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Germany

# State Elections in Germany bring further losses to the Left and upticks for the Far Right

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**On October 8, elections were held in two important states of Germany: Bavaria and Hesse. Bavaria is the second largest German state in terms of population and also one of the wealthiest, with its economy also ranking second among German states in terms of GDP. Hesse ranks fifth in terms of population (out of 16 states) and contains the city of Frankfurt—the primary financial center for both Germany and continental Europe.**

The outright winners should come as no big surprise. The Christian Social Union (CSU) will be reigning again in Bavaria, as it has in every election cycle since WW II in that state – now, for the second time in a row, partnered with the “Freie Wähler” or Free Voters, another center right party. In Hesse, the Christian Democrats (CDU) are again the strongest party and are at liberty to decide if they want to continue a coalition with the Greens or enter talks with the Social Democrats (SPD) or Free Democrats (FDP).

## **Significant gains for the far-right party, AfD (Alternative for Germany)**

The most concerning election results, however, are the inroads made by the AfD. In both states, the far-right party gained several percentage points vis-à-vis the last elections in 2018. In Hesse, support for the AfD jumped by 5.3 percentage points, from 13.1% in 2018 to 18.4% in this election, while in Bavaria the increase was only slightly less, from 10.2% in 2018 to 14.6%. Part of the reason the AfD was weaker in Bavaria is that the CSU has historically been successful at bringing far-right voters into the bigger tent of Christian Democracy. Undeniably, though, the AfD has consolidated its base across the republic. One can no longer speak of just “protest” voters nor of a significant “East-West” divide.

Moreover, it would be inaccurate to characterize the AfD’s political clientele as economic losers. Certainly, AfD has garnered support among the worst-off working-class voters. Studies have shown that ten percent of unemployed voters support the AfD. The percentage of people without a high school diploma (Abitur) among voters for the AfD is higher than the percent of these voters among supporters of any other political party in Germany. [1] However, there are also numerous documented examples of educated and/or wealthy sectors of German society openly supporting the AfD.

One famous case in Germany was a Leipzig Professor of Law tweeting: “A white Europe of fraternal nations. For me this is a wonderful goal!”. Similarly, a Saxon entrepreneur offered his machine shop to host a local AfD event in 2018. Another entrepreneur present at the event donated 19,500 Euros to AfD in 2017. [2] Other journalistic investigations into the AfD money trail led to the billionaire August von Fink and into Switzerland. [3] People vote AfD for different reasons, but while the party may have started out as a euro-sceptic, neoliberal party, it very rapidly turned into a far-right organization.

In this sense, we can argue that AfD voters at the very least tolerate, if not openly endorse, the xenophobic, Islamophobic, antisemitic, völkisch-nationalist and sexist messages this party routinely transmits. Unfortunately, this appears to be in line with similar findings here in the US.

Studies conducted here have revealed that:

30% of Americans agree with the statement “I often find myself fearful of other people of other races.”

14% of Americans agree some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.

23% of Americans agree that sometimes other groups must be kept in their place. [4]

In other words, there appears to be a significant percentage (anywhere from about 15 to 25%) of voters in either country, and presumably in others, open to totalitarian and racist ideas.

## The drastic demise of the Left

In this election, Left and center-left parties lost across the board in both states. In Bavaria the SPD dropped below 10%, while the Greens dropped 3.2 percentage points to 14.4%. In Hesse both parties dropped by about 5 percentage points, handing the Social Democrats their lowest result ever in that State at 15.1%. No doubt, the fact that both these parties are at the helm federally, together with the Liberals, in an alliance known as the “Ampelkoalition” or traffic light coalition, due to the colors of the participating parties, played a significant role. Nancy Faeser, who was the top candidate for the SPD in Hesse, is the current Secretary of the Interior.

Far more alarming for us, however, should be the downward trend at the polls of Germany’s left opposition party – Die Linke. Die Linke ceded 3.2 percentage points, which dropped the party to 3.1 % at the polls, quite a bit below the 5% threshold required for representation in parliament. Furthermore, this means that Die Linke has now exited out of every single “Western” German State, except for the two smaller city states of Bremen and Hamburg. This harsh reality is clearly no reason to cheer for a party that was trying to shed its “East” heritage and represent the underprivileged across the whole republic.

