

German far right makes record gains

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Polarisation: Dissatisfaction among Germany's youth is believed to have had a significant influence on the outcome of the election, with many young people drifting to political groups on the far-left and far-right fringes.

Is liberal democracy under threat? The success of the AfD party in Germany's federal elections has caused fears over Europe's future.

What's happening?

Alice Weidel is the smart-suited leader of Germany's **far-right** Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party. Critics call her party, which supports ending immigration, and "protecting national culture", a threat to **democracy**.

This weekend it secured almost 20% of votes in the German election, the largest share of votes for a **far-right** party since World War Two.

Find out more

To critics, the AfD is **extremist**. Weidel has claimed that immigrants are "girls in headscarves, knife-wielding men on government benefits and other good-for-nothing people".

But her supporters argue that **mainstream** politicians are the real problems. The German economy is not growing and people are feeling poorer. High levels of immigration and a string of attacks by recent migrants mean that many are demanding strict border controls.

Most Germans, though, do not support the AfD, and a **coalition** led by the centre-right politician Friedrich Merz will now run Germany.

But mainstream political parties have failed to respond to the frustration felt by many. The success of leaders promising radical change suggests that many have given up on **liberal democracy**.

Is liberal democracy under threat?

Some say

Yes! The AfD has attacked immigrants, questioned Covid vaccines and global warming, and threatened to leave the EU. If it entered government, it would be a disaster for democracy.

Others think

No! Far-right parties are in power in several EU countries without damaging democracy.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

1. Connect

"Simply because something is a populist movement doesn't make it either good or bad."

P.J. O'Rourke (1947 – 2022), American journalist

Empty heading

What do you think?

How do you feel about this story? - Do you worry about the rise of right-wing politicians? Or do you think that politics in other countries has little influence on what happens at home?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: How many votes did the AfD win in the Sunday elections? How does this compare with the mainstream parties?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Germany's GDP was 4,305 billion euros in 2024, 0.2% smaller than the previous year. How does this compare with the GDP of your country and that of the richest and poorest countries in the world?

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine that AfD leader Alice Weidel is visiting your school. Write a list of the questions you would ask her.

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, think of three more reasons why the far-right is becoming more popular in Europe.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Do you think the far-right will come to power in Britain? Write a news story set 50 years from now, explaining whether a populist party ever won an election and describing what happened next.

Glossary

Far-right - A range of ideologies that emphasise social order, racial purity and the elimination of opponents.

Democracy - A system of government based on the idea of rule by the people.

Extremist - People or groups which have extreme ideas, often relating to politics.

Mainstream - Ideas shared by most people.

Coalition - Two sides working together officially.

Liberal democracy - A system of government in which governments are elected and the rights and freedoms of the individual is protected.