

The electoral victory of the NPD in Saxony and the prospects for future extreme-right success in German elections

UWE BACKES

ABSTRACT Largely because of Germany's traumatic experience of National Socialism, German extreme right-wing parties have remained a marginal post-war political phenomenon. The spectacular electoral victory of the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) in the Saxon parliamentary elections of September 2004 (9.2 per cent of the vote) nurtured the fear that a far-right party could establish itself at the national level. Backes explains the election victory by relating it to a set of Saxon and Eastern German circumstances. He demonstrates that unfavourable conditions, which have so far prevented the establishment of extreme right-wing parties at the national level, still prevail. Against this background, he shows that the NPD's capacity for taking advantage of advantageous conditions (like economic problems and xenophobia, rampant in some places) reaches its limits very quickly.

KEYWORDS extremism, German elections, Germany, Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, party system, right-wing extremism, Saxony

Because of Germany's traumatic experience with National Socialism, its political culture has ever since been closely observed by all those who fear a renaissance of right-wing extremism. The so-called 'burden of the past' seems to have contributed decisively to the fact that such groups have polled fewer votes in elections than their counterparts in European countries with older traditions of democracy, such as France. In none of the three waves of politically driven voter mobilizations that political scientists have distinguished in post-war Europe—with regard, in Germany, to the Sozialistische Reichspartei (SRP) in the early 1950s, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) in the second half of the 1960s, and the Republikaner (REP) in the late 1980s and early 1990s—have German far-right parties been disproportionately successful.¹ Moreover, the ubiquitousness and resilience of the protest vote have diminished in the course of the decades.

1 See Klaus von Beyme, 'Right-wing extremism in post-war Europe', *West European Politics*, vol. 11 (a special issue on 'Right-wing Extremism in Western Europe', ed. Klaus von Beyme), 1988, 1–18.

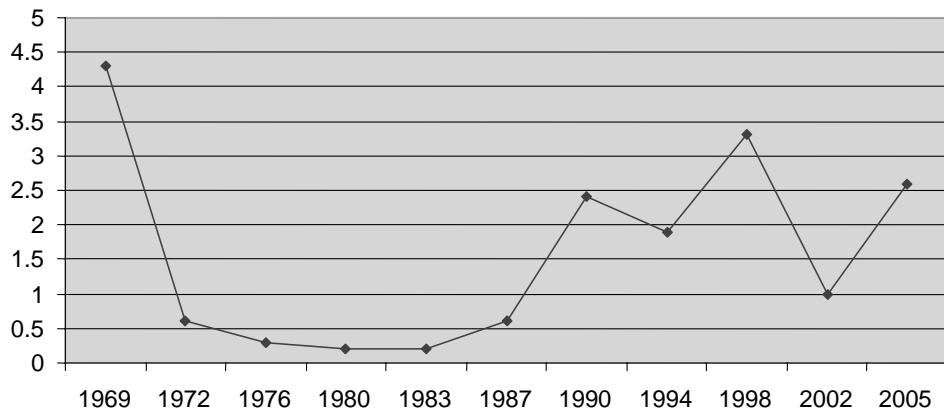
132 *Patterns of Prejudice*

Figure 1 Results of the NPD, DVU and REP in parliamentary elections, 1969–2005 (sum total (%) of vote). Source: Statistisches Bundesamt

German reunification did not, at first, change this picture. As Figure 1 indicates, the sum total of votes cast between 1990 and 2005 for the three far-right electoral parties—the Deutsche Volksunion (DVU), the REP and the NPD—falls far below the 5 per cent threshold needed for representation. An all-time low was reached in the Bundestag parliamentary elections in September 2002, when the NPD and REP together achieved a mere 1.0 per cent of the total vote. Compared with the previous elections four years earlier, the REP (1998: 1.8 per cent) lost 1.2 per cent, and the NPD (1998: 0.3 per cent) only gained an extra 0.1 per cent. The DVU—not least because of its low membership numbers—fielded no candidates.² In the European election of June 2004, the far-right parties achieved similarly modest results, although the REP and NPD (the DVU did not participate) did register a slight increase in votes: the REP's share rose from 1.7 to 1.9 per cent, and the NPD's increased from 0.4 to 0.9 per cent. And, in the Bundestag parliamentary elections in September 2005, the NPD increased its vote but, having achieved 1.6 per cent (REP: 0.6 per cent), remained far below the 5 per cent threshold.³

During the last decade, the vitality of militant subcultures and the high level of xenophobic violence have been in sharp contrast with the organizational weakness of legally operating far-right parties.⁴ Their memberships decreased considerably (see Figure 2) and, based on these

2 See Eckhard Jesse, 'Die Rechts(außen)parteien: Keine Erfolge in Sicht', in Oskar Niedermayer (ed.), *Die Parteien nach der Bundestagswahl 2002* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich 2003), 159–77.

