# Gay parents contemplate relocation amid far-right election victory in Germany



As she watched her daughter play in a Berlin playground, 29-year-old Nicki Kämpf and her wife were contemplating a significant move westwards. The couple's concern stems from the recent victory of the far-right party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), in a state election, a first in post-World War II Germany. The election results, confirmed on Sunday, have left many Germans unsettled, particularly those in the formerly communist and less prosperous eastern states where AfD's influence is strongest.

Kämpf and her wife fear for their safety and future, especially since the adoption paperwork for their 1½-year-old daughter is still pending and might take another year or more to finalise. "I don’t think I would be able to adopt her if they’re in power," Kämpf shared with The Associated Press. The couple discussed moving to Cologne, known for its liberal-minded residents but are reluctant to move far from their family in Thuringia and neighbouring Saxony.

AfD's victory in the Thuringian state, led by one of its most hardline figures, Björn Höcke, has heightened these concerns. In Saxony, the party narrowly missed out on leading, finishing just behind the mainstream conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Nationwide discontent with the government, inflation, economic struggles, anti-immigration sentiments, and doubts about military aid to Ukraine have fuelled support for populist parties. A new leftist party, also successful on Sunday, may be essential for forming state governments, given the hesitation to govern alongside AfD.

In Germany’s east, AfD’s foothold is particularly strong with branches in Saxony and Thuringia under surveillance by the domestic intelligence agency for proven right-wing extremist activities. Höcke, who has been convicted for using a Nazi slogan, is appealing the decision. When confronted about the intelligence agency's findings, Höcke retorted, “Please stop stigmatizing me. We are the No. 1 party in Thuringia. You don’t want to classify one-third of the voters in Thuringia as right-wing extremist.”

Sunday's election coincided with the 85th anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland, marking the start of World War II. There were protests against AfD in cities like Hamburg, Dresden, and Leipzig. Reflecting on explaining the situation to his young children, Lukas Meister, a 38-year-old father from Berlin, wondered, "How is it that people are so proud to vote for a party that is so bad for everyone?"

Older Germans who witnessed the Nazi era are worried. Many thought the country had immunised itself against nationalism through rigorous education and laws against persecution. Holocaust survivor Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Jewish Community of Munich and Upper Bavaria, cautioned against dismissing AfD’s rise. "The numerous voters made their decision consciously, many wanted to make the extremists on the fringes responsible," she stated.

Knobloch recalled Kristallnacht, or the “Night of Broken Glass,” when she watched Munich's synagogues burn and saw her father’s friend taken away by Nazi officers. Gudrun Pfeifer and Ursula Klute, two retirees, shared similar concerns. Pfeifer, 83, remembered being stranded in a war-torn Berlin and dealing with severe illness and starvation.

Thorsten Faas, a political scientist at Berlin’s Free University, expressed alarm over AfD's popularity among younger voters. In Thuringia, 38% of voters aged 18-24 supported AfD compared to 33% overall. Faas commented, “These first voting experiences are very formative and you can assume that this will also affect future voting decisions of this generation.” Klute, 78, shared her distress over the AfD's appeal to the younger demographic and emphasised, "People always forget the lessons from history."

The rise of the AfD has stirred deep concerns across Germany, as citizens and observers reflect on the possible implications for the country's political landscape and social fabric.