

The Success of the Far Right in Germany – An Analysis and Countermeasures

A few days ago, the right-wing extremist AfD (Alternative for Germany) won more than 30 percent of the votes in the regions of Saxony and Thuringia, and in about two weeks there will be elections in Brandenburg. The newly founded party BSW also comes to more than 10 percent in both regions. How is it that such parties won so many votes in these state elections? The reasons are manifold, and I would like to explain them from different angles:

First, a historically justified explanation: The sociologist Rai Kollmorgen from the University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz clarifies in an interview with tagesschau24: After the fall of the Wall in 1989, about 75 percent of people in eastern Germany lost their jobs. This has caused a trauma that Kollmorgen calls "transformation shock." The experience of loss makes people in the East particularly sensitive to the topics of "migration" and "support for Ukraine", one hears again and again in interviews shown on television: Why support migrants or Ukraine if we don't have enough ourselves? Both the AfD and the BSW clearly position themselves against migration and support for Ukraine.

Secondly, the AfD is very active in social media channels such as Tik Tok in order to reach young voters in particular. It is obvious that around 35 percent of voters under the age of 30 voted for the AfD. The party has succeeded in building a network of young people in the east, not only through social media, but also through social events such as summer festivals (someone said on television that today in the east it is no longer the Greens or the SPD that organize such events, but the AfD). There are some studies on why so many people were able to behave so cruelly in the concentration camps during the Second World War, such as the Stanford prison experiment, which was also shown in the German film "The Experiment", or the Milgram experiments. A German novel entitled "Die Welle" (engl. The Wave) shows how young people can be drawn into extremism by group dynamics; on youtube you can watch both a German and a US trailer. In a September 4 article on the danger posed by these elections, journalist Serge Schmemmann of the New York Times shows how the AfD is trying to reach young men with the following messages: "Real men stand on the far right. Real men are patriots. That's the way to find a girlfriend".

Thirdly, there is a reason that is typical of East Germany: people had been living in a dictatorship for decades and were shot when they tried to flee. The Stasi (secret service of the former East Germany) observed thousands of dissidents and tried to win over IM (Informal

Employees) to cooperate with the service. The AfD is now being observed by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and is classified as definitely right-wing extremist, which German courts have confirmed. When AfD members make statements about the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, they always refer to the historical context and refer to the methods of it as "Stasi methods". From a socio-psychological point of view, they link the injustice experienced by former East Germany citizens with today's institutions. In addition, we know from surveys that people in eastern Germany often feel disadvantaged compared to people in the west. The AfD is signaling in essence: "The state is discriminating against you, you are still living under a dictatorship, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution is the Stasi and we stand for the resistance against this unjust state." So there is a method of equating democratic institutions with the unjust system of the time to get people to protest against the system by voting for the far right.

What can be done? First of all, the education system would have to be sensitized to these mechanisms. For example, the film "The Wave" could be part of the history lesson and a critical examination of how to recognize fake news and how parties like the AfD use it in a targeted manner should also be part of the curriculum. In addition, due to Germany's special history, it should be obligatory for students in the East and West to visit a memorial site such as the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

Secondly, as a social business consultant, I would recommend founding a non for profit bank like "Grameen America". Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has shown that his approach of supporting women with the help of microcredits in a group of five system also works in industrialized countries. It would be good for the West and the East in Germany if there was such a bank that would give everyone the opportunity to become self-employed through microloans (the 5-group system from Yunus is an important success factor!). The self-efficacy generated by this would both alleviate the trauma or transformation shock after reunification and counteract the generally widespread fears that migrants could take something away from you economically. With the young generation in mind, Yunus has launched the "3zeroclubs", which are intended to encourage pupils and students to join together in groups of five to work towards a self-defined sustainable goal. This initiative could also be increasingly used in schools and universities!

Third: The new law „The Democracy Promotion Act“ should finally pass the German parliament. It was designed to strengthen civil society, e.g. by providing financial support to associations that are committed to democracy.

Fourth: The right-wing extremist AfD should be banned. In the Thuringian state parliament, the AfD has won more than 30 percent of the seats, which gives it a so-called "blocking minority". This means that it is possible for the party to prevent the appointment of judges and the dissolution of the Thuringian state parliament; and the AfD in Thuringia can influence the control of the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution. In Germany, two conditions must be met for a party to be banned: First, it must be clear that it is behaving in an anti-constitutional manner. The University of Cologne has just published a study in which it has analysed this with a view to Thuringia (www.extremismusmonitor-thueringen.de). Second, it must have gained enough power to achieve its goals. The second requirement is now fulfilled with regard to the "blocking minority" obtained.

Strengthening civil society by promoting democratic education, building a social economy through financial participation for all, and finally banning the AfD are the instruments to strengthen democratic culture in Germany – and elsewhere!

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