3 See Uwe Backes, 'Polarisierung aus dem Osten? Linke und rechte Flügelparteien bei der Bundestagswahl 2005', in Eckhard Jesse and Roland Sturm (eds), *Bilanz der Bundestagswahl 2005. Voraussetzungen, Ergebnisse, Folgen* (Munich: Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit 2006 forthcoming).

4 See Uwe Backes and Cas Mudde, 'Extremism without successful parties', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2000, 457–68.

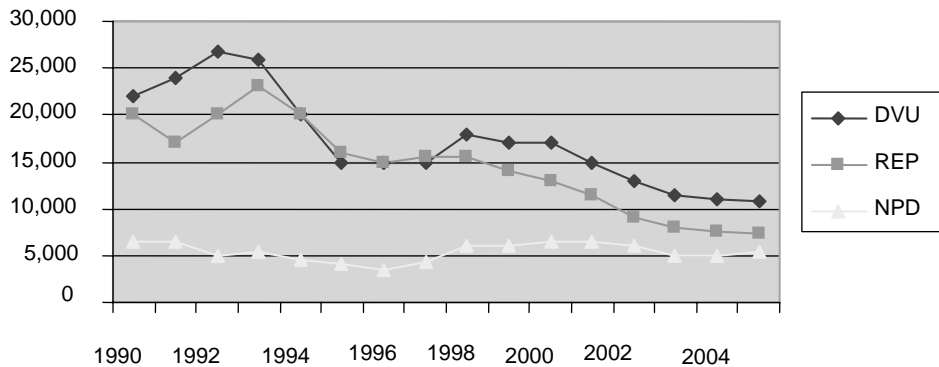


Figure 2 Membership of German far-right parties, 1990–2005. Source: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz

data, no professional observer could have predicted a wave of mobilization at the national level.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of a growing power to mobilize support by far-right parties at the regional level. This applies mainly to the NPD. In its regional strongholds in Saxony, where the party has its strongest branch nationally (1,000 members at the beginning of 2005 out of a nationwide total of about 5,100), the NPD made considerable gains in the local elections of June 2004, for example, in Saxon Switzerland. The far-right bloc Nationales Bündnis Dresden won 4 per cent of the vote and was able to send three delegates to the city council of the Saxon capital, among them the national NPD vice-chairman Holger Apfel (born 1955). Apfel advocates cooperation with neo-Nazi *Kameradschaften* and is a mastermind of the strategic ‘three pillars concept’, which calls for a combination of electoral politics (‘the fight for the parliament’), activist politics (‘the fight for the streets’) and the dissemination of ideas (‘the fight for hearts and minds’).⁵

Furthermore, benefitting from the fact that the 5 per cent threshold was abandoned for the first time, the NPD managed to take up seats in several city councils, as well as the county council, in the local elections in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on 14 June 2004. In the state elections in Thuringia on the same day, the NPD multiplied by many times its share of the vote, from 0.2 per cent (1999) to 1.5 per cent. In the state elections in the Saarland on 5 September 2004, the NPD well exceeded this result. Starting from square one (it did not participate in 1999), the party won 4.0 per cent of the vote. However, the NPD—and the DVU—achieved their most spectacular results in the state elections of September 2004. In Saxony the NPD succeeded for the first time since 1968 in entering the state parliament with an almost sensational result of 9.2 per cent of the vote (1999: 1.4 per cent). On

⁵ NPD-Parteivorstand, ‘Das strategische Konzept der NPD’, in Holger Apfel (ed.), ‘*Alles Große steht im Sturm*’. *Tradition und Zukunft einer nationalen Partei* (Stuttgart: DS-Verlag 1999), 356–60.

the same day, the DVU again won seats in the Brandenburg state parliament, and with an improved result of 6.1 per cent of the vote (1999: 5.3 per cent).

However, as the first two state elections that followed those in Saxony and Brandenburg showed, the dreams of the extreme right-wing parties had little in common with reality. On 20 February 2005 the NPD was able to increase its share of the vote, compared to the previous election, in Schleswig-Holstein (state election 2000: 1.0 per cent), but, with 1.9 per cent, fell far short of their—unrealistic—expectations. In North Rhine-Westphalia (22 May 2005) the result turned out to be even worse. With only 0.9 per cent of the vote, the NPD did not even reach the minimum set by the state for the refund of election campaign costs (1.0 per cent). The share of votes cast for the REP, which also participated, dropped from 1.1 per cent (2000) to 0.8 per cent (2005).

The following analysis of the Saxon election victory shows why the far right's expectations were unrealistic. It will examine the factors in the way of a continuing extremist winning streak, and demonstrate that the so-called 'opportunity structures' for the extreme right in Germany are not all favourable. And, furthermore, that right-wing extremists themselves lack the ability to take advantage of those conditions that are favourable.

