

Twitter Thread by Yascha Mounk



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The elections in Bavaria show that the German political system, which has long seemed reasonably stolid, is in enormous flux at the moment.

A thread with four lessons. (Just wait till you get to Number 4! ■)

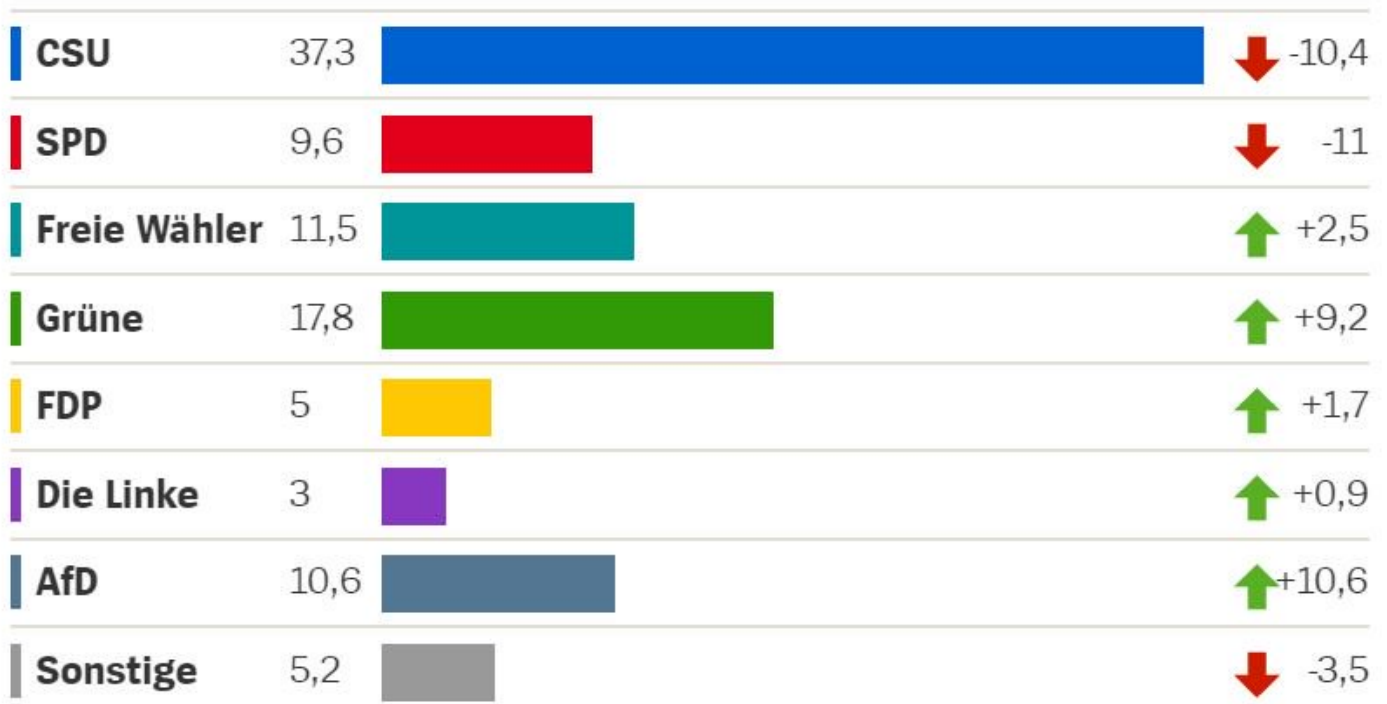
Landtagswahl Bayern 2018

Hochrechnung ARD, 20.49 Uhr

ARD | ZDF

Gesamtstimmenergebnis

Anteile in Prozent



1) Don't let anyone fool you: The elections show that populist sentiment remains strong. The CSU ran its most hard right campaign in decades. The AfD gained ten percent. And the Free Voters are also deeply conservative, and especially critical of the government's refugee policy.

Together, this means that strongly right-of-center parties have taken about two thirds of the vote.

Anyone who tries to sell that as a success for the liberal left is kidding themselves.

2) For a long time, it looked as though the troubles of broad social democratic parties that once commanded ~40% of the vote were sui generis.

That narrative is certainly confirmed today, with the SPD in single digits.

But...

...it now also looks as though center-right parties that once commanded ~40% of the vote will keep declining.

This is the CSU's worst result in history. It comes at a moment when its sister party, Angela Merkel's CDU, at 26%, polls worse than at any point since the 1950s.

3) The Greens have pulled off an amazing feat by doubling their vote, becoming Bavaria's second party.

But the Greens overwhelmingly drew voters from the SPD. So this is not the rise of a new kind of politics; it's a realignment within the center-left camp.

4) This has big implications for the SPD.

Historically, Social Democrats have done so well by holding together a coalition of working-class voters (e.g. steelworkers) and the liberal bourgeoisie (e.g. teacher, university students, civil servants, artists).

The reason why social democrats are struggling so badly is that each part of its base is cheating.

Working-class voters are flocking to right-wing populists. The liberal bourgeoisie feels better represented by cosmopolitan parties like the Greens.

So far, social democrats have tried to hold on to both sets of voters. But I think it's now clear that, at least in PR systems, this is a losing fight.

Cosmopolitan parties that don't have to serve working-class voters have much more traction with the liberal bourgeoisie.

This means that the left should accept its de facto division of labor.

Parties like the Greens are very well set up to serve the ~20% of the education that is educated, reasonably affluent, predominantly urban, and pretty cosmopolitan in values.

Instead of chasing the fading dream of re-establishing themselves as big umbrella parties with 40% of the vote, Social Democrats should copy the Greens by focusing on a more coherent set of voters: the working-class part of its base.

It ain't glamorous. I doubt social democrats like the SPD will gain much more than 20% in the long-run.

But it is a fundamentally important task for the health of democracy: because these are the voters that will otherwise flock to authoritarian populists like the AfD.

[end]