare.[217] In fact, the Left Party's website contains an anti-AfD portion explaining how that party is hindering the Left's anti-right-wing program.[218] The AfD is also very patriotic, a quality that the Left Party does not share, in part due to its past as a member of the Soviet bloc, where allegiance to the group of communist states was more important than German nationalism.[219] The Left Party and the AfD may share similar qualities including their appeal to those who feel estranged from their own society, but when it comes to policy, the two parties are substantially different.

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[214] Ibid.
[215] Konstantin Richter, "Germany's far-rigth AfD is here to stay," Politico, April 24, 2016, http://www.politico.eu/article/germanys-far-right-afd-is-here-to-stay/.
[216] Ibid.
[217] "DIE LINKE: Themen," Die Linke, accessed June 2, 2016, https://www.die-linke.de/politik/themen/.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Thompson, *The Crisis of the German Left: the PDS, Stalinism and the Global Economy,* 23.

Conclusion

Although the Left Party did not win the most votes in the Thuringian state elections in 2014, the party was nonetheless successful in creating a coalition government. However, the Left Party's voters were overwhelmingly older than those that voted for the CDU, which could spell trouble for the coalition in the next election. The Left Party's leading role in this coalition was caused by a perfect storm of voter turnout, the split right-wing vote, and the fall of the FDP. The Left Party's past as the East German ruling party has affected its ideology, but the party's authoritarian elements have been purged in the twenty-five years since German reunification. Despite this, the party still meets considerable difficulties in participating in governing coalitions due to its reluctance to denounce all the unsavory elements of its past.

The idea of Thuringia as a model for a federal coalition has its limits. The makeup of Thuringia is different from that of other states; additionally, the Left Party is still much less popular in western Germany than it is in the new federal states. The staying power of this coalition will not be tested until the next election cycle in 2019, so the possibility remains that the Left Party could be thrown out on its ear at that time.

Although the Left Party and the AfD draw comparisons due to their populist roots and outsider status, the two parties are politically quite different. The Left Party is focused on social issues, while the AfD is more focused on the Euro and the refugee crisis. Nationalism and patriotism are handled differently

by the two parties, even though they both appeal to those who are outsiders in society.

Despite worries from those on the right as well as some within the SPD and Greens, the coalition has so far functioned as a normal ruling coalition. Social and foreign policy, as well as *Bundesrat* legislation, have not greatly deviated from previous government policies. This falls in line with the idea that critiques from parties out of power are easily able to be radical, but actual policy is constrained by compromise.[220] This proves that the Left Party could be adept at ruling on a higher level as well; the party is no longer exclusively a regional party, but a party with the ability to cooperate, compromise, and govern. However, the overall negative image that the party has in western Germany mean that this party is unlikely to be a major player on the national level, no matter how well it governs in Thuringia; no matter how weak the CDU may seem, it remains doubtful that disillusioned CDU voters would turn to the Left Party as an alternative while parties such as the SPD, AfD, and FDP exist.

[220] Dalton and McAllister, “Random Walk or Planned Excursion?,” 763.

Conclusion

Although Angela Merkel's CDU has suffered a loss of popularity in recent months, the situation in Germany is still not favorable for a broad left-wing coalition on the federal level. Data from previous elections show that the CDU is popular across demographics and fails to show an impending demographic shift due to age or education, even with the rise of the AfD. The case study from Thuringia shows that the Left Party is slowly building trust and is able to govern competently, but the taboo against working with that party still exists to some extent within the SPD and CDU. Instead, the greater impact of the red-red-green coalition in Thuringia may be the trust that the Left Party is building due to its responsible governance. Most importantly, although the press in Germany and abroad continue to speak of the impending end of the European Union and the danger that Merkel and her party are currently facing, they often ignore the state of affairs among political parties: the SPD has suffered blows to its credibility through its welfare reforms in the early 2000s and since then has not sufficiently set itself apart from a CDU that has been slightly left of center.[221]

The CDU and the CSU may face setbacks in the near future, especially as the CSU's majority rule in Bavaria looks to be threatened by the AfD, but their setbacks would have to be accompanied by an alliance on the left before they destroyed the party's place at the top of German politics. The long history of CDU/CSU conflicts shows us that although these two parties may argue from

[221] Denkler, "Fünf Gründe, warum die Lage der SPD so schwierig ist."

time to time, they ultimately work together in order to preserve the CSU's dominance in Bavarian politics.

The red-red-green coalition in Thuringia is a great opportunity for the Left Party to demonstrate its reforms and distance itself from its East German past. This coalition may be another in a series of poor decisions for the SPD, since many who voted for this party felt betrayed by its decision to join a Left Party coalition in Thuringia. However, the Left Party throughout Germany may reap the benefits of this coalition, which shows that the Left Party can govern fairly in a democratic society.

Germany's next federal elections are a year away. Political issues that are of great importance now may decline in popularity; a fickle electorate may have its voting decision swayed by immediate concerns. The SPD and Greens have reacted to the CDU's current reign of power by concentrating their efforts on the state levels, where they and the Left Party have been much more successful in gaining power than on the national level. All three left-wing parties are currently suffering from a lack of federal popularity. However, many in Germany are unsatisfied with Merkel's approach to the refugee crisis, which opens the door to a left-wing coalition.

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Appendix 1: Abbreviations

Alliance90/the Greens – the Greens

Alternative for Germany – AfD

Electoral Alternative for Labor and Justice - WASG

European Union – EU

Freedom Party of Austria - FPÖ

Free Democratic Party - FDP

German Christian Democratic Union - CDU

German Christian Social Union – CSU

German Communist Party - KPD

German National Democratic Party - NPD

German Social Democratic Party – SPD

German Social Unity Party – SED

German Socialist Student Organization - SDS

Left Party/SPD/Green Coalition – R2G

Party of Democratic Socialism – PDS

Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West - Pegida

South Schleswig Voters' Association - SSW