The NPD's electoral success in Saxony, 2004

Hardly any professional observer would have thought it possible, half a year before the elections in Saxony on 12 September 2004, that the NPD would manage to win 9.2 per cent of the vote (see Figure 3), and thereby enter the state parliament with twelve delegates. However, the success of the NPD

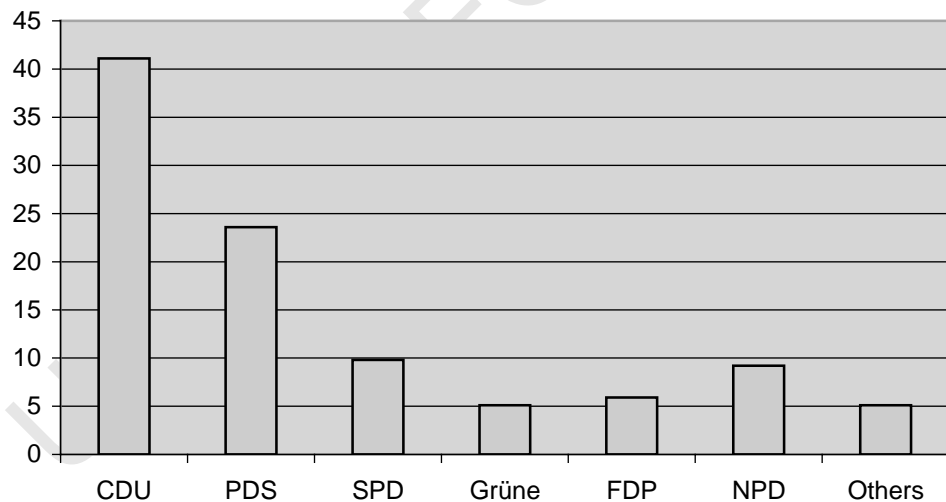


Figure 3 Election results in Saxony, 2004 (% of vote). Source: Statistisches Landesamt Sachsen

100 was based on a set of peculiar circumstances that do not exist in other states
101 of Germany or on the national level.

102 First of all, the characteristics of Eastern German society, with its double
103 experience of dictatorships, must be taken into account. The expansion of
104 Western Germany's political, economic and social systems into the eastern
105 states did not transform the society of the former GDR all of a sudden into a
106 consolidated democracy. In fact, what exists is a society in transition that, in
107 a more subtle form, exhibits the same traits as other states of the former
108 Soviet bloc, especially the industrially advanced Poland and Czech Republic.
109 The concurrent transformation of both the economic and the political system
110 without creating drastic social upheaval was only possible because of West
111 Germany's political and economic stability but, in the process, that stability
112 was sorely tested. Solving the social and economic problems of consolidation
113 in Eastern Germany has been made more difficult by the longstanding
114 'political stalemate' between the major parties. Necessary structural reforms
115 (such as the rebuilding of the welfare state due to demographic changes or
116 the disentanglement of the federal system) have been delayed for too long.
117 The 'reform jam' and the economic burdens of the reunification process
118 (stagnant or decreasing wages and salaries, increasing taxes and social
119 security contributions) have undermined the people's confidence in the
120 problem-solving abilities of the major parties. In the subjective perception,
121 actual problems turn into insuperable mountains. According to surveys of
122 the Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungsinstitut Berlin-Brandenburg the
123 number of citizens in Eastern Germany whose self-descriptions range from
124 'unsatisfied' to 'very dissatisfied' concerning their future prospects more
125 than doubled between 2000 (21 per cent) and 2003 (45 per cent).⁶ Objective
126 factors, like a persistent high unemployment rate (Saxony 2004 average: 17.8
127 per cent; Germany: 10.5 per cent),⁷ are just as relevant as subjective
128 perceptions in view of the degree to which exorbitant expectations for a
129 swift transformation of eastern living conditions into those of Western
130 Germany have been disappointed.

131 In the eastern *Länder* pessimism about the future turns more rapidly into
132 dissatisfaction with democracy because faith in democratic institutions and
actors depends much more on 'output'.⁸ Electoral volatility is also extremely

6 Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungsinstitut Berlin-Brandenburg (SFV), *Sozialreport 2004. Daten und Fakten zur sozialen Lage in den neuen Bundesländern* (Berlin: SFV 2004), 36–7.

7 Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 'Arbeitsmarkt Durchschnitt 2004', available at www.statistik-portal.de/Statistik-Portal/de_02_jahrtab13.asp (viewed 7 February 2006).

