Local
Case Studies
for Europe:
THE POWER OF PROXIMITY

ENGAGING WITH CITIZENS LOCALLY AND COUNTERING THE FAR RIGHT

THE **GREENS/EFA**
in the European Parliament

DAS
PROGRESSIVE
ZENTRUM

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Preface

Over the last decades, Europe has experienced the rise of far right parties across the continent, at all levels of political power. A lot has been written about how the extremist right has gained votes and voters in recent years by finding 'easy' scapegoats for the big transformations of our times – from established political elites, to immigrants or sexual minorities. While at national or European levels the names and strategies of the far right receive a lot of attention, less is known about how right-wing extremists gain support at local levels of politics, away from the limelight of big politics, where proximity to citizens is essential in fostering success.

This handbook examines how to engage with citizens locally and counter the far right. We look at ten constituencies across five European countries, from north to south, and east to west, and present the strategies of various local progressive politicians in countering right-wing extremism in some of their strongholds.

We hope this handbook will serve as a tool for local politicians looking for strategies to deal with the far right in local contexts. We feature interviews and examples from constituencies where Green and other progressive politicians successfully managed to counter the rise of the far right. We also look at strategies in constituencies where the far right is in power and progressive forces face uphill battles to convey their messages and bring their policies to life.

The handbook is built around the idea of politicians' proximity to citizens and how to bring citizens' concerns to the core of running local communities. We look particularly at strategies in communities that are confronted with very tangible effects of the great challenges of our time – from the exit from coal, and the collapse of polluting heavy industry, to fast-paced changes in workplace realities taking place as a result of digitalisation, or the increasing depopulation of rural areas. The extreme right has had various levels of success in presenting 'easy solutions' and villains for such complex issues. We therefore look at how progressive politicians are countering these narratives, and find ways to address citizens respectfully and honestly, without shying away from difficult discussions.

This handbook shines a light on progressive politicians who counter the far right daily in their communities, by directly addressing those voters who feel left behind by big politics. We can all learn from their struggles and successes, and we hope you will find the power of their examples as inspiring as we have.

We wish you a pleasant read!

SKA KELLER, MONIKA VANA, ANNA CAVAZZINI
Brussels, November 2021

Introduction

"Because I worked in the mining industry, I knew what language to use to talk to these people to calm their fears. Because people are afraid of losing their jobs, they're afraid that they'll have trouble making a living again. I try to explain (...) complicated matters in simple language that people are familiar with. In the same way, I also try to talk about issues such as climate or mining."

– GABRIELA MORAWSKA-STANECKA, MYSLOWICE, POLAND

The handbook seeks to inform, inspire and motivate progressives who engage in party politics locally by presenting best practices, and to deliver insights on the role of proximity to citizens when countering the far right. It is at the local level where "The Power of Proximity" serves as a tool to give marginalised groups in our societies a sense of shared belonging. This book provides progressive campaigners, activists and strategists with examples of how this can be done: strengthening social cohesion while transforming our societies into a sustainable future.

At the local level the far right's presence is physical.

Much of the real fight against the far right is being waged at the local level. Here, the greatest threat is not a dreadful headline in the newspaper or your Twitter feed but a hatenote at your doorstep. The dispute between democrats and anti-democrats is not moderated in a television show but takes place on the streets or during office hours. Here, at the local level, the far right's presence is physical. They repeat the claims of their leaders to be the voice of the common man, all through Europe. They despise liberal elites and "their" politicians. One important aspect of the far rights' campaigns is to assert they "know what the people want, and what they fear". Not always but often enough they successfully implemented the idea that they are "closer to the people". However, it is populism in its purest sense, not proximity.

Progressive proximity has the power to reach beyond its own voter base.

Reality has shown, however, that far right politicians have a fundamentally different, and in fact absurd understanding of "proximity to citizens". Their understanding of community and closeness is an exclusive one. While claiming to serve "the people" while unmasking "the elites" they exclude specific groups in their understanding of the demos, making migrants the scapegoat. Anyone who does not conform to their image of a homogenous and nationalistic society is excluded. In fact, proximity to citizens must be inclusive. The concept consists of at least two dimensions: proximity to people and proximity to solutions. Both can be observed on the local level. Local representatives can create proximity through their approachability, transparency, consultancy and participation. Ideally, they know the local context by heart. They not only have an open ear to learn about concerns, but also know and influence the right solutions on the ground. This proximity has the power for progressive politicians to reach beyond their voter base.

Moving without leaving anyone behind

Proximity to citizens is an important tool to build majorities and create a common understanding over the greatest challenge of our time: social-ecological transformation. Greens have long argued that crises will intensify or return

"To beat our opponents, we relied on a clean and proximity-based campaign, on building a programme that did not come from a research department but from a consultation with citizens. We must listen to the people, and once they see that we are listening to them, they can also listen to what we have to say."

– SAMI DAMERGY, MANTES-LA-VILLE, FRANCE

"We organised a discussion on wind power with opponents and supporters. Many right wing actors were present at this event. Through moderation, all participants had their say and at the end, some rather right wing participants thanked us for the discussion and gave positive feedback. This showed that conversations are possible and important to pick up citizens and inspire them to have a more open discussion about political ideas."

– KAROLINE JOBST, SAALE-ORLA, GERMANY

if we do not fundamentally change the way we produce, distribute and consume resources and goods. While aiming high, for example, pledging that Europe will be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, a just, social and inclusive transition is regarded as necessary. The promise: "moving to a new green era without leaving anyone behind" is therefore repeatedly emphasised. We must start at the local level to build trust and confidence in the structural reforms needed to transform our economies and societies. They are an important bridge between the green future vision and everyday-life concerns like interventions to transform our immediate surroundings. Our direct opponent on this journey are the far right populists who not only poison social cohesion and divide societies, but many of them also denying the human influence on climate change.

The aim and structure of the handbook

This handbook is dedicated to ten case studies from five European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden). The range of portrayed areas includes a traditional mining region, Mysłowice in Poland, an outlying area, Saale-Orla in Germany, as well as larger cities, such as Innsbruck in Austria.

The handbook has three major sections. The first explains the handbook's methodology, and contextualises definitions. The second sorts the collected cases into three scenarios, differentiated according to local roles of the far right

and progressives. The first scenario, **"Back on track"**, looks at regions where progressive actors regained power after an electoral success of far right parties, or where promising far right candidates were in the end not successful. The second scenario, **"Neck-and-neck race"**, describes a case where progressive and far right parties level with each other and have an equal chance of outperforming their respective opponent. The third scenario, **"Damage control"**, showcases regions with far right strongholds without a chance of currently winning a progressive majority but with aspirations to minimise the damage of far rights' influence. Each case study sets out local political situations, the key topics of the far right and progressives, the role of proximity to citizens, countering strategies to right wing populism, and proactive plans the progressives strive to bring forward. Additionally, ten profiles portray individual personal stories of locally engaged progressives.

In the last section of this handbook, corresponding recommendations can be found. The handbook shows how meaningful proximity to citizens is always inclusive and constitutes being approachable and useful to all. Best practices of how to counter the far right are shared according to the three scenarios and ideas about how parent parties can support those at the local level can be found.

Have a good read!

PAULINA FRÖHLICH
Head of Programme 'Future of Democracy',
Das Progressive Zentrum)

Methodology and Terminology

CASE SELECTION

This handbook delivers insights from ten different regions in Europe within five countries: Austria, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden. Besides the geographical aspect of including North-, East-, South and West-European perspectives, the different political contexts concerning the historic development and current standing of the far right were additionally interesting for the choice.

CASE STUDIES

The choice of case study regions within those countries was based on an in-depth research and open data analysis of local, regional, national and European election turnouts. Each case study fits into one of three scenarios. The scenarios were chosen because in each one progressives had to make (or are making) serious efforts to convince people to vote for them. Here, where the election of the far right is not unusual, trusting contacts with citizens is particularly important. These are the three scenarios:

- "Back on track" – regions where progressive actors regained power after an electoral success of far right parties, or where promising far right candidates were in the end not successful.
- "Neck-and-neck race" – regions where progressive and far right parties level with each other and have an equal chance of winning.
- "Damage control" – regions with far right strongholds without a chance of a progressive majority currently but where progressives aspire to minimise the damage.

Each case study is created after holding standardised interviews between January and March 2021 with at least two politically engaged locals and is enriched by data on socio-demographic conditions of the region. In selecting our interviewees, the main criteria was their active and impactful engagement in and for their local community. The interviewees range from local Green Youth activists to Members of the European Parliament who all share the prioritisation of proximity to voters and their interests within locally fought campaigns. All socio-demographic data and details of election turnouts presented in this handbook were collected to the best of our knowledge for the purpose of comparability, but we cannot guarantee their accuracy. The case studies also include one portrayal of an individual of that region, who shares its story and impressions. In some cases the portrayed person has also been interviewed in order to create the case study, in other cases it is someone else.

TERMINOLOGY

This handbook uses the terminology "far right" to describe different parties and movements in Europe. The term is not used to distinguish right wing political powers on a radical to extremist range, but on the contrary to understand them all as operating toward the end of a left–right spectrum. The minimum feature that parties described as "far right" in this handbook share is nativism in the sense of ethnic nationalism, following the definition of Cas Mudde. As he points out in his book *The far right today*: "It is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native (or 'alien') elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nations-state."[1] Undoubtedly, there is a diversity when analysing further features among the far right party family, which is why academia distinguishes, for example, "radical right" and "extremist right" groups when studying their relationship to liberal democracy. The case studies presented in this handbook speak of different political powers within the overarching category "far right", all of which are hostile to liberal democracy in one way or another.

In clear opposition to the far right are the Greens. The term "Greens" will be used when referring to the party affiliation. However, if the region portrayed does not have a Green party, another progressive party that shares the main features of the Green Party family will be mentioned. All progressive parties mentioned in this handbook share a focus on environmental protection and social cohesion, have a pro-European vision, and highlight the importance of minority rights.

Those who wish to read more on the political context of the countries of concern will find a short report on each country in the appendix (page XXX). The following organisations co-author the case studies and country reports in cooperation with Das Progressive Zentrum:

Arenagruppen, Sweden
Innovation in Politics Institute, Austria
Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Poland
Terra Nova, France

Case Study Scenarios

BACK ON TRACK

The "Back on track" scenario looks
at regions where progressive actors
regained power after an electoral
success of far right parties, or where
promising far right candidates were
in the end not successful.

Country	Austria
Region	Tyrol
District/Town	**INNSBRUCK**
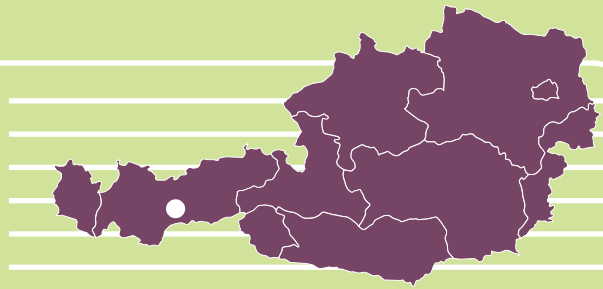
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2019
District/Town: **175** | Nation: **105.6**

Average age[2] → 2019 District/Town: **42.5** | Nation: **42.8**

(Highest) educational attainment* [3] → 2018
Lower secondary education: District/Town: **17.9%** | Nation: **17.9%**
Higher secondary education: District/Town: **15.6%** | Nation: **15.8%**
Vocational training: District/Town: **42.5%** | Nation: **48.2%**
Teritary education: Region: **24.1%** | Nation: **18.1%**

*Due to rounding to one decimal place, inaccuracies may occur
when adding the values to 100%*

Average income (gross)[4] → 2019
Tyrol region: **31,812 €** | Nation: **35,027 €**

Unemployment rate[5] → 2019
District/Town: **4.2%** | Nation: **7.4 %**

Longterm unemployment rate[6] → 2017
Tyrol region: **0.5%** | Nation: **1.9%**

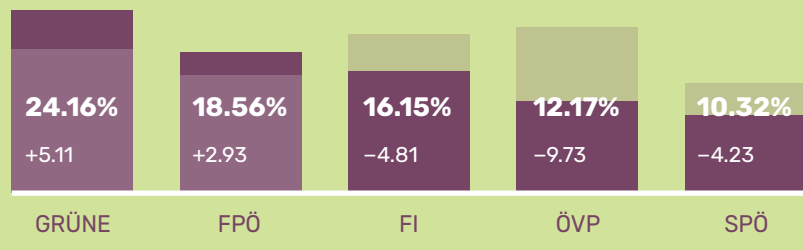**Regional migration** (+/−)[7] → 2019 **-0.17%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)[8]
→ 2019 District/Town: **27.5%** | Nation: **23.7 %**

ELECTION RESULTS

Local council elections (2018)*[9]

NEOS	**4.73%**
FRITZ	**3.23%**
GERECHT	**3.10%**
TSB	**2.72%**
ALI	**2.38%**
BI	**2.08%**
PIRAT	**0.39%** (−3,42)

GRÜNE	FPÖ	FI	ÖVP	SPÖ
24.16% +5.11	**18.56%** +2.93	**16.15%** −4.81	**12.17%** −9.73	**10.32%** −4.23

Turnout **50.4 %** *Municipal council and mayoral elections 2018 Innsbruck. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/−).*

Most significant shift of voters: Local: **From:** ÖVP **To:** GRÜNE | National: SPÖ and FPÖ **to** GRÜNE

Regional elections (2018)* [10]

VP TIROL	**25.88%**	(+3.51)
SPÖ	**22.83%**	(+7.00)
GRÜNE	**18.95%**	(−4.90)
FPÖ	**16.17%**	(+3.79)
FRITZ	**7.89%**	(+0.81)
NEOS	**7.28%**	
FAMILY	**0.78%**	
IMPULS	**0.23%**	

Turnout **58.4 %**
*Results for the regional elections 2018
from the municipality Innsbruck*

National elections (2019)* [11]

ÖVP	**29.76%**	(+3,50)
GRÜNE	**21.72%**	(+14,72)
SPÖ	**18.27%**	(−10,15)
FPÖ	**15.22%**	(-7,90)
NEOS	**10.11%**	(+3,01)
JETZT	**3.00%**	(−2,68)
KPÖ	**1.19%**	(+0,04)
WANDL	**0.49%**	
GILT	**0.24%**	(-0,64)

Turnout **71.3 %**
*Results for the national elections 2019 from
the municipality Innsbruck*

European elections (2019)* [12]

ÖVP	**27.73%**	(+6.60)
GRÜNE	**23.94%**	(−1.04)
SPÖ	**19.61%**	(+0.62)
FPÖ	**15.58%**	(−1.84)
NEOS	**10.56%**	(−0.18)
EUROPA	**1.59%**	
KPÖ	**0.99%**	(−1.71)

Turnout **59.7%**
*Results for the European elections 2019
from the municipality Innsbruck*

LEGEND ÖVP: Austrian People's Party • **SPÖ:** Social Democratic Party Austria • **FPÖ:** Freedom Party of Austria • **GRÜNE:** The Greens • **NEOS:** The New Austria and Liberal Forum • **FI:** For Innsbruck • **PIRAT:** Pirate Party • **TSB:** Tyrol Seniors Party • **GERECHT:** Fair Innsbruck • **ALI:** Alternative List Innsbruck • **BI:** Citizen's Initiatives Innsbruck • **FRITZ:** Fritz Dinkhauser List • **IMPULS:** Impuls Tyrol • **FAMILY:** The Family Party • **VP TIROL:** People's Party Tyrol • **JETZT:** Pilz List • **GILT:** Every Vote Counts: Citizens' Parliaments and Expert Government • **KPÖ:** Communist Party Austria • **WANDL:** Change Party • **EUROPA:** European Party Austria

This case study was created in cooperation with Mathis Dippon and Katharina Zangerl from the Innovations in Politics Institute.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Innsbruck is the fifth largest city in Austria and the capital and centre of Tyrol. The most visible characteristic is its location in a valley surrounded by high mountains of the Alps. This location results in limited space for housing and buildings, but allows citizens to experience instant access to nature, which gives them a high quality of life through a unique connection between alpine and urban environments. Innsbruck is not an industrial city, but has industries in the outer regions. Tourism plays a major role, and the city continuously develops as an educational hotspot for currently some 30,000 students as educational facilities are constantly extended. Recently, Innsbruck is transforming into a more trendy place; the gastronomic and cultural offers are increasing and diversifying. Living – housing in particular – is very expensive in Innsbruck, while the incomes are not so high.

The city and the region of Tyrol in general have been predominantly governed by the Christian-Conservative Party (ÖVP), but in recent years, the Green Party has become a coalition partner at a regional level. The same trend can be seen at the local level in the city of Innsbruck, where the Greens have been a partner of the city-governing coalition since 2012. Since 2018 the Mayor of Innsbruck has been from the Green Party and has won the run-off election against the Conservative former mayor. The election took place in a favourable political climate for the Greens in Innsbruck. Two main factors can be identified that were beyond the strategic campaigning of the Innsbruck Greens. One was that the Greens are the most established and well-known party representing leftist, progressive views, so there is no real alternative for progressive voters than the Greens. This allowed them to campaign in a more conservative tone, as the left-wing voters would vote for them anyway. Second, in 2017 the Green Party lost its parliamentary group status nationally following a very poor election result where it failed to reach the threshold of 4 per cent. This left many people with progressive views in shock and motivated many to vote for the Green Party at the next opportunity, which happened to be the municipal election in 2018.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Right wing populism has been a long-standing phenomenon in Innsbruck. The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) gained eight seats in the municipal council by winning around 20 per cent of the votes at the last local election. They do especially well in the outer districts. The FPÖ gained significant importance in Austria, when they entered the coalition in 2017 at a national level.

