

Right-wing extremist parties in Germany

platforms, personnel,
voters

Roadmap

- What is extremism?
- What is right-wing?
- Which right-wing extremist parties do/did exist in Germany?
- How can they gain parliamentary representation?
- What do/did they stand for?
- Who are/were their voters?
- What consequences does their existence have for Germany?
- What are their prospects for the future?

What is extremism?

- Stems back from the 19th century
- Not a very precise notion:
 - “A tendency to go to extremes, especially in politics” (Webster’s dictionary); being on the tip of the left-right axis
 - No problem with democracy so far
- Every day language definition is neither especially clear nor very useful

How is extremism defined in Political Sociology?

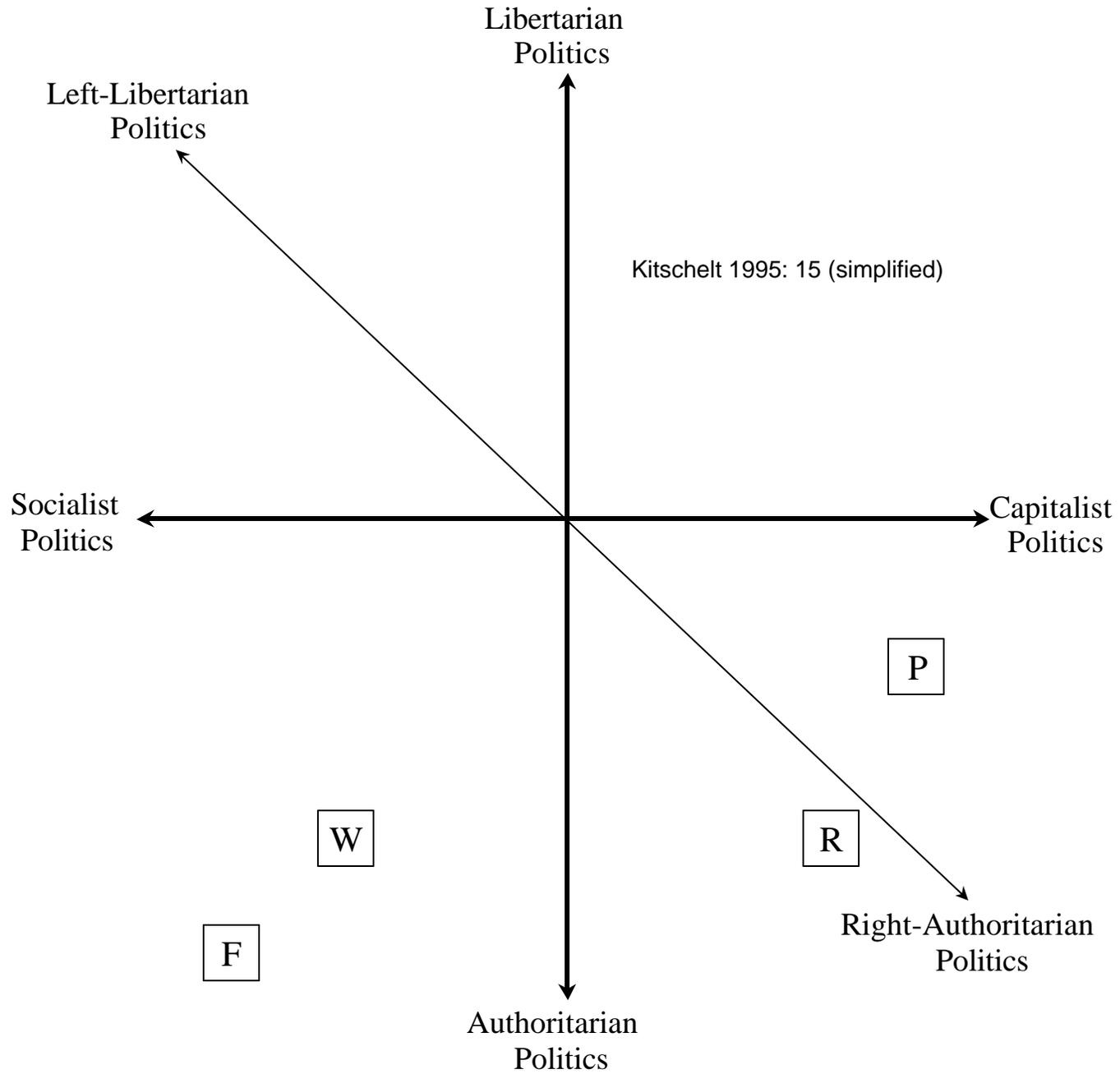
- Definition by Lipset/Raab (1971:6) is more precise and widely accepted:
 - “Extremism is anti-pluralism”
 - “the repression of difference and dissent”
 - “the closing down of the market place of ideas”
 - “the tendency to treat cleavage and ambivalence as illegitimate”