8 See Oscar W. Gabriel, 'Demokratische Einstellungen in einem Land ohne demokratische Traditionen? Die Unterstützung der Demokratie in den neuen Bundesländern im Ost-West-Vergleich', in Jürgen Falter, Oscar W. Gabriel and Hans Rattinger (eds), *Wirklich ein Volk? Die politischen Orientierungen von Ost- und Westdeutschen im Vergleich* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich 2000), 41–77.

high as the major parties of the eastern states are socially less anchored—at the level of party identification—and can count on only a handful of loyal voters. Volte-faces often lead to the rapid deflection of voting trends. The party systems in the eastern states—due to the partial transfer of those from the West—do not evince a high degree of fragmentation, but tend, like the party systems in Poland and the Czech Republic,⁹ towards polarization, which is indicated by the persistence of the electoral power of the Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (PDS), which emerged from the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) of the former GDR, and the frequency of extreme right-wing success at the polls. In addition, far-right parties benefit from the increase of fears and resentments in the eastern states towards migrants. According to the European Social Survey 2003 the ‘resistance to immigrants and asylum seekers’ in each case turned out to be higher in Eastern than in Western Germany.¹⁰ In this context, one has to remember not only that the percentage of immigrants and asylum-seekers in the population of Western Germany is larger than in that of Eastern Germany, but that the proportion of foreigners in the East, for example in Saxony, has tripled since 1990 (percentage of foreigners: Germany end of 2003: 8.9 per cent; Saxony 2004: 2.8 per cent¹¹). There is no correlation between electoral wards where there was a high NPD vote and those with a (relatively) high percentage of foreigners. The proximity of the Saxon electoral strongholds to the neighbouring countries of Poland and Czech Republic seems to be more relevant. The opening of borders, related to the eastward enlargement of the European Union, released fears of economic competition (cheap labour, increase of cross-border activities of Czech and Polish companies) in sections of the population. In polls taken on election day, NPD voters cited the ‘policy on foreigners’ as the second most important reason for their party preference.¹²

However, another factor was more important, probably even decisive, namely, the protest against what is commonly called ‘Hartz IV’, the government’s attempt at labour-market and welfare reforms. Almost 60 per cent of NPD-voters named this policy as the most important reason for their vote.¹³

9 See Attila Ágh, ‘The end of the beginning: the partial consolidation of East Central European parties and party systems’, in Paul Pennings and Jan-Erik Lane (eds), *Comparing Party System Change* (London and New York: Routledge 1998), 202–16.

10 Marcel Coender, Marcel Lubbers and Peer Schepers, *Majorities’ Attitudes towards Minorities in Western and Eastern European Societies. Results from the European Social Survey 2002–2003*, Report 4 for the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (Nijmegen: Nijmegen Institute for Social and Cultural Research 2005), 3–4.

11 Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen, *Ausländische Mitbürger 2004/2005* (Dresden: Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen 2005), 1.

12 Infratest/dimap, *WahlREPORT: Landtagswahl Sachsen 2004* (Mannheim: Infratest dimap 2005), 2.

13 Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, ‘Landtagswahlen in Sachsen und Brandenburg: NPD und DVU’, 19 September 2004, available at www.forschungsgruppe.de/Ergebnisse/Wahlanalysen/Newsletter_NPD_DVU (viewed 7 February 2006).

164 It was mainly in the eastern states that a wave of protest against 'Hartz IV'
165 welled up a few months before the state elections in Saxony and Branden-
166 burg. Despite the fact that the protests were instigated primarily by leftist
167 groups and provocatively called 'Monday demonstrations',¹⁴ the NPD
168 attempted to maintain a high public profile in several cities of Eastern
169 Germany by riding the wave of these popular protest demonstrations, in the
170 face of expressions of disapproval by their predominantly leftist organizers.
171 The 'Hartz IV' protest wave reached its peak in the weeks before the state
172 elections, and the NPD was quick to place (anti-Hartz IV) socio-political
173 statements at the centre of its own campaign. The NPD thereby avoided
174 appearing too shrill, and made efforts to present itself as a respectable right-
175 wing party. According to the election-day polls of the Forschungsgruppe
176 Wahlen, 14 per cent of blue-collar workers and 18 per cent of the
177 unemployed voted for the NPD. The average NPD-voter was male (12.6
178 per cent), young (18–24 years: 16 per cent; 25–34 years: 13.9 per cent; 35–44
179 years: 11.7 per cent; 45–59 years: 9.8 per cent; over 60 years: 4.3 per cent), and
180 with a low level of education.¹⁵

181 The significant impact on the vote of issues like the proposed labour-
182 market reform or the policy on foreigners indicates that problems related to
183 globalization can create favourable opportunities for extreme right-wing
184 parties, particularly if the problem-solving ability of the established
185 democratic parties seems insufficient. This adds to the inclination of a
186 like-minded part of the electorate to exert pressure on the established parties
187 by voting for political outsiders. In this way, extreme right-wing parties can
188 exploit the potential of both ideological sympathizers as well as voters
189 wishing to protest particular policies. An analysis by the Statistisches
190 Landesamt Sachsen sheds light on the high percentage of protest voters:
191 14 per cent of the people who cast their second vote for the NPD actually cast
192 their first vote for the post-Communist PDS (see Figure 4).¹⁶

