

# Germany: Social Democrats, Left Party responsible for growth of right in Saxony elections

Ulrich Rippert  
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Sunday's election in the German state of Saxony revealed two developments which have significance beyond the borders of the Free State in eastern Germany.

Firstly, the degree of alienation from the policies of all of the parliamentary parties was palpable. Over half the 3.4 million registered voters voted against all parties by abstaining. It was the second lowest rate of participation in a German state election since 1949. At the first state election in Saxony after the re-unification of Germany in 1990, voter participation stood at 73 percent.

Secondly, with official "left" politics consisting of the anti-social policies of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Left Party, which also support the German government's war course, a layer of voters increasingly turned to right-wing, nationalist parties. The right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) won 9.7 percent of the vote at its first election.

The neo-fascist National Democratic Party (NPD) also just barely failed to reenter parliament with 4.9 percent.

If the 51 percent who did not participate are counted together with the protest voters for the right-wing parties, and the additional 5.1 percent who voted for small parties, more than 60 percent of the electorate did not vote for parties represented in the federal parliament.

The ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which also controls the state presidency in Saxony, achieved its worst ever result, with 39.4 percent of the vote. The liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), which had been in coalition with the CDU, received only 3.8 percent of the vote. As a result, the party, which only

last year still controlled the posts of German foreign minister and vice chancellor, was removed from the last state government in which it was represented.

The SPD celebrated its election result of 12.4 percent as a success. Four years ago, it fell to a record low of 10.4 percent. The Greens, with 5.7 percent, barely passed the 5 percent cut-off for parliamentary representation.

The Left party's result was also revealing. Support for the party, the second strongest in Saxony, fell from 20.6 percent to 18.9 percent. Statistics on shifts in the electorate show that around 15,000 Left Party voters shifted their allegiance to the AfD, and 2,000 to the NPD. A further 13,000 former Left Party voters turned their back on the party and joined the camp of the non-voters.

Faced with the performance of the AfD and NPD, Left Party Chief of Federal Affairs Matthias Höhn spoke on Monday of a "rightward shift in Saxony." A similar view was expressed by Left Party Chairwoman in Thuringia, Susanna Hennig-Wellsow, who spoke of a bad day for democracy.

Media commentators also described the good result for AfD, which won votes with its right-wing criticism of the euro and slogans against immigrants and homosexuals, as threatening. Heribert Prantl wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "Saxony, once a stronghold for red Social Democracy, is today the most conservative and right-wing German state."

But the central question of who is responsible for the growth of the right is avoided by everyone. Instead, the electorate is denounced. The daily *Die Welt* went so far as to call the right to vote into question, in order to prevent a further shift to the right. The state

government's role "is there for all to see," the paper wrote, questioning how seriously the right to vote was taken by citizens and if they can be trusted to use it.

But it was precisely last Sunday's election results which showed the central responsibility of the Left Party for the move to the right. The right-wing, anti-social policies of the SPD have been well known for years. Some of the largest protests against the Hartz IV and Agenda 2010 reforms of the SPD-Green Party government took place in Saxony.

The Left Party, and its predecessor the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS), portrayed themselves as critics and took the lead of protests in several locations, but only to keep them under control and run them into the ground. In practice, the Left Party supported the policies of the federal and state governments.

A good example of this is their support for the "debt brake," that is, the balanced budget law. This is one of the most important financial measures which forces spending cuts, lay-offs and privatizations to be enforced at the federal, state and municipal levels. Among other things, the "debt brake" obliges the federal government not to take on any new debt after 2020.

Leading representatives of the Saxon Left Party were involved in the implementation of the debt brake in Saxony. Early last year, the Left Party's fraction leader in the state parliament, Rico Gebhardt, voted on behalf of his fraction in favor of changing the state constitution to incorporate the debt brake and ban any new debt.

This measure had terrible consequences, forcing municipalities to impose increasingly sharp social cuts. In the states in eastern Germany, it is frequently Left Party officials in the local authorities who rigorously force through these austerity measures.

The result of these policies has been a rapid deterioration of the social crisis. At the beginning of the year, a study was published according to which every fourth child in Saxony is threatened by poverty. The result put Saxony well above the federal poverty rate for children of 18.9 percent. In Leipzig, children are affected particularly severely by poverty at 29.9 percent; in Chemnitz the rate is 26 percent and in Dresden, more than one in five children (20.7 percent) grow up in economic insecurity.

Virtually at the same time as this report, it was announced that the state government was cutting

education, making it once again a privilege for the wealthy.

Confronted with the growing social tensions produced by its policies, the Left Party demanded better pay and equipment for police in the recently concluded election campaign.

Twenty five years ago, the Stalinist regime in East Germany, whose political descendants are today in the Left Party, intervened to reintroduce capitalist relations, glorifying the "social market economy." Today, the pro-capitalist, bourgeois character of this party is being fully exposed. Its right-wing politics dressed up in left colors strengthens the right-wing populists. This is the secret to understanding last Sunday's election in Saxony.



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