Extremism vs. Democracy?

- From Lipset's (and my) point of view, extremism is the *opposite* of a liberal, pluralistic democracy
- Certain concepts of democracy (Marxian , maybe Rousseauan) are not liberal/pluralistic and can therefore be termed as extremist
- Extremism can be combined with any position on the (economic) left-right axis
- The concept of left vs. right needs some additional clarification

What's left from left vs. right?

- Political values and preferences are often described in spatial terms
- Historically, the left-right-axis has been chiefly associated with economic cleavage (socialism vs. free market)
- A second, less clear cut axis involves two closely correlated sub-dimensions:
 - “a delineation who is a ‘player’ or citizen” (cosmopolitan vs. particularist conceptions of citizenship)
 - “a choice of decision modes among players” (Kitschelt 1995:4)



What is libertarian/authoritarian?

- Involves the issues of New Politics (ecology, women's liberation, gay & lesbian issues, immigrants, demands for direct democracy etc.)
- Authoritarianism leads to a “closing down of the market place of ideas”, “repression of difference” etc.
- Authoritarianism is highly correlated (although not completely identical) with Lipset's extremism vs. democracy dimension
- Right-wing extremism is therefore usually used in a broader sense than just “right-authoritarian politics”

What is right-wing extremism?

- Broad definition includes:
 - (Neo-)Fascist parties: NSDAP, Fascists, SRP, DVU (?), NPD (?), MSI
 - Welfare chauvinist parties: “Republicans”, DVU (?), NPD (?), National Front in Britain (?)

What is right-wing extremism?

- Broad definition also includes:
 - New Radical Right parties: Front National in France, Scandinavian Progress Parties, Some political sects and FDP-Dissidents in Germany
 - Often included: right-wing populist parties like the FPÖ in Austria, the Leagues in Italy

What are the differences between left-wing and right-wing extremism?

- Classical left-wing extremisms: Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, some strands of Anarchism
- Things in common:
 - hierarchal modes of decision making (very often)
 - limited citizenship / limited rights
 - anti-pluralism
- Differences:
 - role of a society's tradition (very often)
 - citizenship based on class/consciousness vs. race/ethnicity/gender
- Economic issues do not always make a difference!

How can a right-wing extremist party gain parliamentary representation?

- Leaving some details aside, parliaments on the national and state level are elected on the basis of list votes (proportional representation)
- There are 5% thresholds for the national parliament and for each state parliament
- Details vary, but by and large
 - a party requires 5% of the list votes in a state to gain seats in the state parliament
 - a party requires 5% of the list votes in Germany to gain seats in the Bundestag (which is considerably harder for small parties)

Which right-wing extremist parties do/did exist in Germany?