193 Nevertheless, the political realities and balance of power in Saxony also
194 contributed to the success of the NPD, whose Saxon regional branch is its
195 strongest one nationwide (see Figure 5).¹⁷ The national NPD leadership had

14 The term used for demonstrations against the Communist dictatorship in 1989–90.

15 Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen, *Wahlen im Freistaat Sachsen 2004—Sächsischer Landtag. Ergebnisse der repräsentativen Wahlstatistik* (Kamenz: Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen 2004), 27; Forschungsgruppe Wahlen.

16 At the federal and regional level, German electoral law mandates that each voter has two votes. The share of seats for each party depends on the share of second votes. The first vote is for a local candidate and influences only the individuals who will occupy the elected seats. The motive for 'splitting' votes in the election of smaller parties is the expectation that the party will be too weak to receive a direct mandate in the second vote.

17 Henrik Steglich, *Die NPD in Sachsen. Organisatorische Voraussetzungen ihres Wahlerfolgs 2004* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht 2005).

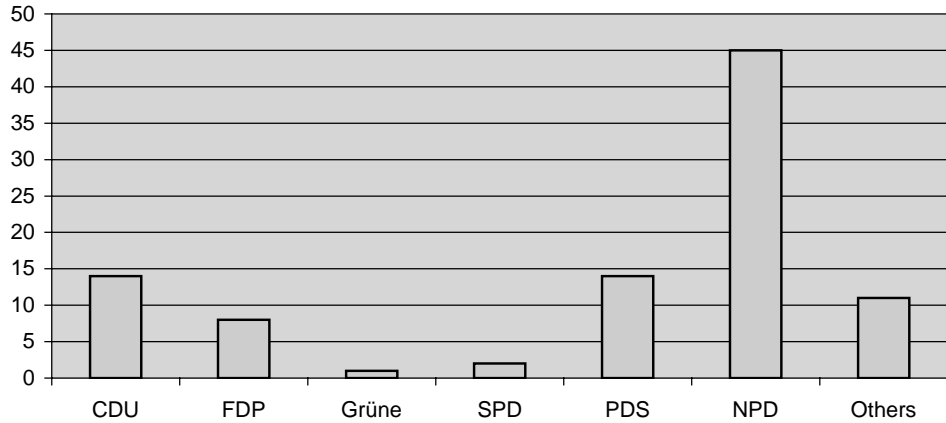
138 *Patterns of Prejudice*

Figure 4 First votes of those casting second votes for the NPD. Source: Statistisches Landesamt Sachsen

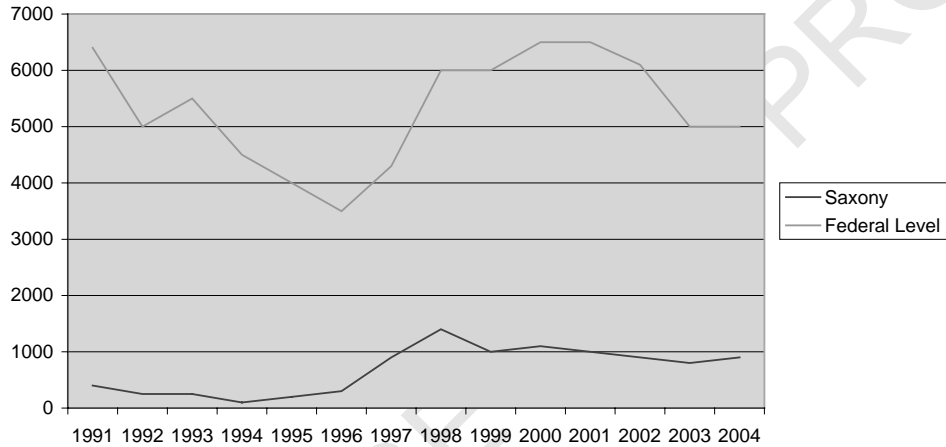


Figure 5 NPD members, Saxony and nationwide, 1991–2004. Sources: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz

chosen Saxony as a model region, transferring the editorial office of the party paper, *Deutsche Stimme* (German Voice), to the small Saxon town of Riesa, and the central youth organization, Junge Nationaldemokraten, to Dresden. Accordingly, the NPD achieved its best result in years at the regional level in the Saxon state elections of 1999 (1.4 per cent). Michael Nier (born 1943), a former professor of 'dialectical and historical materialism', managed to become a NPD candidate, and attracted attention with a platform mixing nationalism and anti-capitalism.¹⁸ Steffen Hupka (born 1962), a former

18 Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1999* (Dresden: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2000), 124.

