# Main Text: The German Far-Right Voter

**The Rise of the Far-Right**

Far-right parties have been increasing their vote share and gaining power across Western Europe

When on April 21st 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the far-right Front National made it to the second round of the French presidential election, it sent shockwaves through the political system. It was an unprecedented result that no one had expected. All other political parties united to elect his opponent and eventual winner, Jacques Chirac. When 15 years later, in 2017, Jean-Marie’s daughter, Marine Le Pen, made it to the second round of the French presidential election, it came as a surprise to no one. For the last 20 years have seen a transformation of Western Europe’s political party system, chief among which has been the rise of far-right populist parties whose platform is built on Euroscepticism, anti-immigrant sentiments if not outright racism and a strong anti-establishment message. This time period saw either the establishment of new far-right parties, the strengthening of old ones or the radicalisation of others. Several of them ended up joining governments, like the FPÖ in Austria or the League Nord in Italy.

Germany seemed resilient to this trend till the 2010s

For a long time period, Germany seemed resilient to this trend. While some far-right parties would win a regional election here or there, none ever made it into the Federal parliament, the Budnestag. It seemed like Germany’s history with fascism, WWII and the holocaust would insulate Germans from ever voting for a far-right party in high numbers again. This all started changing with the Euro financial crisis in the early 2010s. A new party was founded called the Alternative for Germany or AFD (Alternative für Deutschland) that opposed supporting the Southern European countries and demanded Germany go its own way. The party quickly moved further to the right adopting the same language used by other far-right parties in Western Europe: Demonizing migrants, demanding Germany be reclaimed for the Germans and strongly opposing Germany refugee policies in 2015 -2016. The refugee crisis powered their rise to become the third largest party in the German federal parliament in 2017 and the largest opposition party.

* *Visual*: Table with AFD’s electoral successes in Landtagswahlen and European Parliament elections
* Optional: Populist quotes by party leaders or from manifesto

This meteoric rise was driven by a particular type of voter. This voter is likely never to have attended college, more likely to be male and to profess not to be religious. This voter is also much more likely to be living in the former communist GDR, Eastern Germany, where the AFD has often achieved results close to XX in regional elections.

* + Visual: Table with election results in the different states
  + *Visual*: visual with probabilities
* Education as the new class:

The strength of education as a predictor of far right and populist voting is not only a German phenomenon. Blue-collar men whose education stopped at a pre-college level are more likely to support the nationalist populists all over the Western world. These voters are often described as the losers of modernization, unable to cope with the multi-cultural world and globalized knowledge economy of the twenty-first century we currently live in.

* + - Optional: Discussion of authoritarian vs libertarian values

While research shows that education actually has a causal effect and not just a correlation on voting for the far-right, it is disputed how additional years of formal education actually affect voting behaviour. Does education teach one to be more tolerant and accepting? To be less susceptible to populist messages? Or does education allow one to profit from today’s knowledge economy and thus, have fewer resentments to fuel voting for the far-right? While the answer remains elusive, education seems to be this new cleavage in society, replacing class and religion, the cleavages of years past. Today, the level of education separates people by income, values, type of jobs, whom they interact with, their social circles and where they live. And while one would hope that an increase in the percentage of the population attending college might reverse this dynamic and increase their share in the voting population, the German example shows what a smaller proportion of the overall voting population they actually are.

* + - *Visual*: Share of different population groups in the electorate/among voters
    - *Optional visual*: Increase in higher education in OECD over the last 30 to 60 years

# Underreporting and data constraints

* Find significant underreporting of voting for AFD in data set
* Either the cross section is not representative or more than half of the AFD voters were too ashamed or shy to report voting for the party
* Generally lower education voters are more difficult to reach for polls – might be the same in this survey
  + *Visual*: Difference between AFD’s vote share and % of respondents reporting to have voted for them

# Data

1. Data on Voter Demographics

About: <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/>

All data on voter demographics and voter turnout in German elections are derived from the **Year-Year** European Social Survey (ESS), an academic semi-annual cross-national survey of over 30 countries. Interviews are conducted face-to-face and include a minimum effective sample size of 1500 for larger countries and 800 for smaller ones.

ESS data are available for download for non-commercial use upon registration here ([registration](https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/user/new)).

The code used to clean and prepare the data for the analysis can be found here:

2. Data on election results in Western Europe

Following data was used for visualizing election results in Europe:

3. Data on far-right categorization of parties

The categorization of parties as far-right was done following …. More information can be found here.

4. Data on federal and regional election results in Germany

Data on federal and regional elections in Germany can be found here:

# Contact

This website and its content were developed by Harvard Kennedy School students Lucas Kitzmüller, Siddhant Gokhale and Ahmed Ragab as part of their coursework for the class Programming and Data for Policymakers.

*Optional*: For inquiries please reach out to *our email adresses*

**Notes for self:**

Ideas for titles:

# Education as the new class

How education increasingly predicts voting for far-right parties and positions in the West

Percentage of college educated of overall electorate

Statistic on higher educational levels in Western Europe

Percentage of MPs with a university degree?

<https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/education-as-a-new-political-divide/>

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/education-and-antiimmigration-attitudes-evidence-from-compulsory-schooling-reforms-across-western-europe/15551FC325C118588CF61113697488A3>

A second line of argument highlights the emergencein advanced democracies of a new structural cleavagepitting those adversely affected by deindustrialization,automation, and globalization—both materially andsymbolically—against those benefiting from thesestructural changes (e.g., Kitschelt1997). Individualswithout qualifications fall on the losing side of thiscleavage. For such voters, the activation of physicaland cultural boundaries—signified by economic pro-tectionism and ethnocentric policies—may boost theirdisposable income (Mayda2006; Scheve and Slaughter2001), in addition to their self-worth and social status(Lamont and Molnar2002; Shayo2009). In this“edu-cation-as-cleavage”literature, education not onlymatters because of what happens while one is gettingan education but also because of everything else thathappens after exiting the educational system: the suc-cessful completion of additional degrees translates intodifferent life expectations and experiences—e.g., lowerunemployment risks, higher wages, and differentoccupational choices—that make one less likely to holdanti-immigration attitudes