- Successors of the Nazi Party (late '40s / early '50s)
- “Second wave” of right-wing extremism (mid '60s)
- New right-wing parties (“third wave” since the '80s)

- All of the above are either classical fascist or welfare chauvinist parties
- “New radical right” and “right wing populist / antistatist” parties do not exist or rather failed to gain electoral support in Germany

Which successors of the Nazi Party did exist in West-Germany after '45?

- Deutsche Konservative Partei, Deutsche Rechts-/Reichs Partei, Sozialistische Reichspartei (most important)
- Voters, members: former Nazis, platform: nazism with minimal adaptations to democracy
- Fission and fusion
- SRP declared unconstitutional and dissolved 1952
- Electoral support for right-wing extremism dropped sharply in the early 50s
- Reasons:
 - economic success (specific support for FRG grew)
 - Cold war situation left no room for “third ways”

What was the second wave of right-wing extremism in Germany?

- In 1964, the DRP and many right-wing sects merged and formed the NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands)
- Some 20% of the membership were former members of the Nazi Party
- Ideological blend of anti-communist, nazism, conservatism and even catholic elements
- Main goals:
 - German unification
 - Revision of the Oder-Neisse-Border
- Electoral success in some states between 1966-68 (up to 9.8% of the vote)
- Failure in the General Election of 1969 (4,3% of the vote)

What happened to the NPD after '69?

- After the end of the grand coalition ('69), the Christian Democrats moved to the right
- NPD adopted anti-foreigner stance and even more radical positions on nazism
- Steep electoral decline of the NPD
- Fielded candidates in some elections but gained typically less than 1% of the vote
- Formed an loose alliance with the DVU in the late '80s / early '90s which broke again soon
- Insignificant in electoral politics but tries to organise (East-German) Neo-Nazis and skinheads
- 6,000 members today (about 20,000 in the '60s)

Who are the “modern” right-wing extremist parties in Germany?

- The “Republicans”
 - founded in 1983
 - 15,000 members as of 1998
 - about 20,000 in the early ‘90s
- The “Deutsche Volksunion” (DVU)
 - founded as a club in 1971
 - turned into a party in 1987
 - 18,000 members as of 1998
 - up to 26,000 in the early ‘90s

Who are the “Republicans”?

- Undoubtedly the most important right wing party in the late '80s and the '90s
- Founded by two former MPs of the CSU (christian democrats in Bavaria) who disagreed with the parties new, amazingly “soft” course regarding the GDR
- Taken over by Franz Schönhuber
 - Lost his job as a TV journalist after giving praise to the SS
 - Chairmen and most prominent figure from 1986 to 1994
 - Soon avoided any references to Nazi past
 - Tried to establish image of a far-right but democratic party

What do the “Republicans” stand for?

- Unification, peaceful revision of the Oder-Neisse-Border
- Welfare-state, but only for Germans (Lifeboat metaphor)
- Against immigration of foreigners, especially asylum-seekers
- Against “foreign infiltration” of German culture (whatever that means)
- Law and order (insinuate most foreigners are crooks)
- Cues to racism and anti-Semitism can be found between the lines

When did they gain electoral support?

- Remember: 5% threshold for elections on state, national and European level in Germany
- Republicans couldn't pass this threshold during the '80s
- After a campaign appealing to xenophobic sentiments, the Republicans obtained 7.5% in the Berlin State Election and the election of the European Parliament in 1989 but failed in the general election of 1990 and in 14 state elections during 1990-91
- In 1992: 10.2% of the vote in the state election in Baden-Württemberg (regional strongholds)
- Since then: failure in every election but the Baden-Württemberg state election of 1996 (9.1%)

Who voted for the “Republicans”?

- More men than women
- More single than married persons
- People with 9 years of schooling or less
- People from the working class, especially
 - if on a low qualification job
 - if unemployed or afraid of losing one’s job
 - if not organised
 - if not churchgoers
- People from the southern states (regional strongholds in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria)

Why did they vote for the “Republicans”?