204 companion of the neo-Nazi Michael Kühnen and, until March 2000,
205 chairman of the Saxon NPD, appeared as the spokesman of an internal
206 party tendency known as the Revolutionären Plattform.

207 Despite such candidates, in the election campaign of 2004, the NPD
208 eschewed shrillness. In local strongholds (such as Königstein, where it won
209 21.1 per cent of the vote in the 2004 local elections), seemingly respectable
210 personalities allowed themselves to be won over by the NPD, and the party
211 achieved a certain social embeddedness. In addition, the national leadership,
212 as the state elections approached, concentrated its efforts on Saxony, and sent
213 some of its most experienced activists there from other regional branches. An
214 electoral pact with the DVU helped to reduce the competitive pressure on
215 the extreme right. The Saxon branch of the REP distanced itself from the
216 strategic course adopted by its national leadership, and thereby demon-
217 strated to the NPD its readiness to cooperate. In fact, a large proportion of
218 the REP's regional membership actually defected to the NPD. In addition to
219 these factors, an anything but powerful CDU, thrown off balance by the
220 change of prime ministers (Georg Milbradt succeeding Kurt Biedenkopf),
221 and a PDS with a rather pragmatic profile and little potential for attracting
222 the protest vote can be counted among the 'opportunity structures'
223 favourable to the NPD.

224 **Unfavourable conditions for future NPD success in Saxony**

225 The NPD did not only find favourable conditions in Saxony, but was also
226 able to take advantage of them. In view of this, might the party be capable of
227 picking up the thread of its successes from the late 1960s,¹⁹ and this time
228 reach the 5 per cent threshold on a national level and enter the German
Bundestag?

229 Against the background of the recent decades, such a development seems
230 unlikely. First of all, it is doubtful that the NPD would, on a long-term basis,
231 be capable of exploiting opportunities as effectively as it did in Saxony. The
232 present-day NPD differs significantly from the party of the 1960s and 1970s.
233 Under the party chairman Udo Voigt (born 1952, national chairman since
234 1996), a former air force officer who, after leaving the German armed forces,
235 earned a master's degree in political science in Munich, the NPD opened
236 itself up to militant neo-Nazis and skinheads. Though the party clings to a
237 strategy of acting within the law, the fact is that it increasingly counts on
238 provocative public activities, and propagates a mixture of ultra-nationalism,
239 ethnocentrism and anti-capitalism that smacks of its archetype, historic
National Socialism.

19 For the history of the party, see Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse, *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, rev. edn (Frankfurt and Berlin: Propyläen 1996), 60–138.

240 The legal proceedings in which the government attempted to ban the
241 NPD,²⁰ which were initiated in 2001 and foundered on procedural grounds
242 in 2003—namely, the heavy presence of federal undercover agents in the
243 party's executive on both the state and federal levels—only brought
244 the party increased publicity. Horst Mahler, a former founding activist of
245 the Rote Armee Fraktion, who gradually transformed himself from leftist
246 terrorist into right-wing extremist, acted as the NPD's lawyer. In a statement
247 on the behaviour of the Federal Constitutional Court during the ban
248 proceedings, he called the government a 'vassal' of the 'most powerful
249 criminal state ever on earth'.²¹ He was referring to the widespread far-right
250 belief that the United States controls the world in an alliance with Jewish
251 power. After the proceedings came to an end, Mahler left the NPD as it, to
252 his mind, appeared to be too willing to compromise. The national chairman
253 later declared that Mahler resigned from the party because the NPD
254 leadership had refused to take up Holocaust denial and lead the party 'in
255 a battle over the Holocaust'.²² This, in the meantime, did not prevent Voigt
256 from paying tribute to Hitler as a 'great German statesman' despite bearing
257 'responsibility for Germany's defeat'. According to Voigt, National Socialism
258 as a 'movement still exists in today's Germany', and the NPD is attempting
259 'to embrace the National Socialist movement, as well as national-liberals and
260 national-conservatives, because to reject it would be only to help political
261 enemies'.²³

262 Statements like these have not been rooted out in obscure speeches; they
263 are quite commonly produced whenever the national chairman gives
264 interviews. They show that the NPD is only willing and able to impersonate
265 a democratic organization to a very limited extent. The party's ideological
266 dogmatism is so strong that it limits its populist manoeuvrability
267 considerably. The NPD therefore does not possess the 'winning formulae'
268 that have been identified in analyses of the success of other extreme right-
269 wing parties in Europe by academic observers like Piero Ignazi, Herbert

20 See Lars Flemming, *Das NPD-Verbotsverfahren. Vom 'Aufstand der Anständigen' zum 'Aufstand der Unfähigen'* (Baden-Baden: NOMOS-Verlag 2005); Eckhard Jesse, 'Der gescheiterte Verbotsantrag gegen die NPD. Die streitbare Demokratie ist beschädigt worden', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, no. 44, 2003, 292–301; Claus Leggewie and Horst Meier (eds), *Verbot der NPD oder Mit Rechtsradikalen leben?* (Frankfurt-on-Main: Suhrkamp 2002).