One of the main reasons for this poor performance was again Sarah Wagenknecht, who has been a thorn in the party’s side for quite some time. In particular, the former parliamentary speakers’ views on climate change, diversity and migration have been routinely at odds with the remainder of Die Linke’s leadership. With regards to migration, Wagenknecht has not been above repeating right-wing platitudes. This has even earned her invitations to join demonstrations organized by the AfD as well as to become a member of the far-right party itself. She routinely seeks the spotlight and uses, for example, her own publications, as well as prime time tv talk shows and interviews, to repeatedly fire against Die Linke. Wagenknecht finally left the party towards the end of October, after the two State elections we are discussing here. The split was in the end inevitable and should have happened much sooner via disciplinary proceedings and an exclusion process but didn’t for a variety of reasons. In the end she decided to start her own, highly personalized new party (the temporary name of the new party is “Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht” or Alliance Sarah Wagenknecht) which will further splinter the Left in Germany. While the split was necessary, Wagenknecht was, unfortunately, able to convince nine other members of parliament to leave with her. This will most likely hurt the party tremendously with regards to both parliamentary status and financial resources, once these members are forced to resign their mandates. For more information on the Sarah Wagenknecht dilemma check out this [interview](#) by Die Linke-affiliated Rosa Luxemburg Foundation:

## How can we stop the rise of the far right?

There are no easy answers as to how to resolve the severe crisis of Die Linke. However, there are proven tactics that can and should be implemented to confront the fascist AfD and curb further growth.

The AfD, just like any other fascists, needs to be outed and confronted wherever they raise their ugly heads. Specific

actions would include:

## **1. The existence of the AfD should neither be trivialized nor normalized**

Members of the AfD need to be marginalized and branded as the fascists they are, wherever they show up in public – whether on tv talk shows or at their information stands or kiosks during election cycles. Tearing off their pseudo-conservative mask will also continue to make them unacceptable as a coalition partner for the CDU.

## **2. The AfD and other fascist movements need to be confronted in the streets**

The AfD, often in conjunction with other fascist movements such as PEGIDA, tends to take to the streets in order to mobilize its members, recruit new sympathizers and intimidate minorities as well as anybody else who is not on their side. This should never be allowed without the broadest resistance and counterprotests of all and any anti-fascist and anti-racist groups and individuals. This requires broad mobilization across the spectrum but has successfully been done repeatedly in Germany in the recent past.

One of the most memorable occasions was when an alliance of over 10,000 anti-fascists prevented a march of about 1,300 Neo-Nazis through the City of Dresden in 2006. For a long time, the far-right has been trying to instrumentalize the horrific bombing of Dresden in February, 1945, in which 25,000 civilians lost their lives. Since the late nineties, Neo-Nazis have organized regular annual anniversary marches to commemorate the bombing and exploit it for their own purposes, trivializing the crimes against humanity by the Nazi regime by highlighting this Allied war crime.

## **3. Education**

Efforts have been made, not least through the nation-wide initiative “Standing Up Against Racism” to train people to be able to stand up to right-wing slogans and teach others to do the same via seminars. It is imperative to have broad networks of these trained individuals at every workplace. Furthermore, every union should pass an incompatibility resolution against the AfD!

## **4. Provide a political alternative**

There have been voices calling for the AfD to be outlawed for being “unconstitutional”. We should reject these calls on the same basis that we would reject them in this country. As revolutionary socialists from the Marx21 network (a tendency within Die Linke) rightly point out: “...a ban wrongly relies on the state and the repressive apparatus, which in case of doubt is positioned against the left and weakens civil society anti-fascism.” [\[5\]](#)

While the AfD has turned into a fascist party, the same cannot necessarily be said of every single person who votes for this party. Germany, like many other countries, is currently feeling the impact of a series of crises, including those stemming from climate change and the Ukraine war. Social spending cuts by successive governments further exacerbate these problems. While it is thus understandable that support for the traffic light coalition members is collapsing, it is not a given that this leads to success for the AfD. The AfD has nothing to offer but racist slogans and nationalist sentiment. However, it is skilled in exploiting these crises and portraying itself as being “against the current system”, especially in light of Die Linke being perceived as splintered and weak and somehow not in true opposition to the effects of these crises.

Our hope is therefore that Die Linke will be able to soon pull together, focus on its core values of international solidarity and social justice for all and sharpen its opposition profile against the status quo. This could result in a first step towards making the AfD politically obsolete.

Source: [Solidarity](#).

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[1] Yendell, Alexander et al. (2018): "Die Parteien und das Wählerherz 2018", Abteilung für Medizinische Psychologie und Medizinische Soziologie der Universität Leipzig.

[2] "So viel haben sächsische Unternehmen an die AfD gespendet", Leipziger Volkszeitung vom 16.1.2019.

[3] Fuchs, Christian/Middelhoff, Paul: "Das Netzwerk der Neuen Rechten: Wer sie lenkt, wer sie finanziert und wie sie die Gesellschaft verändern", Reinbeck: Rowohlt 2019.

[4] American Survey Research Project: "Three National Panel Surveys" fielded on October 2016, March 2017 and July 2017 by YouGov.

[5] See [AfD-Nazis stoppen! Aber wie?](#).