- Two competing hypotheses in German discussion:
 - “Pure” discontent with existing parties & policies
 - Xenophobia & feelings of threat
- No evidence for pure discontent
- Plenty of evidence for
 - Xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic attitudes
 - Fears and feelings of (relative) deprivation
 - Beliefs that foreigners are the source of many problems of German society
- Probably interaction of discontent & xenophobia

What happened to the “Republicans”?

- Opportunity structure
 - CDU/CSU, FDP and SPD agreed on much stricter policy on asylum seekers
 - Demands for unification were fulfilled
 - Germans get accustomed to economic problems of unification / Republicans couldn't capitalise on west German resentments
 - Party under observation by authorities since 1992
- Internal conflict
 - Schönhuber, the most telegenic and prominent figure left the party in 1995
 - New chairman Schlierer tries to steer away from other right-wing groupings (DVU), but quarrel continues

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Who is the DVU?

- Dominated by its chairman Gerhard Frey since 1971
 - made a fortune (he is worth several million DM) with war-time-novels, brochures on the “truth” about concentration camps, video tapes, flags, Nazi memorabilia etc.
 - owns two right-wing extremist newspapers (about 60,000 copies each week)
- DVU founded as a club to sell publications
- Party organisation is hardly separable from publishing company
- Today’s party members are the hardcore of the subscribers, most member quite apathetic

What does the DVU stand for?

- Official platform is only six pages long, starts with oath on democracy and constitution
- Articles in Frey's newspapers are more revealing
 - Protection for the “honour of German soldiers”
 - Welfare state for Germans (especially workers & farmers)
 - Law & order, immigration issues
 - Germans are pictured as an endangered species
 - More aggressive and racist undertones and more references to German past (compared to Republicans)
- Many racist “faux pas” committed by party officials

When did they gain electoral support?

- Fields candidates in some state elections:
 - 1992: obtained about 6% of the vote in Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein
 - 1997: obtained a share very close to the threshold (4.98%) in Hamburg
 - 1998: impressive success (12.9%) in Saxony-Anhalt but failed in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
 - 1999: 5.3% in Brandenburg, failed in Thüringen & Bremen
- Didn't field candidates on the national level in 1990/94
- Failure in the general election of 1998 (1.2%)

Who voted why for the DVU?

- Little is known about the DVU's constituency (lack of survey data)
- Probably closely resembles the Republicans constituency
- Success in Saxony-Anhalt
 - Was fostered by an unparalleled campaign (costs were several million DM) using modern marketing techniques (e.g. targeted direct mailing)
 - Local representatives of the party acted as Frey's puppets
 - Many voters had very few information on the party
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What happened to the DVU?

- Change of opportunity structure & internal problems
- The DVU is a “virtual party”, because
 - It has very few active members
 - The party organisation is tied to Frey’s company
 - Frey de facto tells state chairpersons and members of parliaments what to do and to say
 - Persons who criticise or even don’t obey Frey are often compelled to leave the party
 - MPs act often unprofessionally; quite a few MPs left the party after being elected

What was the Republican's and DVU's impact on the German political system?

- Raised fears of a new Nazi movement
- Third wave seems to be over as far as direct electoral support for Republicans & DVU is concerned
- Articulated opinions which are not uncommon but seldom addressed by the established parties
- Thereby prompted the liberal-conservative government *and* the social-democratic opposition (but neither the green nor the socialist party) to adopt stricter policies
 - on asylum seekers
 - and on public security

What are their prospects for the future?

- A (potential) demand for right-wing extremist policies continues to exist
- Opportunities have changed since the late '80s / early '90s
 - Unification
 - Policy change: Immigration has subsequently dropped from the mass media's and the public's agenda
 - Since the federal government has changed, right-wing voters can be attracted again by Christian democrats
 - People are more content with existing parties and party system than in the '90s
 - Right-wing extremist politicians often portrayed as incompetent and involved in internal conflicts
- If conditions change, a fourth wave might upheave