21 Statement by Horst Mahler, 'NPD-Stellungnahme zu den Schriftsätzen der Prozeßbevollmächtigten', 11 March 2002, available online at www.extremismus.com/dox/vmann3.htm (viewed 16 January 2006).

22 Moritz Schwarz, "'Ziel ist, die BRD abzuwickeln". Der NPD Vorsitzende Udo Voigt über den Wahlerfolg seiner Partei und den "Zusammenbruch des liberal-kapitalistischen Systems"', *Junge Freiheit*, no. 40, 24 September 2004.

23 Ibid.

270 Kitschelt or Jens Rydgren.²⁴ Furthermore, the NPD leadership lacks
271 charisma. Like its far-right competitors, the NPD is without an exceptional
272 talent, in terms of creating effective rhetoric and propaganda, who would be
273 able to bring the so-called 'national camp' together. As for personnel
274 generally, they are badly equipped. Even the second tier of the organization
275 cannot boast any effective leaders. There is, in short, no one on the horizon
276 who might conceivably grow into a successful 'piper'.

277 What is more, the NPD's ideological dogmatism and its (partial)
278 orientation towards historic National Socialism diminish its ability to form
279 alliances with more moderate potential partners. The NPD's neo-paganism,
280 with its accompanying social revolutionary and racist character, do not mesh
281 well with either neo-liberal or with Christian fundamentalist positions.
282 Accordingly, an alliance, in particular with the REP, should not be possible,
283 even if some regional associations of the REP attempt to forge such an
284 alliance. The strategic electoral rapprochement of the NPD and DVU— the
285 proposed formation of a 'national people's front (*Volksfront*)—met with a
286 clear rejection by the REP leadership: 'We do not have anything in common
287 with parties that plan to extirpate the state and democracy in order to
288 establish a "Fourth Reich", and there will be no cooperation.'²⁵ Whether the
289 alliance between the NPD and DVU, which was formed in October 2004 and
290 formally ratified in January 2005, will last for long seems at best dubious.
291 The DVU leader Gerhard Frey's strategy of ostentatiously asserting loyalty
292 to the constitution is irreconcilable with the aggressive and subversive stance
293 of the NPD leadership, with its openness towards militant skinheads, neo-
294 Nazis, *Kameradschaften* and espousers of 'national resistance'. Any serious
295 cooperation would also mean the loss of (financial) independence, which
296 Udo Voigt has always considered to be crucially important.

297 The NPD also faces a number of uncongenial 'opportunity structures' in
298 the Federal Republic of Germany. One such obstacle is the concept of
299 'militant democracy' that is embodied in the constitution, even though its
300 own limitations were revealed in the course of the legal proceedings to ban
301 the NPD. But Germany's 'militant democracy' is not exhausted by the
302 possibility of banning parties. Of greater significance is the existence of
303 offices charged with the protection of the constitution (*Verfassungsschutz*),
304 which report, critically and publicly, on the activities of those groups that
305 come into conflict with the basic rules of the democratic constitutional state.
306 In Germany it is possible to ban political parties that are extremist in nature

24 Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2003), 197–218; Herbert Kitschelt in collaboration with Anthony J. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe. A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1995); Jens Rydgren, *The Populist Challenge. Political Protest and Ethno-nationalist Mobilization in France* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2004), 226–32.

25 'Republikaner: Keine Allianz mit der NPD', press release of the the national office of the REP, no. 50, 31 October 2004.

142 *Patterns of Prejudice*

307 but that act within the law, a legacy of the failure to halt National Socialism
308 in the 1930s. This preventive aspect of ‘militant democracy’—so-called
309 *Vorverlagerung des Demokratieschutzes*—in combination with the publication
310 of the results of the monitoring of such groups at both a national and
311 regional level, has no fully-fledged counterpart anywhere else in Europe.
312 Reports by the *Verfassungsschutz* offices are scrutinized attentively by the
313 public and represent a major obstacle to the mobilizing ability of all those
314 parties that are mentioned in them.²⁶ This also concerns organizations
315 against which the militant democracy is not seriously considering using any
316 of its constitutionally mandated instruments (when their use seems
317 inopportune or judicially unenforceable), such as banning public assembly,
318 banning a party or demanding the forfeiture of fundamental rights or
319 restricting employment by the civil service.²⁷