Besides the established FPÖ, in Innsbruck new small but loud splinter parties emerged in the far right spectrum in recent years. These single-issue parties gather people around emotional topics opposing the established parties. The most striking one is the party Just Innsbruck (Gerechtes Innsbruck) founded in 2016, formed in opposition to the former Conservative Mayor Oppitz-Plörer. That is why they indirectly supported the green candidate at the mayoral runoff between Georg Willi (The Greens) and Christine Oppitz-Plörer in 2018. Meanwhile, they are represented in the municipal council by one member. Although they gained votes only in the lower single-digit percentage range, they are radical, very visible and get a lot of media attention. Using an emotional approach, they "are really good in mobilising 'hardcore fans' as they don't have a lot of people following them, but those who do follow them strongly and blindly". In comparison, the Greens have a broad mobilisation and reach more people, but their followers are less passionate.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN INNSBRUCK

Visible & emotional
It is notable that populist actors pick very visible and emotional topics. They rally their supporters around topics they can see and feel, for example roadblocks or construction sites, and "make people get angry at those things".

"Drüberfahren" (acting against the people's will and interests)
The populist parties framed the former mayor as aloof and withdrawn and alienated from the people, as somebody who doesn't care about the citizens and acts constantly against their will and interests. This narrative was eventually transferred to the former mayor's Green predecessor.

Scandals
Populists exploit the scandals and inconsistencies of established parties and politicians. In Innsbruck, the former mayor pushed through a city-internal cable car – and it is widely viewed that lots of money was wasted in its construction.

An excluding "we"
The populists in Innsbruck claim that "we have to remain us" and consider themselves as speaking for "the people". This term excludes not only migrants and refugees but also the many Germans who study in Innsbruck. The excluding "we" determines other policy standpoints like living and housing. Populists argue that rents are expensive because of many foreigners like students who "come and take the apartments away".

Mobility
As mentioned before, populists are in confrontational opposition to the transport and traffic policies of the Green Party and their new mobility concepts. They defend parking spots and are against reducing car traffic.

KEY TOPICS OF THE GREENS IN INNSBRUCK

Sustainable mobility

In Innsbruck, the Green Party campaigned to turn to sustainable and ecological city mobility: fewer cars, more bikes, more and better public transport.

Affordable housing

As mentioned earlier, housing and rental prices in Innsbruck are extremely high. Therefore one key topic of the mayoral campaign was affordable housing.

New and uniting style of politics

Besides the two mentioned policy aims, the Green Party campaigned intensively on a new and uniting style of politics. The slogan "Politics can be different" symbolises the candidate's intent to be "very close to the citizens", highlighting the difference from the former mayor and opponent. Georg Willi is a very pragmatic, approachable and non-polarising person who does not represent extreme positions: "There was one statement that really took off in popularity, when he stated that affordable housing is more important to him than gender-equal language." This attitude made him a candidate not only for the left but also for conservative voters who can be deterred by too extreme left positions.

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

The region of Tyrol can be characterised as rural, where people are down to earth and value pragmatism and approachability. Therefore proximity in politics is a very central factor and has increased in importance in recent years. In Innsbruck proximity has further become a major campaign issue. The former mayor has been viewed by many citizens as aloof, stubborn and withdrawn from the people. Hence the other parties have used this sentiment to campaign and present their candidates in a very approachable manner.

"It's a very important topic and a major critique on the former mayor – that she was (too) far away from the people, too stubborn to listen to the citizens. Therefore, being close to the people is a very important part in the politics of the city." (Tabea Eichhorn, Head of Office (Mayor of Innsbruck))

Proximity by the FPÖ

The right wing populists in Innsbruck can be seen in the form of the most established and largest party, the FPÖ, as well as smaller, newly established parties like Just Innsbruck (Gerechtes Innsbruck). Here we will focus mostly on the FPÖ as it is the most relevant, winning 20 per cent of the votes in the last election. To create a feeling of proximity to the citizens the FPÖ has three main methods. One is to create a community feeling via demarcation against "others". They claim to speak for "the people" by accusing other citizens of the city of taking away resources like houses, parking spots, jobs. Second, they use simple language and

often speak in dialect to create a down-to-earth image and make people feel connected to them. Third, they hold public events where they give out beer and food for people to take away, encouraging sociability. When party members appear in public they wear traditional clothing (Dirndl and Lederhosen).

"The FPÖ creates proximity by talking about 'we'. They make people angry and, in doing so, they create a community feeling." (JB)

Proximity by the Greens

During the campaign and also now in office, the Greens have made proximity and approachability their main characteristics. The main candidate and current mayor has a charismatic and winning personality, he is very approachable and down to earth. His personality and ability to create proximity is considered an important reason why people vote for him.

Like the FPÖ, the Greens regard giving out information to people as a method to create proximity. Informing people about the background, options and thinking that lie behind certain decisions brings politics and especially Green Party politics closer to the citizens. Additionally, they organise open events in the style of feel-good activities, often with a topic represented in the format. For example, to raise awareness about food waste, the Greens held an event where they cooked vegetable soup and gave it out in glasses to passersby, managing to raise awareness of an ecological topic and give the people something to take home.

"We initiate loads of 'feel-good events' where we go biking with people, offer bike repairs or free cinema events, where we show educational movies. We do not discuss controversial topics during these events, but show participants our idea of a good city." (TG)

The formats were citizen-focused, so that during speaking corners the mayor sits in the audience and not on stage. During those events the mayor showed openness to dialogue and also criticism, when confrontation arose he listened and explained. There are also targeted dialogues with specific groups of stakeholders to discuss issues that are of prime concern to them. The motivation behind these events is the combination of "listening to the issues, implementing solutions and receiving feedback".

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Draw a red line

There is no general strategy given out by the national Green Party on how to work against populism. There is however a strong line that the Greens in Innsbruck follow consistently: The motto is "be clear and stay strong": position publicly and openly against right wing populist parties and racism. The Greens have positioned themselves as a counterpart to the far right. It is important however to differentiate be-

tween the far right as a party, which may be attacked, and their voters. A crucial method for progressive actors has been identified as holding dialogue and being truly interested in people's struggles: look for common ground with people and stay on message with all voters.

Form alliances
When campaigning for the mayoral election the Greens formed broad and diverse alliances with artists, associations and other groups that are not traditionally very close to the Green Party to stand united against right-wing populism. It is not advisable to take over initiatives from elsewhere and claim they are your party's. When people independently create an initiative on an issue that is a part of the party programme, get together with them, but don't put your logo on their initiative.

Focus on your vision
One key strategy has been to focus on content, rather than engaging in personal attacks. When political attacks get personal, the Greens try to switch to content and offer a different perspective in their communication. They aim to speak positively and strongly on issues and share the Greens' vision rather than falsify the populists' argument.

"We do not spend much effort on discussing the attacks of right wing populists, but rather discuss our perspectives and show people what we would like the city to become like." (TG)

Reframe claims
The lesson that progressive actors can take over populist topics and redefine them has been learnt by the Greens from the national presidential campaign. The Green candidate campaigned on a traditional folk theme, talking about "homeland" *(Heimat)*, which is usually a conservatively framed topic, but they re-defined it in a manner that shows Heimat as a vibrant, open, cosy place for everyone. This has helped in the presidential campaign to convince conservative voters to choose the Green candidate. The Greens in Innsbruck work similarly, they offer positive perspectives of traditional right wing topics.

Information is key
As the governing party, the Greens had to realise that some of their projects, ideas and even promises to voters cannot be implemented, because of party politics, or they get blocked by political opponents. Therefore, they are taking an upfront position when these issues become public. In their communications the party focuses not on justifying why things can't be done, but on explaining the structure and who opposed the implementation of a project.

"If things get blocked that we promised to people, like for example bike lanes, and the opposition votes it down, we direct the anger of disappointed people to the politicians it should be directed towards. We discuss with the bike-lobby and say, these parties voted against it, write to them. We look for alliances also outside the municipal council." (JB)

Don't moralise
Pretending to be morally superior – praising progressive policies in a morally superior manner – is highly counter-productive and does not create a feeling of proximity with the people. Hold close connection with citizens and continuously talk to them, but not above them.

"So for example in transport policy – we argue that for those who really need to take the car, we should reduce traffic so that they can move without being in lots of traffic jams. And we want to make sure that not so many people have to take their cars anymore therefore we expand bike lanes and public transport." (TE)

Avoid party-internal struggles
The Greens in Innsbruck learnt that when party internal fights are publicised, people get the feeling that the politicians in power only care about their positions and internal power struggles. Therefore, party internal struggles should be avoided. When there are internal debates on issues these should be discussed publicly so that people understand that there are many options when dealing with a challenge.

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Look for opportunities and solutions
It is recommended to use windows of opportunities when they present themselves. The campaign hit the right mood as Fridays for Futures was a big movement during that time and young people discussed environmental issues, which is the Greens' core competence. To gain support for progressive views in local politics, it has been beneficial to campaign on local topics within the progessive agenda and adapt topics to the local level.

"We talked about important topics for the city, not about morality and general topics in the world." (TE)

Keeping a solution-oriented focus and communication allows people to connect with and support progressive views. Gather competent allies and team members, and offer solutions to citizens.

A positive, inviting and welcoming language is important. Using simple language creates connection and therefore technical terms should be avoided. In the campaign, there was a controversial moment when the candidate stated that housing is more important than gender-equal language; this drew criticism from progressive voters, but allowed the candidate to be viewed favourably in the conservative sector.

Focus and distinction
There was a clear distinction between the Green Party of Innsbruck and the Green Party nationally. The Innsbruck Greens have changed their name and incorporated the name of the main candidate to stay apart from the national level. Therefore, the campaign was very candidate focused, and the candidate was a good choice, a charismatic person, with

great communication skills. There was also a very competent team behind him, advising on content and topics. To avoid potential for criticism and polarisation, the campaign team chose not to show controversial party members too much.

Admit mistakes
When issues don't turn out right, when decisions have gone bad, it is wise to admit these mistakes.

"If progressives make mistakes, they should admit them. Don't turn around in circles to argue that you have done everything right, but admit mistakes. Politicians are human, and people understand that. Explain in a transparent and simple manner why you have made certain decisions." (TE)

A FACE OF INNSBRUCK: ZELIHA ARSLAN

Full name	**Zeliha Arslan**
Profession	Librarian
Role in party politics	Municipal councillor / Chair of the Education, Society and Diversity Committee Party: The Greens – The Green Alternative
Age	45
Place of Residence	Innsbruck
Contact	Email: zeliha.arslan@gruene.at Facebook: @zelihaarslan Instragram: @zelarslantirol

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

Local politics are the most personal and intimate form of doing politics and being politically active. Local politics starts in front of your own door, which makes it a very intensive field of work.

I engage in local politics because I have been a political person since a very young age. My parents are Kurds from Turkey, who migrated to Germany and have always been active against discrimination and fighting for equal rights. Thus, political engagement has been part of my biography for a very long time. As a kid of a working-class family and with a migration background, I had already experienced inequalities in Kindergarten and later on in school. This is why I always wanted to change society for the better, to work against inequalities and engage myself to give people a voice.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

As a working-class kid with a migration background, there are many fields in which I am considered an ex-

pert and where my advice is sought. People listen. But this was not an easy journey. Making it to municipal councillor as a migrant, as a woman and as a mother is something I did by myself, with hard work. One could say I have started from minus and have made it very far upfront. The energy and strength that I needed come from my family, where education was always very highly valued and a major aspect of my life. Their activism and willingness to fight for equality have inspired and motivated me. I believe I have become an expert in my fields, because I had to work hard and thoroughly in order to overcome the stereotypes that I have been confronted with. I was in a constant position of defending myself and my status, which is why I learned a lot, worked a lot and studied hard. I always made sure to know 200% about the topic I had to speak about, because people expected me to fail.

I always consider it a success against populism, when I manage to make people think and question populist rhetoric. It is not my ambition to make people change from voting for right wing populists to voting for the Green Party. It is much more my wish that they start

thinking for themselves and realise that populists win with their votes, without giving them anything in return. Once I was in the crowd at an electoral event from the right wing party and I started speaking with a man next to me who was a strong supporter of the right wing party. We discussed rights for everyone, that the populists claim to speak for the people, but that they define very narrowly who those people are. In the end, he realised that the party he was supporting did not come close to what he expected. I have had many such moments in my district, too, when we go door-to-door and talk to the people. In my district, the support for right wing populists is very high. So when I speak to the people, I don't look at them as "bad and right wing". I listen to them, I try to find out what drives them towards populism and what makes them so angry. Very often, you realise that behind all this anger is fear – fear of losing out jobs, schools for their children, apartments. So I really don't look at voters of right wing parties as bad people.

There was an organised district meeting where people gathered around tables to discuss the situation in my district. Now, many people came to let out their anger and conversations went along the lines: "Everything was better back then, the foreigners are taking our jobs away, etc." Most people very strongly supported the right wing party. It was clear why, because the right wing party was the party that showed up in that district and organised events. However, when I asked people what the right wing party did in that district, I asked them to name one thing that is better in this district because of the populists. Nobody could give me an answer, nobody could name anything. So I told them my beliefs on what this district needs and what politics should do here. Afterwards, many people came to me in agreement. Now, my intention is not that everybody there votes for the Greens, but rather that people understand the strategies that right wing parties work with.

I always had the best success with the following strategy: be there, be present – truly listen to people, find a point where you can foster dialogue and let people think for themselves. For many people, these topics

I asked them to name one thing that is better in this district because of the populists. Nobody could give me an answer, nobody could name anything. So I told them my beliefs on what this district needs and what politics should do here. Afterwards, many people came to me in agreement.

are emotional, and you cannot argue against an emotional problem with rational facts. You have to understand the emotions. When people know they are taken seriously, and not blamed for their thoughts but, instead, given the space to discuss them, then they will start questioning. Indeed, it's hard and tiring sometimes. But it is also rewarding. We are struggling to break down complex problems into simple terms. We have to let people know, for example, how climate change will impact them in their personal lifestyle, in their districts, and not talk about polar bears.

What influence has this had on your personal life?

There were times when I thought it didn't make much sense anymore. I always believed that if people just had better information, they would vote more in their own interest. Seeing that this sometimes isn't true and that some people are just strong believers of right wing ideas frustrated me. But I recover from these setbacks when I realise that I can have an impact. I can also ask people, "What information do you need, to realise that it is not the way you think?"

What barriers did you face?

I have faced personal challenges. Being a mother makes time an issue and a scarce resource, and, of course, being a migrant makes it difficult to be taken seriously, as you always have to prove that you belong here and have the expertise, and that you are not just here because of some quota. It is sometimes difficult to always stand up and be there for people, when they complain a lot to you. Sometimes people share stories with you that are really difficult and hard to hear about: loss, unemployment, poverty, etc. This can be challenging.

Institutionally, I sometimes find it very hard to go on, when we try to bring forward important political issues and they get voted down out of political strategy. So opposition parties know that the issue is important but will vote against it, just to not support your party politics.

In general, I see a shift towards more fake news. This makes it incredibly difficult to have fact-based conversation with people. Before, it was easier to talk to people, show them articles in quality media outlets and they would believe you. Now, quality media outlets are under suspicion of being part of propaganda and on the internet you can find all kinds of "news" and information that people use to prove their statements with. Thus dealing with the false information and fake news outlets is a main challenge in the fight against populism.

Language is very important, and sometimes we progressives use the same terminology as right wing populists for some issues. For example, when many people came to seek asylum in Austria, right wing populists

spoke of a "storm" or "wave" or "crisis", and now we are discussing the "refugee crisis", which frames the discussion from a right wing viewpoint from the start. It is important, in order to have a positive effect against populism, to stay with people and go to events not only before elections. It's important to show people that you are there for them, to listen to them – and not only to gain their vote. That is the biggest potential progressives have, listening and making suggestions on how to improve people's situations.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

I advise everyone who wants to be active to stay there, stay strong and don't give up when they know that they are doing the right thing. It's important to make a difference between people who have just been caught by populists and people who have strong right wing beliefs. With the latter you cannot argue, this takes your time and energy, but with most people you can get into a dialogue and understand them. It is important to stay true and authentic, because people will notice if you aren't. Also go everywhere, also into those districts where you think it makes no sense to

go. If we talk about equality and equal rights, we have to be present everywhere and live up to those beliefs by visiting those districts.

Don't argue from above or from a place of higher personal morality, but be authentic. Listen to the people truly and honestly but don't do it from a position where you think you know better. An equal society does not mean that everyone thinks alike!

When you talk to people, connect with them and their perspectives. Try to find it in yourself – don't say "You are racist", but show them that everyone including yourself has racist beliefs in them. That way, people can better listen to you and you have a more qualitative dialogue.

Personally I believe in connecting with people, and encouraging and empowering each other in your own group, so I have joined networks of women in my party. Also, it is important to take proper time-outs and distance yourself from time to time, to gather energy and strength.

Country	Sweden
Region	Dalarna
Municipality/City	**LUDVIKA**
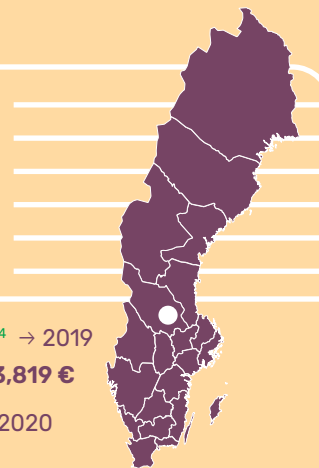
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2020
City: **17.9** | Nation: **25.5**

Average age[2] → 2019 City: **43.3** | Nation: **41.3**

(Hightest) **educational attainment*** [3] → 2019
Lower secondary education: City: **14%** | Nation: **11%**
Higher secondary education/Vocational training:
City: **52%** | Nation: **43%**
Teritary/Academic education: City: **19%** | Nation: **28%**

To the best of our knowledge there isn´t more specific data. Therefore the values do not add to 100%.

