



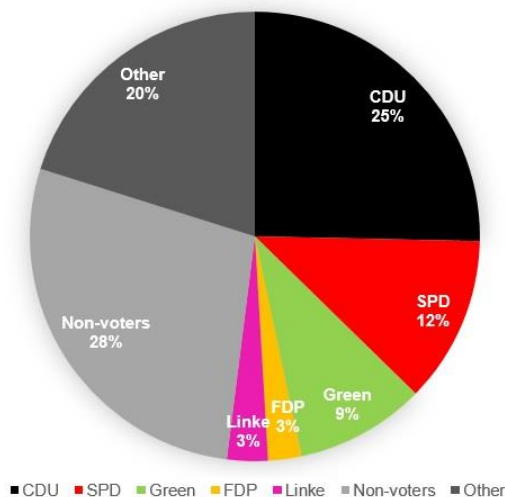
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## A Temporary Alternative for Germany? A Look at AfD's Rise

by Emily Hruban

In state elections on Sunday, the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) party achieved double-digit support in all three states that held elections—Baden-Württemberg (15.1 percent), Rhineland-Palatinate (12.6 percent) and Saxony-Anhalt (24.2 percent)<sup>i</sup>—surpassing their expected support by several points in each state. However, the majority of voters still favored establishment parties. Candidates from outside of Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) won on platforms that supported her open-door refugee policy in both Saxony-Anhalt and Baden-Württemberg. AfD's success, however, showed a growing minority of voters dissatisfied with the current leadership.

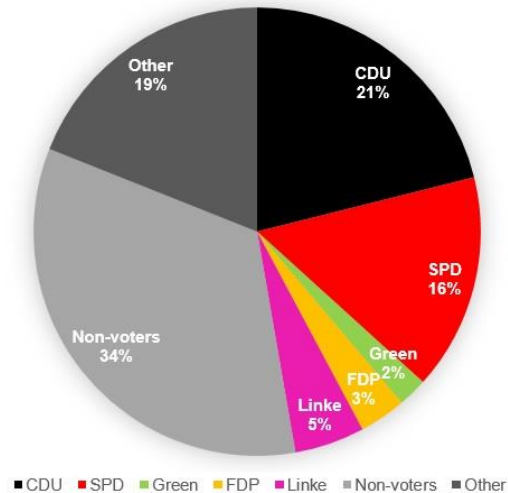
**Where AfD Votes Came From: Baden-Württemberg**



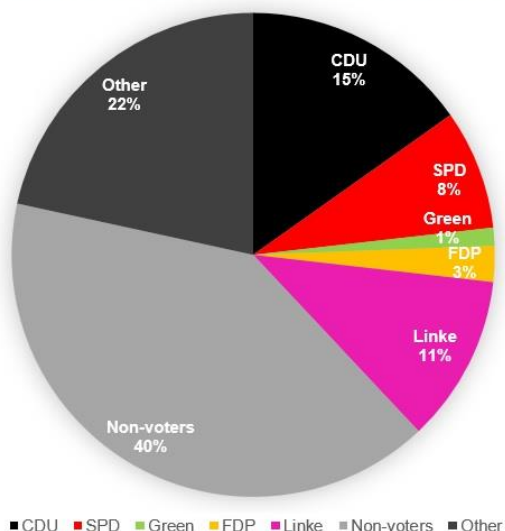
Polls may have underestimated the AfD's potential because voters were uncomfortable admitting their right-wing preference to pollsters. Since World War II, nationalist rhetoric and politics have been taboo in Germany. But the AfD, which formed in 2013, has confronted that taboo head on. Party spokeswoman Frauke Petry, for example, suggested that police use firearms to protect German borders against refugees. The party's unabashedly nativist rhetoric has appealed to those who are fed up with political correctness, and critical of the political establishment and media for not speaking honestly about the refugee crisis.

Voters were drawn to the AfD, which did not exist in the previous elections, from across the German political spectrum. Every party – from the Greens and the left-wing Die Linke to Merkel’s center-right CDU – lost voters to the AfD on Sunday. In addition to those voters shifting party allegiance, many new voters came to the polls. Voter turnout was high, with 4 to 10 percent more of each state’s population participating this year than in 2011. Over one-third of voters for AfD in both Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt were categorized as “non-voters” in past elections. A quarter of voters for AfD in Baden-Württemberg were also previously “non-voters”.