320 A political and cultural peculiarity aggravates this institutional factor.
321 Because of Germany’s traumatic experience with the criminal and self-
322 destructive policies of National Socialism, groupings whose character and
323 development show the slightest similarity with the historic original are
324 monitored with the greatest diligence. That the attitude towards the past is at
325 times hysterical can be seen in the mutual accusations of fascism that fly
326 between the major democratic parties as well as marginal groups. Often, a
327 politician’s interest in sensationalism overlaps with that of journalists, an
328 intersection that fosters an atmosphere of suspicion. Therefore, it is
329 especially hard for extreme right-wing parties to make themselves heard,
330 let alone to find acceptance. Even the populist ‘single-issue movement’ led
331 by Ronald Schill, a former Hamburg judge, met with suspicions of this kind
332 although, despite the radicalism of its law-and-order and anti-immigrant
333 platform, it managed to distance itself from the extreme right convincingly.²⁸

334 The interaction between the trauma of National Socialism, well-developed
335 sensitivities *vis-à-vis* ‘dangers from the right’ and political machinations
336 arising from noble (and occasionally less than noble) motives predetermines
337 the attitudes of democratic parties towards alliances with extreme right-

26 See Uwe Backes, ‘Probleme der Beobachtungs- und Berichtspraxis der Verfassungsschutzämter—am Beispiel von REP und PDS’, in Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (ed.), *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. 50 Jahre im Dienst der inneren Sicherheit* (Cologne, Berlin, Bonn and Munich: Carl Heymanns Verlag 2000), 213–31.

27 On the characteristics of ‘militant democracy’, see Hans-Gerd Jaschke, ‘Die Zukunft der “streitbaren Demokratie”’, *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, no. 1, 2004, 109–22; Eckhard Jesse, ‘Demokratieschutz’, in Eckhard Jesse and Roland Sturm (eds), *Demokratien des 21. Jahrhunderts im Vergleich. Historische Zugänge, Gegenwartsprobleme, Reformperspektiven* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich 2003), 449–74; Uwe Backes, *Schutz des Staates. Von der Autokratie zur streitbaren Demokratie* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich 1998).

28 Frank Decker, ‘Perspektiven des Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland am Beispiel der “Schill-Partei”’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 21, 2002, 22–31 (28).

338 wing parties. In Germany extreme right-wing and nationalist populist
339 parties encounter an 'exclusionary oligopoly'.²⁹ The CDU/CSU take part
340 in this and would be ill-advised to enter into a coalition with a party seen to
341 have a dubious loyalty to the constitution. With public opinion being rather
342 inclined to be generous, a party like the PDS might just get away with
343 something that would be seen as an inexcusable faux pas if carried out by
344 the REP, for example. This applies even more to the ideologically 'harder-
345 core' NPD. The strategy of alienating extreme right-wing parties is pursued
346 with particular enthusiasm by anti-fascist 'watchdogs',³⁰ who in part are
347 devoted to the principles of militant democracy, but sometimes tend to
348 overshoot the mark. Anti-fascists of the extreme left blur the line between
349 loyalty and disloyalty to the constitution and, additionally, encourage the
350 atmosphere of suspicion.

351 No matter how this might be assessed according to theories of democracy,
352 high hurdles are being put in the way of extreme right-wing parties that try
353 to appear 'loyal to the constitution'. They therefore attract little in the way of
354 positive media response let alone the possibility of being offered a
355 platform—out of political interests—like the one Le Pen was offered in
356 mid-1980s France.³¹ Extreme right-wing parties—even those with a dis-
357 tinctly populist profile—have a hard time in Germany attracting political
358 activists, as anyone who comes close to them will fear repercussions in their
359 professional lives. At this point, the consequences of the politics of supply
360 and demand become particularly obvious.

361
362 **Uwe Backes** is Acting Director of the Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitar-
363 ismusforschung and teaches political science at the Technischen Universität
364 Dresden. Among his recent publications are the edited volumes, *Rechtsex-*
365 *tremer Ideologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau
366 Verlag 2003), and, with Eckhard Jesse, *Vergleichende Extremismusforschung*
367 (Baden-Baden: NOMOS-Verlag 2005) and *Gefährdungen der Freiheit. Extre-*
368 *mistische Ideologien in Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht 2006).
369

29 Laurent Kestel and Laurent Godmer, 'Institutional inclusion and exclusion of extreme right parties', in Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde (eds), *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge* (London and New York: Routledge 2004), 133–49 (135).

30 See George Michael, *Confronting Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the USA* (New York and London: Routledge 2003).

31 See Harald Bergsdorf, *Ungleiche Geschwister. Die deutschen Republikaner (REP) im Vergleich zum französischen Front National (FN)* (Frankfurt-on-Main: Peter Lang 2000), 303–9.