Average income (gross)[4] → 2019
City: **31,062 €** | Nation: **33,819 €**

Unemployment rate[5]→ 2020
City: **11.1%** | Nation: **8.5%**

Longterm unemployment* [6] → 02/2021
City: **7.7%** | Nation: **2.8%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2020 **-0.1%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)[8] → 2020
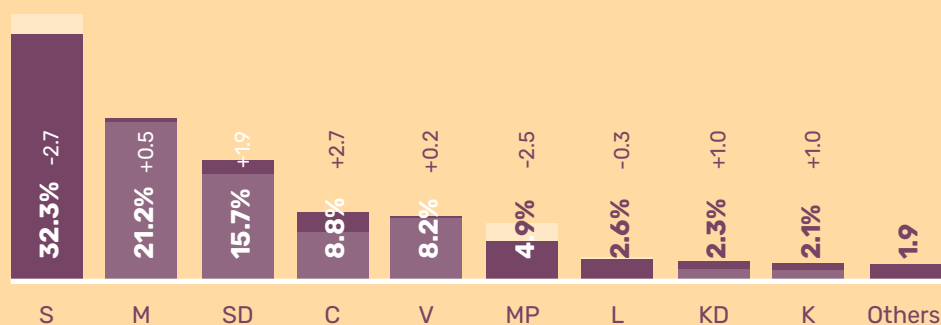City: **18.2%** | Nation: **19.7 %**

Longterm in this case means being unemployed for more than six months (Ludvika) or 27 weeks and more (Sweden).

ELECTION RESULTS

Local council elections (2018)* [9]

Turnout 84,6 %

Municipal council elections 2018 Ludvika. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).

S	M	SD	C	V	MP	L	KD	K	Others
32.3%	21.2%	15.7%	8.8%	8.2%	4.9%	2.6%	2.3%	2.1%	1.9
-2.7	+0.5	+1.9	+2.7	+0.2	-2.5	-0.3	+1.0	+1.0	

Most significant shift of voters: From: Social Democrats (S) **To:** Sweden Democrats (SD)*
* This is just an estimate based on the voting results, there are no local surveys on the matter.

Regional elections (2018)* [10]

S	**31.5%**	(-3.4)
M	**18.7%**	(-3.6)
SD	**15.0%**	(+3.8)
V	**8.7%**	(-0.3)
C	**7.3%**	(+0.7)
DSP	**6.7%**	(+2.1)
KD	**4.6%**	(+2.4)
MP	**3.7%**	(-1.8)
L	**2.8%**	(-0.5)
FI	**0.2%**	(+0.1)
Others	**0.9%**	(+0.7)

Turnout 83,9 %

Results for the Dalarna regional elections 2018 from Ludvika

National elections (2018)* [11]

S	**35.4%**	(-5.2)
SD	**23.2%**	(+3.2)
M	**14.1%**	(-1.3)
V	**8.3%**	(+0.6)
C	**6.6%**	(+2.5)
KD	**4.5%**	(+2.1)
L	**3.5%**	(+0.4)
MP	**2.9%**	(-1.7)
Others	**1.6%**	(-0.6)

Turnout 87.1%

Results for the national parliamentary elections 2018 from Ludvika

European elections (2019)* [12]

S	32.3%	(-4.0)
SD	21.4%	(+8.1)
M	11.7%	(+3.0)
C	9.5%	(+5.2)
MP	8.2%	(-1.6)
V	6.5%	(-2.6)
KD	6.0%	(+2.2)
L	2.4%	(-6.6)
FI	0.5%	(-3.0)
PP	0.4%	(-1.2)
Others	1.2%	(+0.4)

Turnout 50.2%

Results for the european elections 2019 from Ludvika

LEGEND S: Social Democrats • **M:** Moderate Party • **SD:** Swedish Democrats • **C:** Centre Party • **V:** Left Party • **MP:** Green Party
KD: Christian Democrats • **DSP:** Regional party in Dalarna with its focus on health care questions • **L:** Liberals • **K:** Communist Party
FI: Feminist Initiative • **BOP:** Local party in Ludvika • **PP:** Pirate Party

This case study was created in cooperation with Susanna Kierkegaard and Hanna Lyth from Arenagruppen.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Ludvika is a town in the region of Dalarna, located in the central-north of Sweden. It is the largest town in the municipality with the same name. With its 15,000 inhabitants, Ludvika is the third largest town in the region, after Falun and Borlänge.[13] Dalarna was always rich in natural resources, many of the towns centred around iron and steel industries, some of the former dating all the way back to the 8th century.[14]

Dalarna has long been idealised by Swedish nationalists. Side by side with the Viking symbols, the region is often used to represent an idealised form of Swedishness and purity. It is where Gustav Vasa, the man credited with founding the Swedish national state and whose inauguration date became the Swedish National Day, fled to get help fighting the Danish king Christian II in the 16th century.[15]

Success in a coup and lessons learned

The Nordic Resistance Movement (Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen, NMR) is currently the largest and most active organisation for violent right wing extremism in Sweden. Its members aim to overturn the democratically elected governments in the Nordic countries and unite their people under a single "national socialist leader state". Inspired by Adolf Hitler and fascist leaders, they organise themselves in a hierarchical system and train members in preparation for a violent revolution.[16]

Since the NMR (initially known as "The Swedish Resistance Movement") was founded in 1997, the organisation has expanded and developed a parliamentary branch.[17] In 2014, the NMR managed to secure one mandate in the municipal elections in Ludvika, Dalarna, overtaking one of the Sweden Democrats' seats through an unprecedented coup, which goes back to a peculiarity in Swedish electoral law of the time. Only 18 people wrote the name of Pär Öberg from the NMR on the Sweden Democrats' ballot papers, but this was enough to give him a seat in the local parliament. The Sweden Democrats are the dominant populist force in Swedish politics. Founded in 1988 by White Supremacists, the party is now the third largest in Sweden. The Sweden Democrats had five party members running for the local assembly, but received enough votes to secure seven seats. As a result, Öberg was elected on a Sweden Democratic mandate.[18] The same thing happened in the neighbouring municipality of Borlänge, where the Sweden Democrats also won more votes than they had representatives. The right wing extremist Pär Sjögren, member of the NMR and convicted of more than 30 crimes in the past 25 years, had his name written on 21 of the Sweden Democrats' ballots. This initially made him a substitute in the municipal assembly, but when an elected Sweden Democrat resigned Sjögren took over his seat.[19]

These were huge victories for the NMR, which had never before been represented in any democratic assembly. The region Dalarna was already a stronghold for right wing extremism, but after the elections of 2014 the NMR's work intensified and its followers began moving to the region, copying the strategy of their German counterparts in aiming to take over smaller communities.[20]

Today, the NMR no longer holds any elected positions. In 2018, they lost the seats they had taken from the Sweden Democrats in Ludvika and Borlänge. The Sweden Democrats had learnt their lesson and closed the party's lists, so unapproved names scribbled down on their ballot papers could not be elected representatives of the party.

The case of Ludvika has raised awareness nationwide and triggered a series of discussions about possible measures to curb far right influences. Ludvika is considered as a back-on-track scenario because the NMR no longer holds seats locally, with the municipality currently governed by the Social Democrats in coalition with the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and Liberal Party. The political situation with regards to far right presence, however, remains tense.

COURAGEOUS COUNTER CANDIDATES

Maria Strömkvist, a member of parliament for the Social Democrats who lives in Ludvika, was elected chair of the municipal assembly the same year that Öberg got his seat. The timing was not a coincidence – Strömkvist was appointed to the post because the other local representatives wanted someone experienced to handle the uncomfortable situation.

Pär Öberg's presence changed the local parliament. Routines had to be updated – NMR supporters started showing up and interfering with the meetings, and security guards were deployed to all sessions. Strömkvist says that the situation was unlike anything they had dealt with before.

"They always showed up in large groups, filming the assembly and posting everything on their website. They brought lots of people. Sometimes they were louder than what was allowed, they would shout if Öberg did not get to speak." (MS)

As the chair of the assembly, Maria Strömkvist was especially vulnerable to the aggressions of the NMR members. If she asked Öberg to stick to the subject of the debate, his group of followers would start shouting at her. Moreover, the abuse was not confined to the plenary: "They would show up outside my house later in the evening, sitting in their cars, just to make sure I knew that they knew where to find me," Strömkvist says.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN LUDVIKA

The issues the NMR prioritise locally differ from their ideological motives.

Security, regional development and case work

In Ludvika, the NMR's key concerns are to make the municipality "safe again", to "stop wasting the people's money", to contribute to a thriving countryside, and to be a role model in areas of child and elderly care.

Immigration

While security and regional development matters could be prioritised by any party, the NMR differs from others radically on the subject of immigration. They want to end what they call "mass immigration" and start expelling all immigrants to their countries of origin, citing a perceived "eradication of the Nordic people" as their main motivation.[21]

KEY TOPICS OF PROGRESSIVES IN LUDVIKA

Youth engagement

Kerstin Lundh is a representative for the Green Party in the regional assembly of Dalarna. Her party's main struggle at the moment is recruiting and activating young people to get the local youth organisation going.

"Our constant struggle is visibility. I know that in Falun [a municipality in Dalarna] they (the Greens) work with the Fridays for Future movement, they protest almost every week there. People are really committed." (KL)

Environment and sustainability

In Ludvika, the Green Party's priorities include environmental issues like increasing the share of organic ingredients in restaurants owned by the municipality, reducing food waste in schools and only using sustainably produced electricity. The party wants to build more housing as well as lanes for cycling and walking, while increasing the frequency of local bus traffic.[22]

Welfare

Furthermore, the party is prioritising welfare issues, like staffing problems in school, providing culture and entertainment as a part of elderly care, and prohibiting private companies from making profits in the welfare sector. The Greens also wish to invest more in existing Swedish language classes for immigrants.[23]

Employment and health care

The Social Democrats in Dalarna based their regional election manifesto on five points: investing in and strengthening the ambulance health care, employing more staff in regional health care, shortening waiting time for patients, ensuring good conditions for any sub-contractors employed by the region, and developing "mobile care teams" which could provide care in the home for elderly people.[24]

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Proximity by the Nordic Resistance Movement

The NMR has worked hard to establish a sense of proximity to the residents of Ludvika. At their manifestations they carry large banners with schoolbook populist messages such as, "We are not politicians, we are the people."[25]

The NMR's members often positioned themselves at central spots in Ludvika, handing out flyers and holding up banners. On Fridays, they would stand outside Systembolaget (the state owned alcohol monopoly), on Saturdays they stood in the town centre.[26] This regular presence not only served the purpose of visibility, but is also likely to have made it more difficult for members to leave the movement. Having new and young members posted in the central parts of town ensured that everyone knew they were part of the neo-Nazi group.

The progressives' approach

The Greens and Social Democrats in Ludvika Dalarna identify fear as a driving emotion of far right supporters. Addressing this emotion linked to specific policy fields, such as labour, can therefore be helpful when holding dialogues with potential sympathisers of the far right. Progressives try to contextualise and thereby reframe the narrative on hotly debated issues.

Maria Strömkvist thinks the image of Dalarna needs to be updated. She says the nationalists are blinded by their fear of foreigners and hate, and therefore cannot see that Dalarna has been an international place for a very long time. She emphasises the number of international workers in major industries like ABB.

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Overcoming paralysis

The local representatives had to figure out a strategy for how to deal with the NMR in the assembly. In hindsight, asked about whether anything surprised her about the presence of Öberg and NMR, Strömkvist immediately thinks of one thing.

"Possibly that so many are afraid. I did not expect that. That their capacity for violence is so high, so big, that you back down. You don't dare to stand up against them." (MS)

Initially, most parties were shocked by the things that Pär Öberg would say in the Ludvika parliament. Öberg has spread antisemitism and conspiracy theories from the speaker's chair. After this debate, several local MPs told the media that they wished they had responded differently to Öberg but that they were too shocked to know what to say in that moment. The conservative-liberal Moderate Party's chairperson at the time, Gaby Back, told the local public service radio reporters that she wished she had stood up and spoken against what Öberg said.[27]

Understanding voters

Kerstin Lundh says the Green Party in the region does not have a strategy to counter right wing extremism. She is con-

founded by the local popularity of the right wing extremists and populists, mainly because she does not recognise it when she is out campaigning. Understanding voters better, therefore, is an important step to countering the far right.

"People are very friendly when they see us, and then they go home and vote for something completely different, that is what's so strange." (KL)

Knowing the limits of freedom of speech
Maria Strömkvist has reflected a lot on the moral boundaries of freedom of speech, in relation to intolerance from local parties.

"They are elected. To treat them like democratically elected representatives, while not falling into the trap of tolerating their intolerance, is the main issue." (MS)

Defining tolerance in the context of having violent Nazis and their supporters present in the local parliament is difficult. Strömkvist is not impressed with the liberal definition of freedom of speech that is usually wrongly attributed to Voltaire. "Someone said 'I do not share your opinion but I will die defending your right to express it', or something like that, and I think that is so crazy. I do not want to be the first to get killed by Nazis in order for them to be able to express their hate," says Strömkvist. Knowing and defending the limits of freedom of speech is central, especially when countering right wing extremists.

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Banning racist organisations and prosecute hate speech
The Swedish government set up a commission to investigate ways of banning racist organisations in 2019, to be finalised in the spring of 2021.[28] There is currently a parliamentary majority in favour of making participation in activities of racist organisations punishable.[29]

Maria Strömkvist thinks this would be a good idea. In her experience, the laws against hate speech are insufficient. She hopes a new law would enable the police to act more quickly when the NMR is causing problems.

Support sportive and cultural associations
Maria Strömkvist thinks that the presence of NMR in Ludvika is a sign that the community needs to deal with underlying issues of inequality and alienation.

"I think that is the basic problem in Ludvika, there is that growing ground, we have groups of people who always feel like outsiders." (MS)

The issue has been widely debated. Maria Strömkvist thinks that the municipality is doing a lot to prevent alienation. Ludvika has around 365 local organisations and large contributions have been given to cultural associations and sport societies. Still, this is not sufficient as not all inhabitants seem to benefit from it.

A FACE OF DALARNA: ROLF JOHANSSON

Full name	**Rolf Johansson**
Role in party politics	Member of Left party
Age	63
Place of Residence	Dalarna

How it all started
Rolf Johansson, 63 years old, is the founder of the activist group Clowns against Nazis. When the Nordic Resistance Movement planned a march through Borlänge, Dalarna, on International Workers' Day in 2016, he felt the need to do something.

"Those of us living in Dalarna were shocked that the Nordic Resistance Movement were given permission to march on May 1st. We put our thinking caps on and tried to figure something out, we did not know what to do but we knew we wanted to protest in some way," says Johansson.

Johansson came across some videos from the Finnish activist network of clowns called Loldiers of Odin, a parody

on the right wing extremists who call themselves the Soldiers of Odin. He decided to start a Facebook group to see if there were people interested in doing something similar in his area.

"I was alone at first, others had not made up their minds yet. But the closer we got to the day, the more people joined the group. So we decided to do it. On with the makeup and red noses!"

Putting ideas into action
The first protest was a learning experience, Johansson says. He was nervous that he would be the only Clown present. But in the end, 15–20 people showed up. They brought signs to hold, horns to honk and slogans to call.

> "I was alone at first, others had not made up their minds yet. But the closer we got to the day, the more people joined the group. So we decided to do it. On with the makeup and red noses!"

That first day, there was one moment when Johansson felt scared. The Clowns went too close to the Nordic Resistance Movement, and were surrounded by policemen on horses. After that experience, however, the clowns have had good relations with the police.

The Clowns always try to reduce tension at the protests. The police appreciate this, Johansson says. While there will always be spitfires and people looking to provoke violence, the Clowns try to calm things down.

> "They can't punch a Clown. If they do, they have already lost," Johansson concludes.

The challenges of being a Clown
Still, Clowns against Nazis need to consider security when deciding where to meet and how to arrange their protests. Johansson says that several members in Dalarna have been threatened by right wing extremists, and that they are occasionally featured in the Nordic Resistance Movement's media channels.

For that reason, the Clowns are careful not to leave protests alone, they coordinate where they leave their cars and stay in touch with each other before and after activities. They try to stay up to date on what the local right wing extremists are doing. And they stick together. Dressing up as clowns can make participants feel safer.

> "You're part of a group that looks the same. That gives you some affinity. It's an assurance," Johansson says.

Since the first protest in Borlänge in 2016, the Swedish Clown movement has grown. Rolf Johansson now estimates that there are 20–30 Clowns in Dalarna, and between 100 and 200 all over the country.

Lessons for other progressives
The Clowns are not affiliated with any party, and Rolf Johansson says that they engage people from the whole political spectrum. Anyone can call themselves a Clown, there is no formal organisation. Johansson thinks this is one of the reasons why the group has been successful.

> "Politicians could learn from our leaderless organisation. Non-violence and a clear goal is enough. We are politically unaffiliated, we are against Nazis but range from conservatives to leftists. The concept really works."

Johansson is a member of the Left Party, but he has not been very active. The Clown network is more to his taste than regular party politics.

> "I'm allergic to meetings, boards, agendas and things like that, that is why I don't get so involved. I like leaderless groups better."

Clowns against Nazis have tried to connect with Clowns in other countries. Johansson says that there has been some contact between the Swedish and Finnish organisations, and that a few people have come all the way from Norway to participate in the Clowns' activities in Sweden.

To anyone thinking of starting their own Clowns against Nazis movement, Johansson's message is clear: do it.

> "It is the best and most fun thing you can do. Non-violent of course, the day we use violence we lose everything. And because we are a non-violent movement, we are hard to get at. So that is very important. And it is so, so much fun."

What Johansson likes most about being a Clown is that they make people laugh in otherwise serious situations.

> "It can be very heavy, watching these Nazis marching in their white shirts, carrying shields and all that. There is a 1930s vibe that could make you lose both patience and hope. But then, there are the Clowns – honking their horns, laughing and singing. It is a much needed counterweight."

