

Germany's 2025 election and its aftermath

How Did We Get Here? And What's Next for Germany and Europe?

Kai Arzheimer

What happened?

The early 2025 election

- Breakdown of “traffic light coalition” on Nov 6
- Short, bitter campaign followed by political earthquake



source: Wikipedia

The early 2025 election

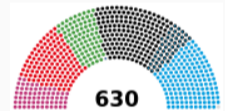
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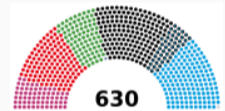
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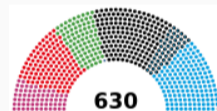
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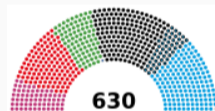
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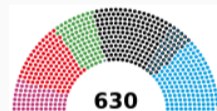
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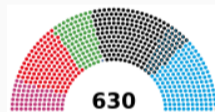
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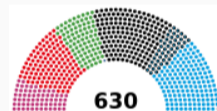
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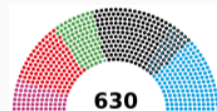
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- Even with Greens, no constitutional amendments/election of FCC judges possible



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- Weimar vibes, anyone?



WHAT HAPPENED?

source: LEMO

How did we get here?

Long-time structural change

- Decade-long decline of churches and trade unions + increased mobility/modernisation + unification → loss of ties to centre parties in younger generations → fragmentation of party system & fluidity of voting behaviour



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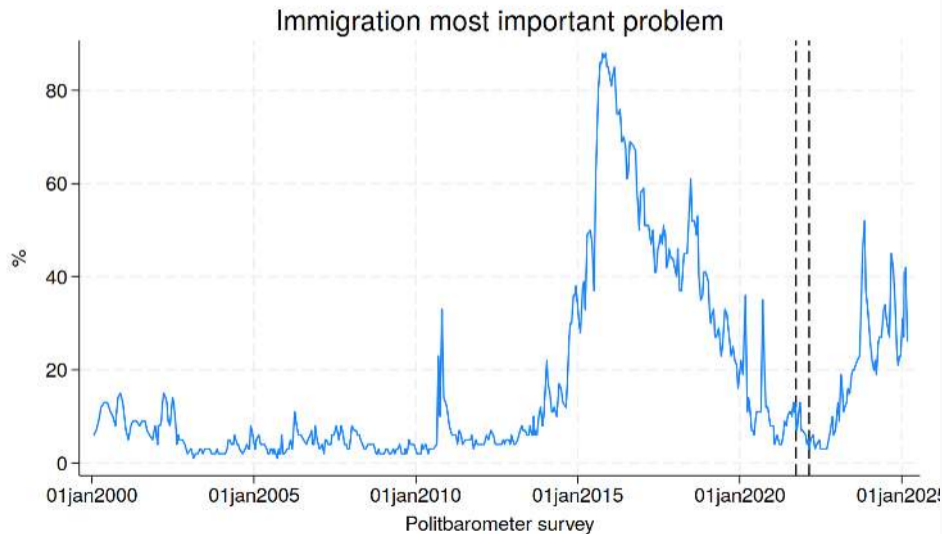
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- Social and political change, global crisis of liberal democracy
- But also: outgoing government spectacularly unpopular



Normalisation and increasing salience of far right positions & actors

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Salience and normalisation



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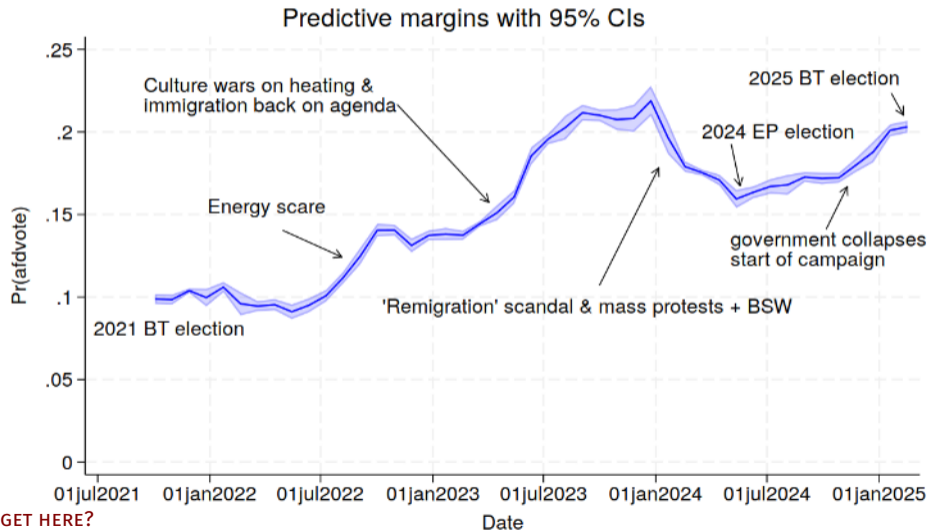
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- CDU/CSU, (most of) FDP getting a purely symbolic anti-immigration motion through parliament with AfD support just days before election

Salience and normalisation



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Who votes for the AfD?

- AfD vote still mostly driven by backlash against immigration & Islamophobia (also some “culture-war” issues)
- Well-known pattern remain (less educated, more eastern, more male, more working class, more worried)
- But 5.5 million additional votes (+115%)
 - Retained most of the 2021 voters (all estimates based on exit polls))
 - Plus 1.8 million former non-voters
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- All while right-wing extremists' control over party ever more obvious

Why the LEFT surge?

- Finally getting rid of the national populists
- Excellent, social-media savvy campaign
- Benefited from anti-AfD mobilisation and disappointment with SPD and Greens

What now?

Germany and Ukraine/NATO?

- New government (especially Chancellor, FM, Defence) committed to supporting Ukraine, less reluctant than Scholz
 - Possibly stronger commitment to European defence & NATO
 - Spending limits lifted
- But parts of the SPD still committed to “peace” and reconciliation with Soviet Union \approx Russia (same goes for a small group within CDU)
- AfD still trying to mobilise fears of nuclear war & parading Russian talking points

Germany and Europe?

- Two parties in charge that shaped Germany's pro-European default; Merz a former MEP, but ...
- CDU/CSU
 - Committed to “regaining control” over borders, i.e. controls, push backs, even if breaks German/European law and angers neighbours
 - More nationalist/right-wing than previous government & Merkel governments
- Too pre-occupied with pressure at home to truly engage?

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- ... but also an overwhelming sense of more of the same & politics for the over-50s
- How can liberal democratic institutions deal with a large, illiberal, anti-system party?
- Mainstream politicians should
 - Not erode norm of exclusion of anti-democrats
 - Not try to beat far right on their own territory
 - Not parrot/fixate on anti-democrats but dare to set their own agenda
- *But what will they do?*