**Where AfD Votes Came From: Rhineland-Palatinate**

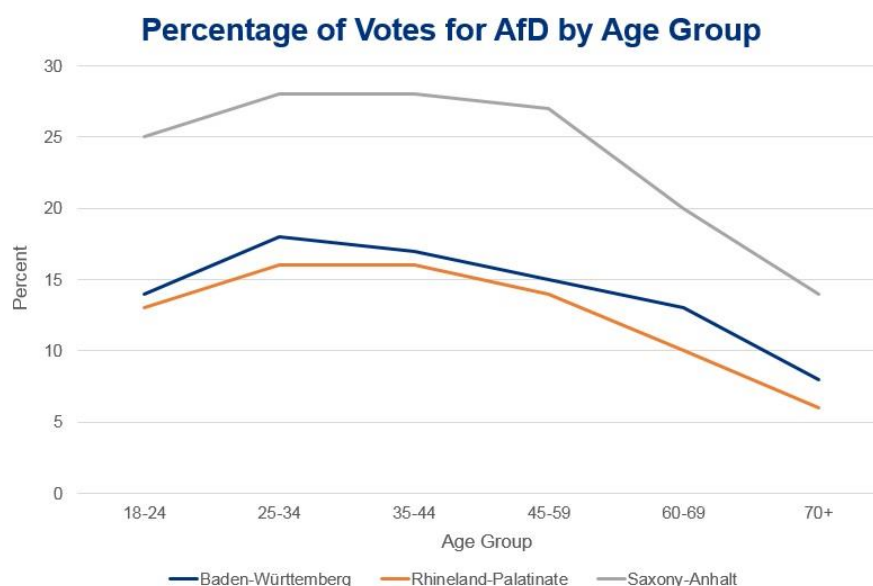


**Where AfD Votes Came From: Saxony-Anhalt**



Like other right-wing parties in Europe and the United States, the AfD received greater support from men than women. Blue-collar workers and those who are currently unemployed were far more likely to vote for the party. In Saxony-Anhalt, AfD received backing from 36 percent of unemployed voters, and 35 percent of blue-collar workers (compared to the state average of 24.2 percent). AfD also gained significant ground in some larger cities, including Mannheim in Baden-Württemberg and Halle and Magdeburg in Saxony-Anhalt.

Other demographic groups yielded equally interesting results. Young voters' support of the AfD was close to the state average in all three states. Middle-aged voters, however, were more likely than the average voter to back the party. Most strikingly, older voters were the least likely to favor the right-wing policies of the AfD. In Rhineland-Palatinate, only 6 percent of voters over the age of 70 supported the party (state average of 13 percent), in Saxony-Anhalt, 14 percent voted for the party (state average of 23 percent) and in Baden-Württemberg, 8 percent voted for the party (state average of 14 percent). Older Germans – particularly those who lived through World War II and the protest generation that followed – hold onto memories of Germany's past, and are viscerally repulsed by extremist politics. AfD's limited support among older voters stands in stark contrast to trends in the United States, where candidates challenging conventional political norms, like Donald Trump, are especially popular with seniors.<sup>ii</sup>



## Staying Power?

The AfD's success in the future, particularly in Germany's federal elections in 2017, hinges on the refugee crisis continuing in the short term and the party's ability to develop a serious platform beyond the crisis in the long term. Votes for AfD were a reaction to Merkel's open-door policy. Other externalities of the crisis could bolster the party's position in future elections, for example a spike in the unemployment rate, terrorism on German soil or attacks against women like the ones in Cologne earlier this year.

In the long term, however, the party will need to develop a more comprehensive platform that addresses kitchen table issues in order to maintain sustainable appeal to voters. AfD leaders have struggled to agree on policies beyond migration. With that in mind, the party

plans to convene a national convention on April 30 in Stuttgart to establish a new platform that addresses topics including the environment, the eurozone and social welfare. Voters will be watching their progress in Stuttgart, and will assess the newly elected representatives' ability to lead. Their success will determine if the party is just a flash in the pan, or is here to stay.

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<sup>i</sup> All figures cited in text and graphs were sourced from *Tagesschau* news site unless otherwise noted:

<http://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2016-03-13-EVENT-BWRPST/index.shtml>.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/31/upshot/donald-trumps-strongest-supporters-a-certain-kind-of-democrat.html>