Country	France
Region	Île de France
Department	Yvelines
Municipality	**MANTES-LA-VILLE**
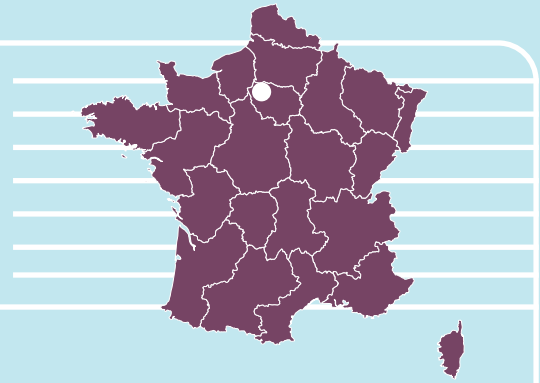
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2017
Municipality: **3,374.9** | Nation: **105.1**

Average age[2] → 2018
Île-de-France region: **38.0** | Nation: **41.2**

(Hightest) **educational attainment*** [3] → 2017
Lower secondary education: Department: **28.3%** | Nation: **22.8%**
Higher secondary education: Department: **21.8%** | Nation: **22.5%**
Vocational training: Department: **25.6%** | Nation: **24.8%**
Teritary/Academic education: Department: **24.4%** | Nation: **29.9%**

Median income (gross)[4] → 2017
Yvelines department: **26,810 €** | Nation: **20,820 €**

Unemployment rate[5] → 2017
Yvelines department: **10.4%** | Nation: **13.9%**
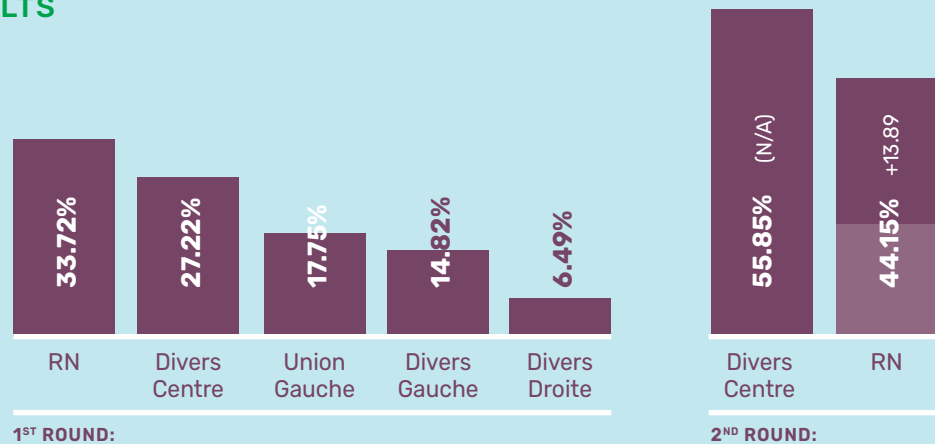
Regional migration (+/–)[6] → 2012-2017 **-0.8%**

The educational attainment data is for the department Yvelines. Due to rounding to one decimal place, inaccuracies may occur when adding the values to 100%.

ELECTION RESULTS

Localcouncil elections (2020)*[7]

Turnout 44,2 %

Municipal council elections in Mantes-la-Ville 2020. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).

1ST ROUND:

RN	Divers Centre	Union Gauche	Divers Gauche	Divers Droite
33.72%	27.22%	17.75%	14.82%	6.49%

2ND ROUND:

Divers Centre	RN
55.85% (N/A)	44.15% +13.89

Most significant shift of voters: From: FN – Right-wing populists **To:** Divers Centre – centrists

Regional elections (2015)* [8]

2ND ROUND:
LR	**51.49%**	(+0.95)
PS	**34.4%**	(-15.06)
FN	**14.11%**	(N/A)
Divers Droite	**2.73%**	

Turnout 56.2%

Results for the regional election 2015 for the Yvelines department

National elections (2017)* [9]

2ND ROUND:
LREM	**53.04%**	
LR	**46.96%**	(-0.05)

Turnout 30.8%

Results for the national legislative elections 2017 from the municipality Mantes-la-Ville

European elections (2019)* [10]

LREM/MoDem	**29.96%**	(N/A)
EELV	**14.71%**	(+7.07)
RN	**14.36%**	(-3.41)
Union de la Droite et du Centre:	**12.45%**	
Envie d'Europe	**5.46%**	
France Insoumise	**4.10%**	

Turnout 53.9%

Results for the European elections 2019 from the Yvelines department

LEGEND FN: National Front (until 2018) • **RN:** National Rally * • **LREM:** La République En Marche • **MoDem:** Democratic Movement • **LR:** The Republicans • **PS**: Socialist Party • **EELV:** Europe Ecology – The Greens • **France Insoumise:** "Rebellious France" • **Envie d'Europe:** Desire for ecological and social Europe • **Union de la Droite et du Centre:** Union of the National Right and the Centrists • **Divers Centre:** "Divers Center" • **Divers Gauche:** "Divers Left"   *2018 the National Front changed his name to National Rally*

This case study was created in cooperation with Marc-Olivier Padis and Alice Tattevin from Terra Nova.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Mantes-la-Ville is a city of nearly 20,000 people in the Yvelines department, in the Paris region. It is located in a bend of the Seine, on the Paris–Le Havre route, a major trade route and a traditionally industrial region, specialising in chemicals and textiles (spinning mills). In the 1950s and 1960s, housing projects were built to accommodate the workforce employed in the region's factories. But the industrial decline following the oil crises of the 1970s affected the region and caused a rise in unemployment. Politically, the city was affiliated to the left during all of these periods, with alternations between communist and socialist mayors.

"Mantes-la-Ville is a vast territory, characterised by a diversity of isolated neighbourhoods with their own socio-economic characteristics. There are vast inequalities: we have neighbourhoods with rather well-to-do and socially integrated households, as well as neighbourhoods with mostly low-income households, whose inhabitants suffer from social exclusion. It is worth noting that 47 per cent of the housing in Mantes-la-Ville is social housing. All of these challenges impede the career path of many individuals, especially young people, whose unemployment rate hovers between 30 per cent and 35 per cent." (FD)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

The success of the far right in Mantes-la-Ville is characteristic of its progression in areas of industrial decline. Although this success is an isolated case in the Paris region, it is representative of the National Front's* establishment in northern France, where industrial decline is accompanied by a high level of unemployment, difficult economic restructuring, and social tensions linked to urban segregation. In the years of rapid economic expansion during the thirty "glorious" years following the end of WWII (the Trente Glorieuses), foreign workers were installed in large social housing complexes close to industrial areas but often poorly connected to the rest of the city or to transportation networks. But when factories saw their activity decline and had to close, these populations had difficulty rejoining the labour market and found themselves "on house arrest" in these neighbourhoods. Even though the influx of foreign labour was halted in the 1970s, family reunification maintained a flow of legal immigration that became particularly concentrated in social housing neighbourhoods.

These former industrial areas had been politically favoured by left wing parties, both communist and socialist, since the post-war period. The decline of the Communist Party from the 1980s onwards and its gradual loss of the cities where it was traditionally established revealed a new phenomenon of electorate "volatility". A rise in abstention reflected a lack

National Front (Front National), renamed in 2018 to National Rally (Rassemblement National)

of interest in politics, especially among the younger generation and the working class. But other voters, open to a new political offer, turned to the National Front. Thus there was a recomposition of the electorate, allowing the National Front to take advantage of the decline and to discredit the old parties.

"In 2014, the National Front conquered City Hall with the election of Cyril Nauth. The left wing faction and the Socialist Party refused to merge their lists and went on to the second round, scattering the votes, which resulted in Cyril Nauth winning the election with a lead of only 61 votes. He won not because he had a high score, but because he had just enough votes to get ahead of the others, especially the left. The division of the left is the main reason for his victory." (SD)

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN MANTES-LA-VILLE

Security and immigration
In this context of high unemployment and urban segregation, the National Rally exacerbates local divisions, fear of immigrants and social unrest.

"They hammer home the usual themes: security and immigration. The mayor's 2014 election campaign can be summed up by a flyer with a picture of a mosque on the front and the phrase 'None of that in our town' on the back." (SD)

Anti-elites
As a party "outside the system", the National Rally systematically attacks other parties' policies and relies on voters' desire for change. It presents itself as the only real political alternative. In a municipality that has been politically affiliated to the left since the post-war period, the National Rally has developed its usual theme: "Get rid of the incumbents."

"The National Rally's main strategy here is only to criticise the record of previous terms and the parties that shared power in the city council." (FD)

KEY TOPICS OF PROGRESSIVES IN MANTES-LA-VILLE

Unifying as allies
The aim of Sami Damergy's "politically unaffiliated" voters list, which he initiated in 2020, was to unite all the actors opposed to the outgoing National Rally mayor by forming a civil society coalition. The scattered left wing parties that had been defeated in 2014 were preparing to run for the mayorship again. Yet it was their division that had allowed the National Rally to win and they did not seem to have learned the lessons of their failure. As president of the soccer club, which was in conflict with City Hall after it abruptly withdrew its subsidy, Damergy was in contact with associ-

ations and residents from all walks of life. He was therefore well positioned to bring together people from outside the parties. They supported him in the second round.

"We made sure that we had an electoral list that was representative of Mantes-la-Ville, meaning with people from all walks of life and political affiliations, in order to convey the message that we can unite despite our differences. It is with this objective that we led a campaign of proximity, to tell the citizens that we were there to listen to them and to answer their needs." (FD)

Fixing daily needs

With the aim of answering people's daily needs, rather than following a particular political agenda, Damergy's coalition focused on concrete issues that needed solving, such as repairing and building infrastructure, from roads to park benches, bolstering social programmes... Generally, it was a matter of addressing what residents were dissatisfied with within the town.

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Proximity of the far right

Right wing populist candidates claim to be "close" to the people, because they break with the established political system and denounce the divide between politicians and the population. However, in practice, they have shown themselves incapable of establishing a trusting relationship with the population. On the contrary, their rhetoric, which stigmatises a part of the population, has only exacerbated divisions.

"In the previous term, the [far right] mayor was very isolated. He had very little contact with his constituents and was almost never seen." (FD)

Sami Damergy, the head of the voters list, an entrepreneur and president of the soccer club, played a role in the confidence that his candidacy could generate.

By basing its campaign on the mistrust between residents, on fear and confrontation, the National Rally placed itself in a role that rendered it incapable of bringing residents together after the election. Its principled hostility to associations, for example sports associations, which led it to withdraw the soccer club's subsidy, was emblematic of a logic of conflict that eventually pushed residents to react by looking beyond political differences.

Proximity of progressives

For a voters list that isn't affiliated to any party, proximity is a key argument, as it is the population itself that rallies through this list. It is therefore a particularly effective response to the way in which populists appropriate the idea of proximity.

"Proximity played a key role in our campaign. It starts even before setting up a programme, because how can you create a programme if you don't know the real needs of the people? Just by listening to them, citizens realise that we are truly here to help them. That's why they subsequently become interested in us. This strategy of proximity also attracted the attention of other candidates who joined our electoral list during the campaign." (FD)

Active citizen dialogue formats were held during the campaign and afterwards, for example in city walks through certain neighbourhoods.

"We organise walks in all the city's neighbourhoods: we start the walk from a centre of social life, such as a school, and along the walk we take note of citizens' requests in order to answer them right away on their feasibility." (SD)

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Consultations and building ties

"To beat our opponents, we relied on a clean and proximity-based campaign, on building a programme that did not come from a research department but from a consultation with citizens." (SD)

Rather than direct confrontation with the far right, which refuses to debate, populism can be countered by developing a project. Against a populist policy that consists of exacerbating antagonisms between residents, one must encourage rebuilding ties, especially territorial ones between districts. To do this, the method for developing the programme is essential. The programme must emerge from discussions with residents and reflect the realities on the ground. The campaign strategy was developed through all means of direct contact with the population, such as door-to-door canvassing. But, to let the residents speak, apartment meetings and public neighbourhood meetings proved to be much more effective.

"[During] meetings (…) all the residents were able to make proposals. I think that was the element of the campaign that worked best. The apartment meetings were smaller, we could be ten people maximum, but in the neighbourhood meetings outside there could be 100 people, and up to 500 people in the largest collective meetings. Residents would bring up projects that they felt were needed, such as road improvements or street lighting, and we would offer them answers as to what we could do." (FD)

Point out misconduct

Additionally, the progressive campaign team tried to show how the previous mayor from the far right had not kept his promises and that he had acted exclusively in the interest of those who supported him, not all those living in Mantes-la-Ville. The team highlighted how the greatest effect of the far right's time in office was breaking local solidarity

and neighbourhood ties between the city's residents, by encouraging distrust and fear, and cutting public funding. The policies, which were not put into place and the absence of reforms that had reduced Mantes-la-Ville to a "ghost town" were directly pointed out by progressives.

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Act instead of reacting

The lessons to learn from this local victory against the National Rally are that one must not let it keep up its rhetoric on the democratic "divide", or the opposition between people and politicians. Local progressive actors can lead voters to overcome their mistrust by inviting them to build the project they want for their city themselves.

"Citizens vote for the far right when they perceive a divide between their representatives and their daily lives. And the far right is banking on such rhetoric. In order to fight against this feeling, we must address residents' daily problems. We must be sincere, and tell them that we will listen to them and, above all, act. If we don't do this, we will further encourage populists, who will always be there to point fingers at their opponents and the lack of progress." (SD)

One must then show residents that the commitment made during the campaign will be kept and that it will produce results, while clearly explaining what a mayor and his team can do according to their jurisdiction.

Engage young people

Young voters feel particularly alienated from politics and institutions. They are more likely to be interested in an election such as a municipal election if they see young people close to them taking action.

"We reached out to young people in particular, who indicated that they were disinterested and disillusioned with politics. During the campaign, I think I served as an example to them, showing them that it is possible to be heard, even when you are young." (FD)

One must then show residents that the commitment made during the campaign will be kept and that it will produce results, while clearly explaining what a mayor and his team can do according to their jurisdiction. By leaving City Hall to meet residents, by making regular visits to different places in the city so as to be aware of people's daily life issues, one invites residents to re-appropriate their neighbourhood and express their wants and needs.

A FACE OF MANTES-LA-VILLE: SAMI DAMERGY

Full name	**Sami Damergy**
Profession	Real estate entrepreneur
Role in party politics	Mayor (no party affiliation)
Age	56
Place of Residence	Mantes-la-Ville
Contact	maire@manteslaville.fr Twitter @SDamergy

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

I decided to head a civil society voters list, Union for Mantes-la-Ville, when I saw that the parties were splitting again in the run-up to the municipal election. In 2014, the National Rally's candidate Cyril Nauth had managed to win the mayor's office with a narrow majority due to the scattering of the other parties, especially on the left. It was the first time a National Front candidate was elected to head a city hall in the Île-de-France region. This victory was due to a "quadrangular election": the two left wing lists refused to merge and both went into the second round, scattering the votes, so that Cyril Nauth won the election with a lead of only 61 votes. When I saw that the same divisions were going to produce the same result, I decided to offer the voters an alternative.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

I have been in Mantes-la-Ville as an entrepreneur for a long time. The residents here know that I have run my business successfully and that I have helped people. I was offered to become the president of the city's soccer club, which plays an important role locally. It's a place where children and young people get together, it's a place of pride for the city, and it has an important social role. The fact that I was president of the soccer club allowed me to get to know the population and, reciprocally, people saw the role that I played. This proximity and my professional pragmatism didn't go unnoticed.

> **All the candidates on our list come from civil society. But we had no trouble convincing voters: when you have a concrete programme, people follow. Gradually, the other parties supported us and they joined the movement that we had managed to create.**

I quickly found myself in a conflict with the elected mayor. The soccer club I presided over was entitled to a subsidy of 80,000 Euros per year in 2013–2016 thanks to an agreement signed with the previous mayor. Following his victory in 2014, the new National-Front mayor withdrew 15,000 Euros from the subsidy. When I went to see him, he justified himself by claiming that budget restrictions were being applied to all associations. My suspicion that the situation would get worse was confirmed when he removed the entire grant the following year. When I confronted him with the guarantees of the agreement, it was torn up in front of me: "We didn't sign it." At that moment, I saw that I had to do something, that no matter what, I would be facing him in the next election.

I became the city's mayor. When I started out, it was to win, I didn't spare any effort. We ran a very intense campaign with a lot of public meetings, which lasted a long time as residents did most of the talking. Our campaign had a pace that our opponents couldn't follow.

What barriers did you face?

We presented ourselves as completely separate from the traditional established parties, without any political experience, with citizens who had never been involved in politics. All the candidates on our list come from civil society. But we had no trouble convincing voters: when you have a concrete programme, people follow. Gradually, the other parties supported us and they joined the movement that we had managed to create.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

Citizens vote for the far right when they sense a gap between their expectations for their day-to-day life and what their elected representatives provide. And the far right relies on this feeling of disconnect by criticising elected officials and their parties. To fight against this feeling, we must deal with residents' daily problems. We must be sincere and tell them that we will listen to them and, above all, act.

It is not about elected officials getting closer to "the people". The people in a democracy are not "one" people. There are always divisions, and politics for me is the act of bringing these factions together by organising city life. To do this, we need a programme arising from citizens' contributions, a shared vision that we want to put into action. If we don't do this, we only encourage populists, who will always be there to point the finger at their opponents and at the lack of progress. We must meet residents in their neighbourhoods, in their homes, and seek to know what isn't working within city streets, in public buildings, on the sports fields. We must not promise them everything, but clearly explain what can be done and in what time frame. And above all, we must honour what we say.

Country	Germany
Region	Baden-Wurttemberg
District/Town	**PFORZHEIM**
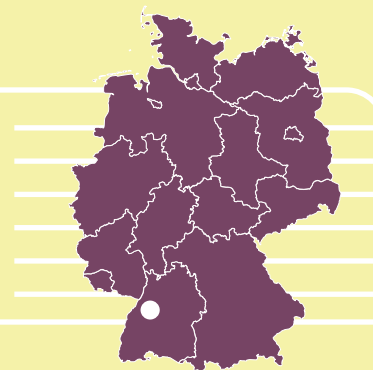
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2018
District: **1,274.6** | Nation: **234.3**

Average age[2] → 2019 District: **42.2** | Nation: **44.5**

(Hightest) educational attainment* [3] → 2019
Lower secondary education: Region: **13.9%** | Nation: **13.3%**
Higher secondary education: Region: **3.2%** | Nation: **3.4%**
Vocational training: Region: **49.9%** | Nation: **53.5%**
Teritary/Academic education: Region: **32.9%** | Nation: **29.9%**

The educational attainment data is for Baden-Wurttemberg

Average income (gross)[4] → 2017
District: **36,672 €** | Nation: **37,776 €**

Unemployment rate[5] → 2019
District: **5.6%** | Nation: **5%**

Longterm unemployment rate* [6] → 2019
District: **1.3%** | Nation: **1.2%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2019 **0.3%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)[8] → 2019
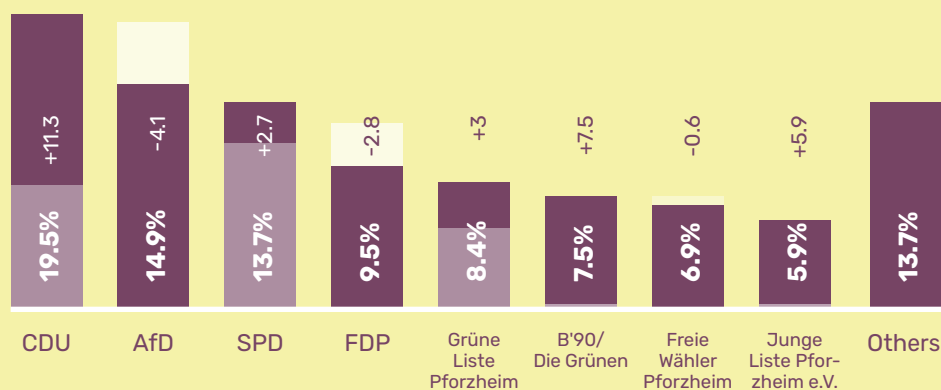District: **27.8%** | Nation: **12.4%**

ELECTION RESULTS

Local council elections (2019)* [9]

Turnout 44,9 %

Municipal council elections 2019 Pforzheim. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).

Party	Result	Change
CDU	19.5%	+11.3
AfD	14.9%	-4.1
SPD	13.7%	+2.7
FDP	9.5%	-2.8
Grüne Liste Pforzheim	8.4%	+3
B'90/Die Grünen	7.5%	+7.5
Freie Wähler Pforzheim	6.9%	-0.6
Junge Liste Pforzheim e.V.	5.9%	+5.9
Others	13.7%	

Regional elections (2021)* [10]

Party	%	Change
Grüne	**25.4%**	(+2.2)
CDU	**19.7%**	(-2.3)
AfD	**16.4%**	(-8.8)
FDP	**16.4%**	(-5.8)
SPD	**10.1%**	(-1.1)
Linke	**3.6%**	(-0.2)
Others	**8.4%**	(+4.3)

Turnout   51,1 %

Results for the regional elections 2021 from the municipality Pforzheim

National elections (2018)* [11]

Party	%	Change
CDU	**32.7%**	(-12.4)
SPD	**16.3%**	(-3.9)
AfD	**16.3%**	(+9.1)
FDP	**13.6%**	(+6.5)
B'90/Die Grünen	**10.8%**	(+1.9)
Linke	**5.4%**	(+0.8)
Others	**4.8%**	(-2.1)

Turnout   76.5%"

Results for the national election 2017 from the municipality Pforzheim

European elections (2019)* [12]

Party	%	Change
CDU	**26.9%**	(-8.3)
AfD	**17.7%**	(+3.2)
B'90/Die Grünen	**17.6%**	(+7.)
SPD	**13.9%**	(-8.9)
FDP	**7.6%**	(+3)
Linke	**3.6%**	(-1.7)
Freie Wähler	**2.2%**	(+0.8)
Tierschutzpartei	**2%**	(+0.9)
Die Partei	2%	(+1.4)
Others	**6.5%**	

Turnout   53.2%

*Results for the European elections 2019 from the municipality Pforzheim *All parties that received less than 1% were left out*

LEGEND S: Social Democrats · **SPD:** Social Democrats · **CDU:** Christian Democratic Union of Germany · **B'90/Die Grünen:** Greens · **Linke:** Left · **FDP:** Free Democrats · **AfD:** Alternative for Germany · **Grüne Liste Pforzheim:** Green List Pforzheim · **Freie Wähler Pforzheim:** Free Voters Pforzheim · **Junge Liste Pforzheim e.V.:** Young List Pforzheim · **Freie Wähler:** Free Voters · **Tierschutzpartei:** Animal Protection Party · **Die Partei:** The Party

This case study was created by Das Progressive Zentrum.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The city of Pforzheim lies in the north west of the state of Baden-Württemberg on the northern edge of the Black Forest. The city has a total population of approx. 125.000. With around 150 different nationalities represented in the city, more than one quarter (27.8 per cent) of the population of Pforzheim are foreigners, more than 50 per cent have a migrant background.*

While overall Baden-Württemberg can be considered one of Germany's economic powerhouses, Pforzheim is struggling with an unemployment rate of 5.6 per cent (compared to 5 per cent in Germany in 2019) but has seen unemployment rates of as high as 9.9 per cent in the previous decade. Since the decline of its jewellery and watch industry in the 1990s, the city has not yet transformed structurally into a more prosperous local economy. However, in recent years the city has succeeded in creating new sustainable jobs in precision engineering, creative industries, medical technology, as well as media and IT sectors. Pforzheim has a university of applied sciences that offers programmes in design, engineering and business economics, and regularly achieves top rankings among students.

"Since the decline of the jewellery and watch industry – from 30,000 employees to 2,400 employees – the poor unemployment rate has persisted despite the settlement of very qualified jobs, e.g. in the area of precision engineering. Of course, this is also due to the development of technology and digitalisation." (RT)

Politically, Pforzheim is a predominantly conservative city. For many years, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has had majorities in the municipal council and provided the members of the state parliament.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Over the past decades, different far right parties have been active and gained electoral success in Pforzheim. In 1968 the right wing extremist Nationaldemocratic Party Germany (NPD) held twelve seats in the state parliament with one of the mandate holders coming from Pforzheim. In the 1990s the popularity of the far right party The Republicans (Die Republikaner) rose rapidly and the party managed to win six seats on the local council of Pforzheim.

Since the founding of the right wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in 2013, Pforzheim has been one of the party's strongholds. They have reached double digits in Pforzheim throughout the last elections at local, regional, national and European level. There are currently six AfD delegates in the city council. In the state elections

* *'migration background' is a German statistical category that is attributed to children and grandchildren of non-German citizens, including non-German citizens living in Germany themselves.*

in 2016, the local AfD candidate reached up to 43.2 per cent in certain parts of Pforzheim and was able to secure a direct mandate for the state parliament.

According to Sibylle Schüssler, who has been active in local politics in Pforzheim for many years and is currently the city's mayor for construction and environment, there has always been a tendency for citizens in Pforzheim to vote for the far right. She describes the development of far right parties in Pforzheim as wave-like.

"After Die Republikaner lost support as a party, there was no far right party until the AfD came along. During this period, votes in local elections were given more strongly to local electoral lists and voters' associations." (SiS)

However, with regards to the AfD, a downward trend can be observed over recent years. In the latest state elections in 2021 the AfD reached 16.4 per cent in Pforzheim and thus took a heavy loss of a little over 8 percentage points. In the surrounding rural Enz region far right parties have generally been much less popular over the past years and decades.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN PFORZHEIM

Migration, welfare policy and public security

The topic of migration stands at the centre of the far right political agenda in Pforzheim. Very much in line with the national party's narrative, the local AfD suggests that the past and current migration policy is the root cause of unemployment and crime in the region.

"The numbers on crime for instance clearly speak a different language. Pforzheim is one of the safest major cities in Baden-Württemberg. Nevertheless, some groups of the population are still caught up in this propaganda." (SiS)

Anti climate politics

The local far right positions themselves against climate protection policies. They are against the expansion of wind power in the region and wish to strengthen the automotive sector.

According to Renate Thon, former chairwoman of the regional association Nordschwarzwald, the AfD lacks a clear programme and takes a destructive position in most policy areas instead.

"In the municipal council, the AfD rejects projects for refugees, migrants, unemployed and youth projects. Even topics such as traffic calming or ideas for reducing car traffic are almost always rejected by the AfD. Seen in this light, there are virtually no ideas of their own, only rejections of constructive proposals." (RT)

KEY TOPICS OF THE GREENS IN PFORZHEIM

More and better cycle paths for the city

The Greens in Pforzheim regret that for years the expansion of cycle paths has not progressed. They think that in times of climate change, efforts for a better cycle path network must be a matter of course. The local Greens argue that more cycling leads to fewer cars, so noise levels decrease and air quality increases.

Providing affordable housing

One of the most pressing social issues in Pforzheim is the lack of affordable housing. Those with few or no wages spend an especially large share of their income on rent. The Greens in Pforzheim call for a mandatory quota of 50 per cent of all municipal construction projects to comprise affordable housing.

Education and child care

The local Greens view a strong educational and child care infrastructure as a key factor in improving the local quality of life and attracting people to move to Pforzheim. Together with spokespersons from churches and social associations, they demand the development of an agenda for the future of childcare places as well as a campaign to recruit highly skilled educators. Moreover, they oppose financial cuts to school renovations.

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Proximity by the far right

The far right in Pforzheim pursues different strategies to build and maintain close ties with the local population. On their websites as well as on social media local AfD representatives use a simple, often polemic, language addressing topics of national relevance, such as measures against the Covid-19 pandemic taken by the federal government, rather than local issues.

In addition to offering citizen consultations, the local AfD also organises a variety of events. As the party has a large base in Pforzheim, prominent figures from the far right spectrum follow their invitation to join local events, attracting large audiences from across the city and beyond. These events help the local far right politicians to increase their popularity and reach out to broader crowds. In smaller events with their core base, such as regular meetings in bars or restaurants, the local AfD tends to invite guests from the party's more radical wing.

Moreover, local AfD politicians take part in demonstrations and show affiliation with certain movements and organisations, such as the newly formed group called Lateral Thinking (Querdenken), which organises anti-lockdown protests and spreads conspiracy myths of far right groups such as the extremist organisation A Heart for Germany (Ein Herz für Deutschland).

"By joining the torchlight march on February 23, the day of the destruction of Pforzheim in 1945, organised by the right-wing extremist association A Heart for Germany, the right-wing populists are trying to use symbolism of the Third Reich." (SiS)

Proximity by the Greens

The Greens in Pforzheim assign a high value to proximity and citizen participation. They consider being in constant exchange with the local population a cornerstone of their work. Not only because close relations to the community promise better results at the polls, but because they believe that taking in the concerns, ideas and opinions of local citizens helps make better politics and strengthen social cohesion.

"For us Greens, proximity to the citizens has been a high priority from the very beginning of our foundation. The Greens have always advocated citizen participation formats at all levels, long before this became part of other parties' programmes." (SiS)

For instance, in reaction to massive public protests against Stuttgart 21, a public infrastructure project to renew the central train station in the capital of Baden-Württemberg, the Green State Premier Winfried Kretschmann called for a "politics of being listened to" and installed a state counsellor for civil society and civic participation. According to Renate Thon, this campaign for more local dialogue, deliberation and participation has increased awareness of the power of proximity throughout the entire region, including Pforzheim.

"I think proximity is very important. People have to feel that they are taken seriously and are listened to. Even though that does not mean that all the wishes and ideas of the people will then be implemented by politicians." (RT)

Party officials and mandate holders make regular visits to local initiatives, businesses, social agencies, educational and cultural institutions as well as environmental associations. They provide citizens' consultations, organise local events that focus on bringing people from different social and cultural backgrounds together, and offer neighbourhood tours.

"Of course, the Greens could do even more to be close to the people. They sometimes fail to do so because the local councillors do their political work alongside their professional activities. Proximity to people requires time that we do not always have." (RT)

All these activities are time consuming and as many local politicians work a full time job next to their political engagement, it is important to create synergies with organised civil society. In this spirit, the Greens take part in local activities of other organisations and movements, such as Fridays for Future, to join forces and reach as many people as possible.

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Speak out and take a stance

In their efforts to counter the far right sentiment in Pforzheim, the local Greens attempt always to call out extreme right wing views and position themselves against them. Given that far right attitudes are relatively widespread in the region, being silent about them in order to reduce attention is no option. This is not to say that Greens should take every opportunity to engage in a discussion with the far right. Rather, it is advisable to take a clear stance against those positions that are evidently anti-democratic and at the same time point out their shortcomings in concrete political questions. A prerequisite for this strategy is to be well informed about far right populist programmes and positions.

"We could not afford to let things slide and remain silent when right-wing populists speak out. This strategy is now paying off." (SiS)

Build broad alliances

The more actors take a stance against the far right the more difficult it becomes for them to poison the discourse. That is why it is important to build broad coalitions. The Greens in Pforzheim describe the founding of the non-partisan alliance against the far right as a decisive step in their efforts of countering far right populism at a local level. One key factor in this strategy is to involve actors who are strongly anchored in the local community. In Pforzheim, for instance, representatives from the Protestant and Catholic churches are crucial members of the alliance.

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Keep up the dialogue and build trust

To win voters beyond the core base, Greens must keep up the dialogue with all parts of the local community. In this context, Renate Thon points out that it has been very important that compared with their founding years the Greens have become less radical in their language and outward appearances. This makes them more approachable for the strong conservative milieu in the region, which in part has tended to be open to far right positions in the past.

"People who vote for right wing populists must be taken seriously with their concerns and fears. This does not mean that I have to comply with them. Devaluing the voters is not helpful, because it causes those who vote for the far right to turn even more strongly in that direction." (SiS)

Fight image as being a "prohibition party"

One key narrative against the Greens in Germany which has also been strong in the region is the portrayal of the party as a "prohibition party" (Verbotspartei). A key proactive strategy is to show that a consistent climate policy is about not reducing freedom, but building the foundation for us and future generations to be able to enjoy the liberties we cherish.

A FACE OF PFORZHEIM: FELIX HERKENS

Full name	Felix Herkens
Profession	Member of regional parliament
Role in party politics	Member of the State Parliament of Baden-Württemberg, Parliamentary Group Chairman, Pforzheim Municipal Council Party: Alliance 90/ The Greens
Age	26
Place of Residence	Pforzheim
Contact	Instagram: @felix_herkens_mdl www.felix-herkens.de

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

In local politics, you have the opportunity to help shape your hometown in a concrete way. It's nice to see how your hometown develops and to have a say in this development. Above all, you are close to the people and get to know their problems. That way you can incorporate them directly into your political work and improve the quality of life.

> **I have been politically involved in my city for almost ten years and have not been discouraged by challenging experiences. Ten years ago it was unimaginable that we could win a direct mandate here, but we did it in 2021. Over time, you build up a reputation and if people see that you stand up for them, you can also convince them.**

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

I think it is important to do politics continuously and not to give up. I have been politically involved in my city for almost ten years and have not been discouraged by challenging experiences. Ten years ago it was unimaginable that we could win a direct mandate here, but we did it in 2021. Over time, you build up a reputation and if people see that you stand up for them, you can also convince them.

In the local council, I have consistently contradicted populists and not allowed right wing, xenophobic or climate change denying statements to go unchallenged. The problem is that over the years, and the longer one is confronted with populists in parliaments, their deliberate taboo-breaking becomes normalised and there is a danger that no one will say anything against it.

In my opinion, it is therefore important that these statements are always consistently and publicly contradicted and that there is no cooperation with populists under any circumstances (jointly agreed votes, etc.) in order not to legitimise them.

What influence has this had on your personal life?

Due to my engagement against the far right, I often receive insulting and threatening messages on social media, so I have had my private address removed from all public sources to protect myself.

But I also receive a lot of support and encouragement from my friends and family. This support was and is of course incredibly helpful and also gives me courage. This joint and mutual empowerment is totally helpful, especially in the case of verbal attacks etc. or when you have the feeling that you are alone with your attitude.

What barriers did you face?

Especially in cities that seem to have been strongly conservative for many years, it is particularly difficult to advocate progressive politics. One is structurally disadvantaged in many respects.

It takes much more time and effort to build up structures, which makes it much more difficult to do politics, especially at the beginning, because the work is spread over a few people and you have hardly any financial resources and also less knowledge.

Being organised in an existing party and being able to use its resources makes it much easier.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

Stay active! Don't let it get you down and join forces with like-minded people regionally and nationally. Volunteer locally in local councils or extra-parliamentary initiatives and spread your contents, ideas and successes through press releases and social media.

Don't let populist speeches stand, but publicly contradict and expose them. Don't let populists and their taboo-breaking become "everyday life", because that is exactly their goal.

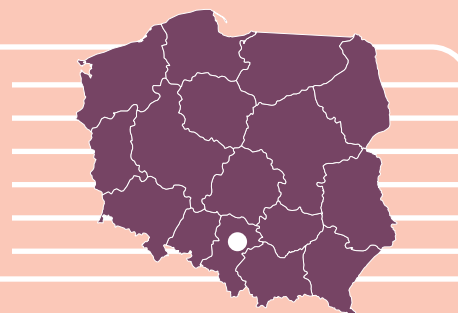It is sometimes a long road, but in the end it is definitely worth it!

Case Study Scenarios

The "Neck-and-neck race" scenario
includes cases where progressive and
populist parties level with each other and
have an equal chance of outperforming
their respective opponent.

Country	Poland
Region	Silesian Voivodship
District/City	**MYSŁOWICE**

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1]
→ 2019 District: **1,137** | → 2020 Nation: **124**

Average age[2] → 2019 District: **41.6** | Nation: **41.3**

(Hightest) **educational attainment**** [3] → 2020
Lower secondary education: Region: **10.5%** | Nation: **12.8%**
Higher secondary education: Region: **10.2%** | Nation: **10.5%**
Vocational training: Region: **51.7%** | Nation: **47.5%**
Teritary/Academic education: Region: **27.5%** | Nation: **29.2%**

*To the best of our knowledge the local and the national data is not available for the same year. **The educational attainment data is for the Silesian Voivodship

Average income (gross)[4] → 2019
District: **11,947 €** | Nation: **12,768 €**

Unemployment rate[5] → 2020
District: **6.7%** | Nation: **6.2%**

Longterm Unemployment rate[6] → 2020
District: **2.3%** | Nation: **2.4%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2019 **0.1%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)***[8]
→ 2021 District: **0.6%** | → 2019 Nation: **5.5%**

***To the best of our knowledge the local and the national data is not available for the same year

ELECTION RESULTS

Regional elections (2018)*[9]

Turnout 52.3%

**Results for the Silesian Voivedoship provincial assembly elections 2018
**The Civic Platform (PO) and Nowoczesna formed a party allliance and run this election togehter as the Civic Coalition (KO)
***Zjednoczona Lewica (ZL) is a party alliance of SLD and Lewica Razem. The vote-share change refers to the change of SLD vote-share only. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).*

32.11%	+7.04	PiS
28.83%	+1.62**	KO
5.15%	-8.06	PSL
8.31%	-2.08***	ZL
6.58%	+2.60	KUKIZ'15
4.96%	+0.32	BS
1.39%	+1.39	Partia Zieloni
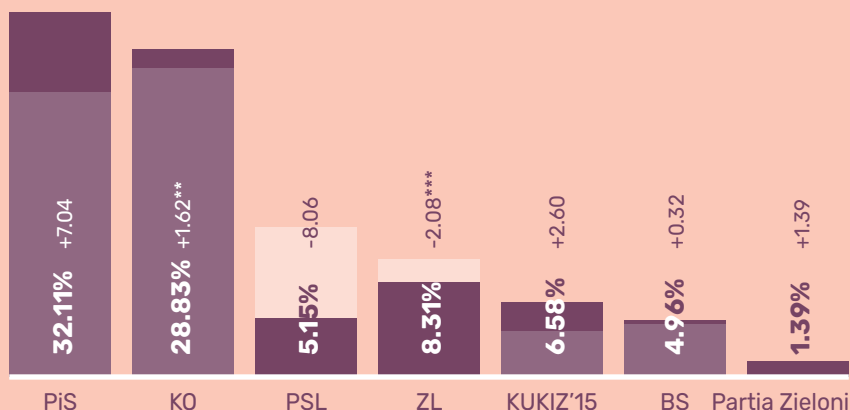
National elections (2019)* [10]

PiS	**49.07%**	(-1.41)
SLD	**50.93%**	(+50.93)**
PO	**-%**	(-49.52)

Turnout	**65.5%**
(National	**61.7%)**

*Results for the national elections to the Senate 2019 from the voting district No. 75 **The candidate of Wiosna/Spring run this election together with New Left Poland (SLD)

European elections (2019)* [11]

PiS	**43.66%**	(+16.93)
Koalicja Europejska	**40.58%**	(-11.46) **
Spring/Wiosna	**5.46%**	(-)
Konfederacja	**4.76%**	(-)
KUKIZ'15	**3.27%**	(-)

Turnout	**45.9%**
(National	**45.7%)**

*Results for the European elections 2019 from Mysłowice **The Civic Platform (PO), Nowoczesna, Zieloni, Inicjatywa Polska, SLD and PSL formed a party allliance and run this election togehter as the European Coalition (Koalicja Europejska)

LEGEND PiS: Law and Justice • **KO:** Civic Coalition (PO, Nowoczesna, Inicjatywa Polska and Zieloni) • **PO:** Civic Platform • **PSL:** Polish People's Party • **SLD:** New Left (Poland) • **Lewica Razem:** Left Together • **ZL:** United Left (SLD and Left Together) • **Partia Zieloni:** The Greens • **Koalicja Europejska:** European Coalition (PO, Nowoczesna, Zieloni, Inicjatywa Polska, SLD and PSL) • **Wiosna:** Spring • **KUKIZ'15:** Kukiz Movement • **Konfederacja:** Confederation • **BS:** Non-partisan Local Government Representatives • **Nowoczesna:** Modern • **Inicjatywa Polska:** Polish Initiative

This case study was created in cooperation with Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek and Filip Pazderski from Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The Slesian (Śląskie) voivodeship consists of three very different socio-economic regions: the Bieruńsko-Lędziński poviat (hereinafter as "the poviat") and the cities of Mysłowice and Tychy.

The poviat is a bastion of support for the ruling, right wing populist Law and Justice Party (PiS). People who live there are characterised by a conservative worldview, attachment to the Catholic faith, and recognition of the role of parishes, which are the main focus of local community life.

Myslowice is a city with a typical mining character, consisting of districts that are practically separate towns. It can be described as a local version of a 'swinging state', as electoral support fluctuates between opposition parties and the ruling coalition.

Tychy is a progressive city, developed after World War II as a sleeping place for the surrounding coal mines and a car factory. There have always been foreigners coming to the city to work. Today, there is still an industrial area where Spanish and Italian companies operate. A relatively high number of inhabitants have a higher education.

An important characteristic of Upper Silesia is its openness, resulting from the historical cultural borderland character of the region, and it has a relatively large number of religious minorities. This background causes people to be tolerant of religious minorities and to be averse to any kind of fundamentalism. However, for social reasons, the local church plays an important role in these traditional small communities.

In the 2019 national elections, the direct candidate for Myslowice, Tychy and the poviat from the social democratic New Left Party (SLD) coalition (Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka from Wiosna/Spring) won by 50.93 per cent against the direct candidate from PiS who gained 49.07 per cent.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Benefit from the national image

The populist authoritarian party ruling Poland since 2015, PiS, took control of the senatorial voting district in early 2015. This occurred in a by-election after the former senatorial seat holder from the district, Elżbieta Bieńkowska, took over as European Commissioner and abandoned her seat. The election was won by PiS candidate Czeslaw Ryszka. Important factors that helped PiS' candidate to win were public fatigue with the long rule of eight years of Civic Platform (PO) and the narrative built by PiS emphasising the liberal nature of PO's views and alleging that the party promoted values contrary to Polish tradition (such as women's rights and so-called gender ideology).

Lack of proximity and religious fundamentalism

After Ryszka took his seat as a senator in 2015, the activities of this politician in the region mainly boiled down to participating in festivals and giving speeches from church podiums. He didn't do much for the people and he wasn't known to the majority of the local residents. An important factor in his favour was the traditionalist views held by a large part of the local population and their susceptibility to the ruling party's propaganda stirring up fear and anxiety. However, in his public appearances, Ryszka became known as a religious fundamentalist, which could have been too much for people living in the area.

"Another important issue was that he [Ryszka] is a religious fundamentalist, and in the four years of his term of office as a senator, apart from his visits to churches and, of course, showing off that he is from the Law and Justice Party and coming to public events, he did not make a name for himself. And that was my advantage. Similarly, it was an advantage for me that he campaigned in churches, normally during or after church services. (...) And when I started talking to people about religion, they kept saying that this Ryszka was at mass last week and people were very outraged by the fact that he had the nerve to do that." (GMS)

The informal "senate pact"

When discussing the 2019 elections to the Polish Senate, it is crucial to note their important specificity. Since the elections to this upper house of parliament in Poland are held under the majority law in single-member constituencies, a possible breakdown of support for different candidates of opposition parties running in the same constituency would give preference to the candidate of the ruling party. This is what PiS benefited from in the 2015 elections, gaining control of the Senate and, as a result, the entire parliament. To avoid a repeat of this situation, the opposition parties managed to establish an informal so-called "senate pact". It was based on a division of constituencies between the parties so that only one candidate representing the political opposition would run in each constituency.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN MYSLOWICE

The slogans used in the 2019 Senate election by the PiS candidate reflected the content of the party's nationwide campaign. They boiled down to fuelling divisions in society and playing on people's fears about opposition parties changing the reality they knew. Perhaps the only local peculiarity was that the PiS candidate stirred up fears about the closure of churches and mines.

Traditions and religion

PiS had policies and propaganda against what they call a "LGBTI ideology" or "gender ideology". The far right claims to "safeguard Polish and Catholic traditions". The progressive opponents were portrayed as being a party hostile to traditions that intended to close down churches.

Popularity and charity

Moreover, the PiS candidate tried to benefit from the popularity of the governing party and public resources available to the party. To this end, he distributed in the district a brochure printed on expensive chalk paper, showing the most prominent PiS achievements in Poland. He also benefited from receiving direct support from the Prime Minister, who was running for the Sejm from the same constituency. In addition, during the campaign, the Deputy Minister of Justice, Michał Wójcik, appeared in the district to ceremonially hand over large cheques for the purchase of fire trucks, financed from the Justice Fund which had been at the disposal of the Minister of Justice. The money had originally been intended to support victims of crime and provide post-penitentiary assistance.

"The PiS candidate was extremely confident [because] he appeared on billboards together with Prime Minister Morawiecki, or supposedly handed firefighters some huge cheques of 50,000 PLN each, together with one of the ministers." (GMS)

Attacking the opponent

Another element of the Law and Justice candidate's campaign was to emphasise the opposition parties' incompetence and their alleged detachment from the realities of everyday life of ordinary people. The far right claimed that progressives would close down mines and therefore be responsible for people losing their jobs.

"And this populism in Upper Silesia still has the face of closing the coal mines. The Solidarna Polska (United Poland) Party* is now gathering this conservative, populist electorate, by saying that they will protect their mines for another 200 years. Which is nonsense, because it is unrealistic from an economic, geological and any other point of view. And they know it, of course. But people are afraid that everything will be completely reversed and that we will also close their churches down. And that's what I try to explain to people, that it's not about that." (GMS)

KEY TOPICS OF THE PROGRESSIVES IN MYSLOWICE

Due to the great diversity of the region, Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka's campaign did not have a single unified message for the entire constituency. Rather, she attempted to formulate slogans and address issues raised by people living in different parts of the electoral district.

"I couldn't speak in the same language in the poviat as I did in Tychy, because I had to draw attention to the fact that people there are more religious. I knew that I had to take

*The Solidarna Polska Party is part of the right wing coalition United Right and has run for national elections together with the right wing populist PiS party. The founder of the party is currently Poland's minister of justice. Solidarna Polska position themselves between the PiS and the right wing extremist Konfederacja Party.

into account the sensitivity of the people. I also knew that people in the poviat were more focused on the internal affairs of a given town than on global issues." (GMS)

However, four main thematic threads could be identified, around which different narratives were built in different parts of the constituency (the involvement of people from different localities in the electoral staff helped in choosing the right slogans). The threads were:

Transportation

...and transport exclusion, which affects people's access to a high level of diverse education, especially for children and young students living outside large urban centres – the restoration of railway connections in every county and bus services in every community was postulated.

Public health care

...and improving its quality – above all, shortening the queues for waiting to visit doctors and reducing the cost of prescribed medicines.

Air quality

...and combating energy exclusion, by replacing heating furnaces.

Culture

… by guaranteeing universal access to cultural heritage and contemporary culture, so as to strengthen freedom, independence of thought, and community building.

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Proximity by the far right

Proximity was an important strategy for the populist ruling party (PiS). But they used a specific notion of proximity. The efforts showing proximity to citizens were only practised during meetings in churches and at various local festivals.

"However, the populists' proximity is peculiar because they are quite non-inclusive. Especially from today's perspective, we can say they appeal to a narrowing group of people. It is not as if they are open to dialogue." (AMM)

The mainly declarative populist closeness was contrasted with the conversational closeness of Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka.

Proximity of progressives

The entire campaign of the progressive candidate to the senate was built on having direct contact with the people of the district. The slogan "a senator close to the people" was used and the candidate focused intensively on consultation with citizens.

"Practically from the first day of collecting signatures for her candidacy to the Senate, Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka was on the street from morning till night. She would get

up at 6 a.m. and go home at 9 p.m. And then the topics of local conversations and local sorrows were our main focus." (KM)

The candidate went to festivals and even if she was not allowed to enter the event, she set up her stand in front of the entrance and talked to people about what bothered them. Often, people were positively surprised to see the actual candidate doing all this by herself instead of sending other campaigners.

Morawska-Stanecka was convinced that a different way of conducting politics is possible, one that departs from the fight between two "political camps" so far known by the region's inhabitants. Her emphasis was on listening to people rather than telling them from Warsaw or party headquarters how things should be and what to do. The progressive candidate also avoided suggesting that she knows anything better than local people. This strategy has delivered clear results and proved to be one of the keys to future electoral success.

Further formats included door-to-door activities by volunteers and the involvement of youth engaging primarily on environmental issues. The electoral staff included people who came from various towns in the region and knew their internal problems very well.

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

A number of activities undertaken during the campaign were aimed at counteracting the populist postulates of the Law and Justice candidate. Apart from demonstrating the absurdity of the Law and Justice candidate's views and the fact that his statements were not truthful, efforts were made not to criticise his opinions. Instead, progressives presented facts. One of the most important means of popularising Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka's views was a flyer created by her team and distributed in the region. It displayed her point of view and discussed topics raised by her counter-candidate by explaining how different her opinions are from the ones presented by PiS candidate.

Addressing the obvious in a solution-oriented manner
Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka, as the candidate of the Spring Party, which openly addresses climate change and the need to abandon the use of coal, could not ignore the topic of coal mine closures. She attempted to alleviate the fears of the inhabitants of the region. Morawska-Stanecka explained to miners and their families what will happen to them in the future, presenting them with concrete solutions to the problems they will encounter. The candidate told people directly that she knew what had to be done to look after the interests of the people in the region. She was credible in this, as she herself had worked for many years in the mining industry.

"Because I worked 20 years in the mining industry, I know exactly that it [closing the mines] can and even should be done. But I know how to do it. Moreover, I knew what language to use to talk to these people to calm their fears. Because people are afraid of losing their jobs, they're afraid that they'll have trouble making a living again. I knew how to talk to these people and what other fears to address, especially when targeting women." (GMS)

Simple language and understanding emotions

"I try to explain complicated matters in simple language that people are familiar with. In the same way, I try to talk about issues such as climate or mining. On the latter topic, I ask a question at every meeting: Do women in Silesia dream of their husband going down the mine and not coming back? (...) My husband worked in the mines and I was afraid when there was a fire in the mine and he was staying down there. And I show my fears, my emotions to people. And yet our husbands can work in other fields and earn the same money or even better!" (GMS)

Show inclusiveness and recall good experiences
Morawska-Stanecka tried to emphasise her centre-left views and avoid associations with radical positions. She rather showed her inclusiveness, her willingness to talk to all people, regardless of their views.

Aware of the conservatism of the region's inhabitants, she decided not to use information showing very visible links to the political left on her election materials. Instead, she used the term "opposition candidate" and her own visuals, which could not be associated with any political party.

"I had this visualisation that used the slogan 'opposition candidate', and 'Let's win the future' was my election slogan. I was referring back to 1989, when the opposition united (against the communist authorities) and the elections to the Senate were won, which brought freedom and a completely different quality of life and change to Poland." (GMS)

Never lose your perseverance
When the opponent is from the far right, then no effort should be spared. Every day counts. And so does every decision. Consistency in content and attitude matter immediately and in the long run.

"There are no fields in which we are allowed to let go. If we fight populism, there are no moments when we are allowed to lie down and take a nap for a week, two, three, a month... There aren't. Either one goes into battle or one does not." (KM)

"Because when the election comes around again the voters will ask: So, when the women went on strike, where were you? Well... And that is also the point. People later judge the results and they see whether you stood shoulder to shoulder with them during the struggle. Or did you do something completely different at the time?" (AMM)

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

After the electoral victory, it still remains a main task to continue to work actively with the people. Local party members continue to address the challenges that people in the region are facing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the introduction of lockdown measures.

There are several areas of activity that Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka considers to be priorities for herself currently and in the near future:

- **Education –** both civic and legal, and the need to develop new curricula, because Poland is still dominated by the individualistic pre-1989 model of teaching, in which the main focus is on preparing participants for individual subject competitions, instead of working on competences in cooperation or community building.
- **Media –** those of a public nature need to be rebuilt in order to fulfil a broad educational and cultural mission.
- **Social inclusion –** starting with the universal availability of public transport, the lack of which blocks children and young people's access to better and diverse education.

A FACE OF MYSLOWICE: GABRIELA MORAWSKA-STANECKA

Full name	**Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka**
Profession	Lawyer
Role in party politics	Vice President for Legal and Legislative Affairs, Spring (Wiosna) Party, currently Deputy Speaker of the Senate Party: Spring (Wiosna) Party
Age	52
Place of Residence	Gostyń village, Mikołów poviat
Contact	Gabriela.Morawska-Stanecka@senat.gov.pl biurosenator.morawskastanecka@gmail.com Twitter: @GabrielaMorStan Instagram:@gabriela_morawska_stanecka

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

The main motivation for me was anger and general fear that someone was stealing my country after 2015 against my will. There was also shame towards friends from abroad who asked about the deteriorating situation in Poland. I quickly got involved in demonstrations against the new government, but I felt that something more had to be done, because the street alone does not lead to political change – not in these times and with Poland belonging to the European Union.

The upbringing I received in my family home was also important to me. It prompts me to focus first and foremost on the welfare of the community to which I belong.

It has always been important for me to be interested in politics and believe that we should fulfil our duties to the state, starting with paying taxes. Maybe that is why I consider the political transformation and 1989 itself as the most important moment in my life.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

As a lawyer, I gave legal advice to people who got into trouble with the law as a result of participating in the demonstrations. After some time, it occurred to me that something more needed to be done, because street actions alone do not lead to political change, especially in view of Poland's membership of the European Union.

That is how I decided to join a political party. I have always been a centre-left person, so I started looking on the left side of the political scene. I immediately rejected the Democratic Left Alliance, which I always associated with the People's Republic of Poland. The Razem Party was too radical in its views for me. So I had a choice between Barbara Nowacka's initiative and Robert Biedroń. The latter appealed to me more because of his personality. Thus, in 2018, I got involved in political activism and creating his new party in Silesia called Spring (Wiosna). I resigned from running a law firm. My family situation helped me in this

decision – my children were already grown up and my husband agreed to support me in my activities.

My activities within the Spring Party led me to participate in the elections for the Polish Senate in 2019. I was first offered to stand as a candidate for an electoral district that includes Sosnowiec. But this is a big city with a very Silesian character, where people prefer to surround themselves with their own people. I would have been an outsider there and I didn't really know the city. In addition, this constituency had an unfavourable political situation with strong local structures of the Civic Platform (PO), which could have found it difficult to agree with the decision made at the party headquarters to have a left wing party politician run from their district. That is why I preferred constituency No. 75 in the senatorial elections, which includes Bieruńsko-Lędziński County and the cities of Mysłowice and Tychy. I knew this constituency very well because I practically come from it and I worked there for many years.

I knew that my campaign would have to look a little different in each of the three parts of the electoral district. We did this by seeking contact with people, going out and talking to them about their problems. I didn't shy away from the important issue of coal mining for this region, especially as I represent a party that has a clear position on the need to move away from coal in the economy. Because I know the region, I also knew that, above all, I had to reassure people about the uncertainty of their future if all the mines were to close. I therefore tried to convince people that I knew what to do, and I put forward concrete ideas.

I realised that in my constituency it would be most difficult for me to gain support in the Bieruńsko-Lędziński Powiat (district). That is why I decided to be particularly close to people there, to talk to them. Many people I met in this way were surprised that someone came to them, because no one had ever done so before.

> **Until the very end, I did not believe that we would be successful because the pre-election opinion polls did not indicate this. I even went to bed early on election night, assuming that it was all over. The next morning it turned out otherwise. I think what helped me first and foremost was seeking direct contact with people on the ground.**

Until the very end, I did not believe that we would be successful because the pre-election opinion polls did not indicate this. I even went to bed early on election night, assuming that it was all over. The next morning it turned out otherwise. I think what helped me first and foremost was seeking direct contact with people on the ground. Second, I called myself "an opposition candidate" in order to dissociate myself from all negative associations connected with party politics in Poland. Third, I tried to refer to the tradition of opposition activity – the year 1989 and the Solidarity movement of 1980 – because I was active then myself. And I emphasised the need to look to the future, using the slogan "Let us win the future". Fourth, as a centre-left person I tried to show inclusiveness and avoid radical, closed-minded views. Instead, I focused on talking to everyone, regardless of their views or religion. Fifth, I think it was a good idea to present in my election materials clear juxtapositions of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) candidates' views on various issues with the opinions of myself and the whole opposition on the same matters. As a result of these activities I won 50.9 per cent of the votes cast and gained a seat in the Polish Senate.

What influence has this had on your personal life?

Women do not go into politics because of their families, above all their children. If you look at who is in the Polish Parliament now, you will see that women with small children are only in the Sejm if they live in Warsaw. It helped me that my children are now grown up and live away from the family home.

You also need the right spouse or partner who agrees to take on the running of all household affairs, to look after other family members (e.g. parents) and to be alone for a large part of the week. Because my life after becoming a senator has changed by 180 degrees. I now spend most of my time in Warsaw. There is so much going on here that I often don't even have time to think about home.

What barriers did you face?

One of the biggest challenges for us today is populism and the resulting social polarisation (the division between "us" and "them"). Parties like PiS build their position on fuelling people's fears and deepening oppositions. And people who are afraid no longer want to talk about concrete problems and substantive solutions. They focus on fear for their jobs, fear of "outsiders", etc. People can also fear the closure of churches, which is particularly important in smaller towns where the church is an important centre of local community life. But this is also an opportunity for progressive politicians, who can build on the fact that people want their church to be inclusive and open at the same time. So they tend to dislike any fundamentalist, closed-minded attitudes. But in doing so, people also need to be reassured that church closures will not

take place. In the same way, while reassuring people about their fears, one should also talk about such issues as climate, ecology and the future of coal mines.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

Above all, you have to believe in yourself and be yourself in whatever you do. That is why you should choose the political formation which best represents your convictions and present the views which you are convinced of.

Before you decide to enter politics, you should also answer the question: Am I ready to sacrifice everything I have had so far and change my life by 180 degrees? You also need to prepare yourself for uncertainty in life, because a lot of unexpected events can happen every day. Therefore, you will also need a lot of flexibility in how you approach your life.

Case Study Scenarios

DAMAGE CONTROL

The "Damage control" scenario showcases regions with far right strongholds without a chance for progressive majority but with aspirations to minimise the damage.

Country	Sweden
Region	Blekinge
Municipality/Town	**SÖLVESBORG**
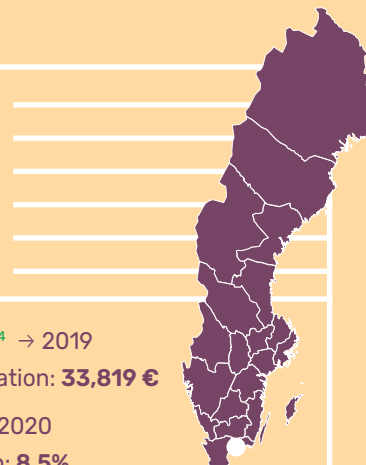
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2020
Municipality: **94.2** | Nation: **25.5**

Average age[2] → 2019 Municipality: **45.1** | Nation: **41.3**

(Hightest) **educational attainment***[3] → 2019
Lower secondary education: Municipality: **13%** | Nation: **11%**
Higher secondary education/Vocational training:
Municipality: **53%** | Nation: **43%**
Teritary/Academic education: Municipality: **18%** | Nation: **28%**

*To the best of our knowedge there isn´t more specific data.
Therefore the values do not add to 100%*

Average income (gross)[4] → 2019
Municipality: **32,134 €** | Nation: **33,819 €**

Unemployment rate[5] → 2020
Municipality: **9.0%** | Nation: **8.5%**

Longterm unemployment*[6] → 02/2021
Municipality: **5.1%** | Nation: **2.8%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2020 **0.3%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)[8] → 2020
Municipality: **12.2%** | Nation: **19.7 %**

***Longterm in this case means being unemployed for more than
six months (Sölvesborg) or 27 weeks and more (Sweden).*

ELECTION RESULTS

Local council elections (2018)*[9]

Turnout 84 %

*Municipal council elections 2018 Sölvesborg. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).
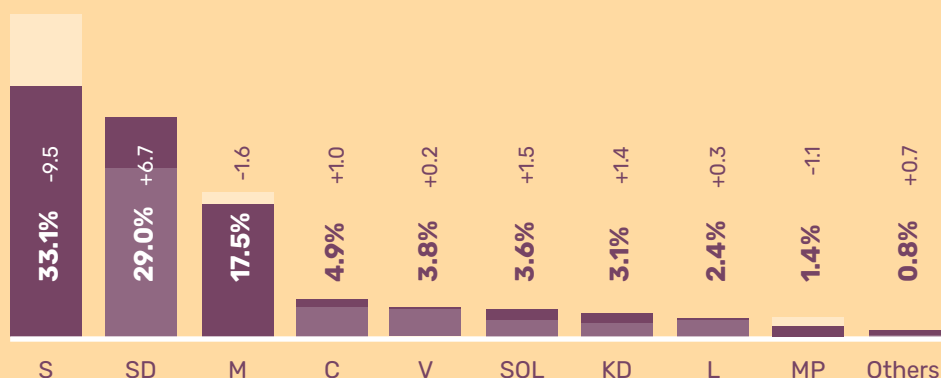
S	SD	M	C	V	SOL	KD	L	MP	Others
-9.5	+6.7	-1.6	+1.0	+0.2	+1.5	+1.4	+0.3	-1.1	+0.7
33.1%	29.0%	17.5%	4.9%	3.8%	3.6%	3.1%	2.4%	1.4%	0.8%

Most significant shift of voters: From: Social Democrats (S) **To:** Sweden Democrats (SD)*
* This is just an estimate based on the voting results, there are no local surveys on the matter.

Regional elections (2018)*[10]

S	**29.5%**	(-6.7)
SD	**27.3%**	(+7.1)
M	**20.7%**	(-1.4)
C	**5.7%**	(+1.5)
KD	**5.1%**	(+2.3)
V	**4.0%**	(+0.2)
L	**3.2%**	(+0.8)
MP	**1.6%**	(-1.9)
FI	**0.3%**	(+0.3)
Others	**2.6%**	(-2.2)

Turnout 85.8%
*Results for the Blekinge regional elections 2018 from Sölvesborg

National elections (2018)*[11]

SD	**31.2%**	(+6.2)
S	**27.8%**	(-5.2)
M	**19.1%**	(-3.6)
KD	**6.1%**	(+3.1)
C	**5.7%**	(+1.1)
V	**3.7%**	(+0.5)
L	**3.2%**	(+0.3)
MP	**2.1%**	(-1.8)
Others	**1.2%**	(-0.8)

Turnout 88.3%
*Results for the national parliamentary elections 2018 from Sölvesborg

European elections (2019)*[12]

SD	**28.6%**	(+9.7)
S	**28.6%**	(-0.5)
M	**14.9%**	(+0.2)
KD	**7.8%**	(+2.4)
C	**6.8%**	(+0.4)
MP	**5.4%**	(-4.4)
V	**3.7%**	(-0.8)
L	**2.6%**	(-3.7)
PP	**0.5%**	(-1.2)
FI	**0.3%**	(-2.3)
Others	**0.7%**	(+0.2)

Turnout 51%
*Results for the European elections 2019 from Sölvesborg

LEGEND S: Social Democrats • **SD:** Swedish Democrats • **M:** Moderate Party • **C:** Centre Party • **MP:** Green Party • **KD:** Christian Democrats • **V:** Left Party • **L:** Liberals • **SOL:** local party in Sölvesborg • **FI:** Feminist Initiative

This case study was created in cooperation with Susanna Kierkegaard and Hanna Lyth from Arenagruppen.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Sölvesborg is the largest town in the municipality with the same name in the region of Blekinge. Located by the east coast in the very south of Sweden, Blekinge is the smallest region in Sweden measured by surface area.[13] It was part of Denmark until 1658.[14] Because of its proximity to the archipelago, Sölvesborg has served as a hub for trade from the 17th century onwards.[15] Its exports peaked in the mid 19th century as its citizens specialised in producing snaps.[16] Today, the docks are mainly used for bulk transport and containers.[17]

It took 18 weeks of negotiations during 2018 and 2019 for the national Swedish government to form, when the right wing bloc split over the issue of the Sweden Democrats.[18] An unusually long duration for Swedish standards. In the end, the two liberal parties chose to support the Social Democrats and the Green Party, leaving out the conservative-liberal Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats, who would have preferred forming a right wing government with the support of the Sweden Democrats.[19] This demonstrates the divisive impact that the Sweden Democrats have had on Swedish politics – breaking up decade-long alliances and forcing the other parties to take a stand, sometimes at major political cost.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

The far right Sweden Democrats are still a relatively new phenomenon in Swedish politics. Contrary to other European countries, the main populist party has not yet had any direct influence over a government, neither as coalition partner nor supporting party. They differ from other large populist parties. In contrast with their European counterparts, they were founded by members of neo-Nazi groups and right wing extremists.[20] This makes them stand out, as they are not originally a populist party but an extremist organisation that has consciously adapted to the main political arena.

Over the last decade, Sölvesborg has become nationally associated with the Sweden Democrats. The municipality in the south of Sweden is the home town of party leader Jimmie Åkesson and in 2018 it was one of the first places where the Sweden Democrats managed to form a local coalition government with conservatives. Åkesson founded the Sweden Democratic youth organisation in Sölvesborg, helped by a party member from neighbouring district Höör, who was later found guilty of burning books while dressed in a Nazi military uniform.[21] Today, the local party leader in Sölvesborg is Louise Erixon, ex partner of Jimmie Åkesson. The local government has been run by the Sweden Democrats since the 2018 elections, when they formed an alliance with the liberal-conservative Moderate Party.

However, the Sweden Democrats always struggled to find local representatives, holding the Swedish record in resignations and empty chairs.[22]

The number of people living in Sölvesborg born outside Europe increased by 557 per cent, or 774 people, between 2002 and 2018.[23] Over the same period, the Sweden Democrats grew from 3.3 per cent of the vote in the local elections in 2002 to 29 per cent in 2018.[24] Irrespective of whether these circumstances helped the Sweden Democrats grow, Sölvesborg becoming a hub for the Sweden Democrats depended more on individuals and coincidence.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN SÖLVESBORG

Anti-migration and culture

The Sweden Democrats in Sölvesborg have focused their politics on issues of culture and migration. In general, they share the priorities of the national party, the main difference being that in Sölvesborg they actually get to put ideas into practice.

For instance, the Sweden Democrats in Sölvesborg have challenged the national Settlement Law of 2016, which states that all municipalities are required to accept their share of immigrants who have received residence permits.[25] In July 2019 Sölvesborg became one of a handful of Swedish municipalities that have banned public begging.[26]

Louise Erixon wants Sölvesborg to be the first place in Sweden with a ban on wearing the veil. Erixon's ban would cover all children from preschool to upper secondary school, women in adult education and employees of the local government administration.[27] The neighbouring municipalities of Skurup and Staffanstorp have tried similar legislation but been hindered by the administrative court.[28]

In July 2019, the Sölvesborg majority decided to only allow purchasing of art that is "classic and timeless" to be available to the general public. The Sweden Democrats usually contrast "classic" art with contemporary political art, which they call "menstruation art", a reference to the work of the Swedish cartoonist Liv Strömqvist whose drawings of menstruating women were displayed in the Stockholm underground.[29]

220 issues

The Sweden Democrats started off their mandate releasing a list of 220 things they would want "to fix" when ruling. This list combining mundane everyday improvements, such as cleaning street signs, and ideologically charged alterations, like changing migration policy, stirred a lot of discussion. Citizens seemed happy with all of the smaller things that the Sweden Democrats and their allies got done. The progressives did not know how to respond to the programme, as a large part of the list were things they would have done too.

"Louise Erixon knows what she is doing, she keeps the entire thing together. They started off their mandate releasing a list of 220 things they were going to get done. From small things like cleaning street signs to the issues they have closest to heart, refugee policy and such." (WS)

KEY TOPICS OF PROGRESSIVES IN SÖLVESBORG

Progressive parties in the region are the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Green Party. The Social Democrats are, despite a significant loss, still the largest party in the Sölvesborg local elections, receiving 33 per cent of the vote in 2018.[30]

Transportation, labour and environmental protection

The Social Democrats in Sölvesborg want to increase public transport, including boats and buses, and build more bicycle lanes. They want to attract more businesses by ensuring that there is space available for new companies, and ensure that it is easy to obtain building permits. The party has several ideas for how to make the municipality greener, while maintaining a strong focus on welfare issues.[31]

Welfare and economy

The Left Party received 3.8 per cent of the vote in the local elections of 2018, a small increase of 0.2 percentage points. The party's priorities include making dental care affordable, shortening the working day from eight to six hours, prohibiting private companies from making profits in the welfare sector, and making public transport free for children, youth and retired citizens.[32]

Climate change

The Green Party in Sölvesborg received 1.4 per cent, a decrease of 1.1 percentage points, leaving the party without a representative in the local assembly.[33] The party prioritises issues of mitigating climate change and protecting the environment. For instance, they want to spend more on public transportation, renewable energy and organic food in public establishments.

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Facebook groups matter

Eva-Lena Ulvsfält is the group leader of the Green Party in Sölvesborg. She describes her party as temporarily inactive, but the few Greens left have found alternative ways of engaging in politics and making their voices heard. Ulvsfält is practising proximity to citizens by stating publicly online what the Sweden Democrats do in Sölvesborg. She is the founder of the Facebook group "The Sövesborg Sweden Democratic leadership scrutinised" *(Sölvesborgs SD-styre under luppen)*, which currently has 6,000 members.

"The group's purpose is to explain to the people here what the political decisions made actually mean, what issues are coming up, and to spread the word to the rest of the country. Local politicians from across Sweden are members of our group, they want to learn more about what could happen if they get a Sweden Democratic leadership too." (ELU)

Ulvsfält thinks that the skilful use of Facebook groups is one of the reasons why the Sweden Democrats have been so successful locally and so she uses it herself.

"I think the outcome of the local elections of 2018 was largely decided in Facebook groups. They stirred up a sense of insecurity, about bad security around the local railway station and criminal activity there." (ELU)

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Deal with critical issues

Security issues were rising on the agenda, and progressives had difficulty in countering them. Initially, the Left Party would react to Sweden Democrats' suggestions simply. For example when the Sweden Democrats suggested that there should be more security at the railway station they said that cameras, guards and surveillance is wrong. Nowadays, they respond to similar proposals in a slightly different manner. Now, they explain the context of a critical issue.

"We approach things by saying, regarding the guards for instance, that should we add a guard at the railway station, the drug deals will just move to the town square. And most people realise that this is true." (WS)

Söderdahl recognises that this strategy probably will not change any Sweden Democrats voter's mind right away. He hopes, however, that he might make people reflect more on the complexity of the issues to which the Sweden Democrats are offering easy answers.

Focus on those who do not yet support the far right and a wise balancing of topics

In Sölvesborg, the group not voting for the far right (yet) makes up over 70 per cent of voters. The Left Party have chosen a few political areas to focus on, based on what they perceive as the weak spots of the Sweden Democrats: the environment, culture and economic issues like privatisation. At the same time, they are careful not to give in to discussion on the Sweden Democrats' favourite topics. When the Sweden Democrats try to shift a political debate to migration or law and order he tries to respectfully bring back the discussion to the original topic.

This does not mean that topics are ignored. The previously common strategy of ignoring and avoiding the Sweden Democrats and their political issues has not been successful either. Most progressive Swedish parties tried it, when the Sweden Democrats were a new addition to the political landscape – they only seemed to grow as a result.

Climate change and the environment are important to most of the public, but not something that the local Sweden Democrats are engaged in at all. On matters of culture and art, the party is very active – but many people in Sölvesborg do not agree with their views, which are often radically conservative and interfering.

Have an eye on the coalition partner

Progressives also keep a close watch on the local coalition partners of the far right: the conservatives.

"Large parts of their local party programmes are just copied from the Sweden Democrats. So in the local parliament, I often conclude that we have all heard what the Sweden Democrats have to say on any particular issue, but I ask what do the moderates say? I rarely get any answers, they just look down at their tables." (WS)

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Progressives in Sölvesborg are encouraged to stay civil, respond to citizens' worries and refuse to reduce complex issues to easy answers. Join forces with the rest of the opposition, if possible, and remember to value and engage with the large majority who do not support right wing populists.

Choose candidates well

The importance of individuals cannot be underestimated, especially in local politics. The success of the Sweden Democrats in Sölvesborg, and their failure in neighbouring communities despite having the same levels of support, shows that leaders can make all the difference. The same goes for other parties.

Prevent coalitions between the far right and others

The Sweden Democrats could not have formed a local government without the support of their conservative partners. The Sweden Democrats cannot gain power or influence without allies in other parties, therefore progressives should discourage parties from building coalitions with the far right.

Highlight the far right's weakness in dealing with criticism

It was noted that the Sweden Democrats and even their allies go to great lengths to avoid criticism, even making decisions outside established channels and rooms. They have trouble responding to critical questions in the local assembly. The party also struggles with internal challenges, both conflicts and its lack of suitable representatives. Highlighting the far right's inability to deal with any sort of criticism is an important tactic for progressives.

A FACE OF SÖLVESBORG: HELÉNE BJÖRKLUND

Full name	**Heléne Björklund**
Profession	Politician, teacher
Role in party politics	Member of the National Parliament (Riksdag) Party: Social Democratic Party
Age	48

An early meeting with populists

Heléne Björklund has lived in Sölvesborg her whole life. She was 26 years old when she was elected as a representative of the Social Democrats in the local municipal government. This was in 1998 – the same year Jimmie Åkesson, the current party leader of the Sweden Democrats, got his first elected position in the same assembly.

"I was really new to politics, I did not have a background in the Social Democratic Youth Organisation. Still, having become a mother at the age of 17 and built a home for myself, one might say I already lived the life of a middle aged person as I got involved in politics," says Björklund.

Björklund has been a member of the Swedish Parliament since 2018. Being of working class background, she has some issues with the increasingly common portrayal of her and her party as representatives of a political elite, as opposed to the Sweden Democrats, who are said to represent the real people.

"Jimmie Åkesson went to Lund University. It is remarkable that he is always made out to represent the working class, while I, who struggled as a single mother and worked in home care, belong to the supposed elite," says Björklund.

Lessons learned from the early years

Björklund remembers the initial reaction of her party to Åkesson in the local parliament as forward and aggressive. Back then, she was impressed with the way her colleagues would shred the Sweden Democrats during sessions. However, today she is not so sure that the strategy was the right one.

"In hindsight I feel sorry for Jimmie, we really cornered him."

After that initial period of aggression, the Social Democrats adopted an informal strategy of ignoring the Sweden Democrats, excluding them from the decision making process whenever possible. But Björklund now believes that policy was not very successful. When she was elected chair of the local parliament, Björklund decided to invite the Sweden Democrats to the working committee in charge of budget processing.

> **We still did not collaborate with them in any way, never discussed or confirmed our positions with them as we are so far apart politically. But we also were not bullies, we did not shut them out completely**

"We still did not collaborate with them in any way, never discussed or confirmed our positions with them as we are so far apart politically. But we also were not bullies, we did not shut them out completely", she remembers.

Recommendations to other progressives

Björklund thinks this might have reduced the extent to which the Sweden Democrats were able to portray themselves as victims, whichBjörklund suggests might be relevant today, too, as the Sweden Democrats run the local government.

"When they run things, they have to take responsibility. The positive aspect of winning power for them is that they are so much more visible. They are at all the grand openings, they are seen, and lots of voters, perhaps teachers, bosses think 'well, that was not as bad as we thought it would be'."

"Still, all the people who have trouble making ends meet, who are excluded from social insurance, struggling with everyday life or really living at the margins of society, their problems are still just as prominent. The Sweden Democrats have not improved anything with their local politics, because economic inequality is still huge here."

Different rules for different parties?

Ever since getting involved in local politics, Björklund has known and valued the importance of proximity to the local community. People in Sölvesborg used not to care whether representatives were "skilled politicians", she says – they wanted to be represented by a neighbour. The Social Democrats in the local parliament were all engaged in the community, often active members of local organisations.

This does not seem crucial nowadays, however. Björklund notes that the current leader of the local government, Louise Erixon, does not seem to prioritise proximity to voters. Surprisingly, this fact does not appear to bother her supporters.

"Jimmie Åkesson was a local guy liked by many. He goes to football games here, his parents run a small business, everybody knows them. That is part of the reason why we do not want to attack him as a person.

"Louise Erixon is not from Sölvesborg originally, she is more of a national figure, at least now. I don't see her around a lot, you never run into her at the supermarket or see her at local activities. She lives her life on social media. And that seems to work well – the question we ask ourselves is whether that is a sign that times change, or yet another case where different rules apply to the Sweden Democrats," observes Björklund.

Professionalism trumps proximity?

Furthermore, Björklund notes that Erixon has professionalised the local party by employing their central press service and advisers. With a centralised structure to support them, the Sölvesborg Sweden Democrats appear very well prepared whenever media calls – especially compared with other parties, whose representatives might need to respond to journalists while at their day job. The proximity which used to be an advantage, might suddenly appear unprofessional.

Björklund says she would not be surprised if the Sweden Democrats decided to portion out central party figures around the country, and have them lead local parties hoping to spread the Sölvesborg model. She has not seen any great discontent with Erixon's leadership so far, and worries that other local governments might copy them.

"I think we need to realise that we could all end up as the opposition and prepare for it. How to handle issues of democracy, for instance. As the Sweden Democrats and their allies are in the majority here they have started making serious changes – they have changed the model of how party support is distributed to their advantage, the Social Democrats are losing almost a third of what we had before. They no longer post documents online, they are not public anymore, because they claim the media do not report on them in a fair way. They locked the local government buildings.

And the worst part is, the people who live here do not care. Only politicians and journalists do."

Nevertheless, Björklund sees one positive aspect of how politics is developing nationally and the Sweden Democrats increase in popularity. Sölvesborg progressives are no longer alone in needing to counter right wing populism.

"Twenty years ago, we were quite lonely, learning by trial and error. Now a lot of people have experienced the same thing as us, we can finally have an internal discussion about it."

Country	Germany
Region	Thuringia
District	**SAALE-ORLA**
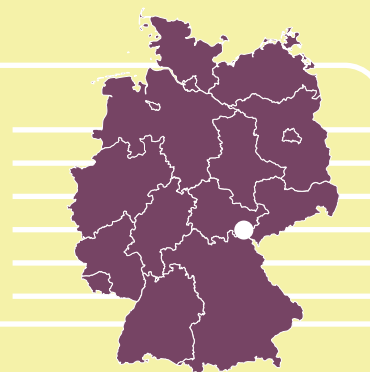
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2018
District: **70** │ Nation: **234.3**

Average age* [2]
→ 2018 District: **48.8** │ → 2019 Nation: **44.5**

(Hightest) educational attainment* * [3] → 2019
Lower secondary education: Region: **13.9%** │ Nation: **13.3%**
Higher secondary education: Region: **3.2%** │ Nation: **3.4%**
Vocational training: Region: **49.9%** │ Nation: **53.5%**
Teritary/Academic education: Region: **32.9%** │ Nation: **29.9%**

*To the best of our knowledge the district and the national data is not
available for the same year **The educational attainment data is for Thuringia*

Average income (gross)[4] *
→ 2018 District: **27,510 €** │ → 2019 Nation: **37,139€**

Unemployment rate[5]→ 03/2021
District: **5.3%** │ Nation: **6.2%**

Longterm unemployment rate* [6] → 03/2021
District: **1.8%** │ Nation: **2.2%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2019 **0.1%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)[8]
→ 2019 District: **3.7%** │ Nation: **12.4%**

ELECTION RESULTS

**Local council
elections (2019)*** [9]

Turnout 62.5 %

*Results for the Saale-Orla
district elections 2019.
Changes compared to
the previous election are
indicated with (+/-).*

CDU	AfD	UBV	Linke	SPD	FDP	B'90/Die Grünen	SIP
31.9% (-9.4)	20.6% (+20.6)	15.0% (+1.6)	13.4% (-8.6)	8.6% (-8.7)	5.7% (+0.8)	4.0% (+4.0)	0.8%
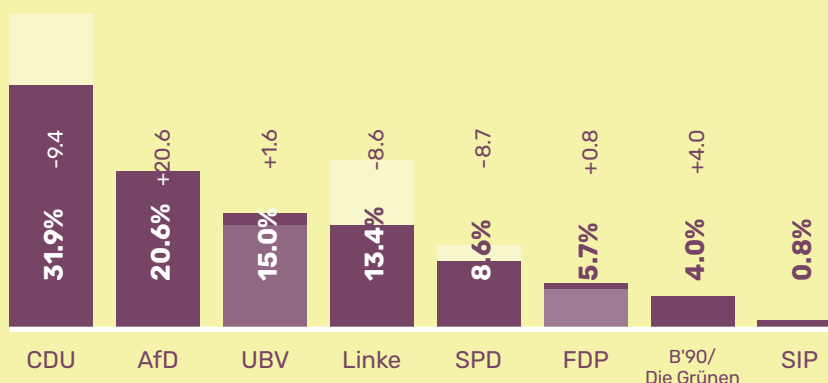
Most significant shift of voters: From: CDU - Conservatives **To:** AfD - Right-wing populists

Regional elections (2019)* [10]

CDU	**32.5%**	(-7.3)
AfD	**29.0%**	(+29.0)
Linke	**23.8%**	(-8.1)
SPD	**6.0%**	(-10.7)
FDP	**4.5%**	(+4.5)
B'90/Die Grünen	**4.2%**	(-1.3)
Turnout (Thuringia	41.1% 64.9%)	

*Results for the regional election 2019 from
the Saale-Orla district 2*

National elections (2017)* [11]

CDU	**28.1%**	(-10.1)
AfD	**25.8%**	(+18.6)
Linke	**16.5%**	(-7.8)
SPD	**12%**	(-3.2)
FDP	**7.8%**	(+5.2)
B'90/Die Grünen	**3%**	(-1)
Others	**6.7%**	
Turnout (National	75% 76.2%)	

*Results for the national elections 2017
from the election district 195 (Saalfeld-
Rudolstadt – Saale-Holzland – Saale-Orla)*

European elections (2019)* [12]

AfD	**27.1%**	(+18.7)
CDU	**25.1%**	(-7.3)
Linke	**13.7%**	(-9.8)
SPD	**9.1%**	(-7.7)
B'90/Die Grünen	**5.4%**	(+1.9)
FDP	**4.7%**	(+2.4)
Others	**14.9%**	
Turnout (National	63.4% 61.4%)	

*Results for the European elections 2019
from the election district Saale-Orla*

LEGEND SPD: Social Democrats · **CDU:** Christian Democratic Union of Germany · **Grüne:** Greens · **Linke:** Left · **FDP:** Free Democrats
· **AfD:** Alternative for Germany · **UBV:** "Independent Citizens' Representation-Free Voters' Association of the Saale-Orla district"

This case study was created by Das Progressive Zentrum.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Saale-Orla is a rural district in the South-East of Thuringia. After reunification, Saale-Orla, like many other regions in East Germany, lost a significant part of its population to emigration. Although the general living conditions have improved fundamentally compared with the 1990s, rural exodus is still the greatest social challenge today. As a result there is economic and social decline in local communities as people – especially the younger population – move to towns and cities to pursue careers or higher education.

Still, the predominantly rural district has been relatively stable with regards to employment. For the most part, un-employment figures are close to the national figures and in some municipalities even lower than the national average. Nonetheless the wage gap between East and West Germany is a known condition and omnipresent in the regional population's awareness. In comparison with other parts of the federal state, Saale-Orla records a particularly low average wage and household income. This disparity poses major challenges, especially for employers and entrepreneurs, when filling vacancies for skilled personnel. Besides local retailers and gastronomists, the wage gap has a clear impact on the financial situation of municipalities. The physical and social infrastructure has been declining in all public sectors; hospitals are being shut down; schools are seldom renovated or refurbished.

"As far as I know, the financial situation of the municipalities has either not changed in recent years or has become more critical. For example, there is a strong need for renovation in schools." (KJ)

Simultaneously, the region has seen a strong political disenchantment, with many people rejecting and questioning democratic institutions and processes. Often unfinished or underdelivered promises on infrastructure improvement have eroded the trust between the voters and their political representatives. This distrust has been fuelled by right wing populists who have gained new followers as a result.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

While the region is historically conservative and still governed by the conservative CDU, right wing extremist sentiments have gained popularity since the 1990s. Right wing actors have long been active in the region, in right wing extremist parties like the Nationaldemocratic Party Germany (NPD)*. Steve Richter, who is an elected representative of the regional Greens and has been living in the area for decades, points out that the neo-Nazi groups and actors of that period are still around.

The Nationaldemocratic Party Germany is a small right wing extremist party first established in the 1960s.

"The 90s were the 'baseball bat years', certainly the years that paved the way for right wing structures today. Today, extremists from back then appear again and again at demonstrations against migrants or Corona measures." (SR)

Nonetheless, he notes that they have mostly adapted their strategies and appearances to blend in more smoothly with a conservative middle-class milieu. Nowadays, the extremists are rarely distinguishable from everyday locals or conservative politicians, even though their arguments and reasoning have stayed the same.

"Today, the biggest problem is not the extra-parliamentary right wing opposition, with their acts of violence, threats and intimidation, but the Nazis in suits in the parliaments." (SR)

In addition, the right wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which claims to be a conservative middle-class party, has become very popular in Saale-Orla and has been able to register relatively high outcomes on every political level, with up to 29 per cent district-wide and even over 60 per cent in one municipality in the regional elections of 2019. The far right predominantly but not exclusively represented by the AfD has also gained popularity among the local youth. For instance, in 2019/2020 in the small town of Pößneck, which is part of Saale-Orla, a youth group emerged that called itself the New Hitler Youth *(Neue Hitler Jugend)*, expressly subscribing themselves to national socialism as an ideology.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN SAALE-ORLA

Migration, refugees and public money
The far right is mobilising against migrants and refugees and instrumentalising the locally dominant fears of disadvantage to postulate themselves as the only political entity that is capable of protecting the rural population. The threat is often visualised as "violent clans" by prioritising an exclusionary and racialised political agenda. The main argument is based on the claim that federal and regional funds are invested disproportionately into refugee accommodation, instead of being invested into infrastructure.

"They sell themselves as the saviours of the German people. Because refugees live in Saale-Orla, the district lacks the money to invest in schools, nurseries or associations, or so they regularly argue." (SR)

Anti-establishment and us-vs-them
A main issue that has led to right wing populists' success in the region is their campaign to instil mistrust towards other parties and politicians whom they label as "old parties" from "the Merkel system". One of the main patterns in the regional right wing populists' lines of argument is the concept of "us against them". This encourages a feeling of union and community by implication, especially among the socially and economically disadvantaged rural population.

"In my opinion, the successes of the right are based on maintaining the culture of envy. It's us against them, whether it's migrants, politically different thinkers (those up there), LGBGT." (SR)

Instrumentalising environmental issues

Differing from their party on the national level, the local AfD actors have appropriated environmental protection as one of their topics. For example, they started arguing against the installation of wind turbines by declaring them to be a deadly hazard to birds and destroyers of the local landscape. That is particular, as there is no proposal to build wind turbines in most of the district. In line with their sensationalist and polarising arguments they portray the Greens' and progressive positions as environmentally harmful and claim to be experts in environmental protection themselves.

"In some cases, topics are taken up that do not even play a role locally. For example, Saale-Orla is in large parts an exclusion zone for wind power and yet this topic is emotionalised and instrumentalised by the right wing populists." (KJ)

KEY TOPICS OF THE GREENS IN SAALE-ORLA

Environmental protection

Like the German national party of the Greens, the regional Greens are prioritising and promoting environmental consciousness and climate justice. As with all their party policies, the regional Greens are actively drawing attention to the local effects of climate change. The local group Green Youth is very active and often cooperates with other local groups, such as Fridays for Future, to organise local initiatives.

"We try to show that every small village and town plays an important role in the fight against climate change. As Green Youth, we regularly organise various actions on these topics, together with Fridays for Future." (KJ)

Infrastructure

The regional Greens chose infrastructure improvements as another important part of their policy proposals. In the past they have promoted better bicycle infrastructure and emissions-free vehicles for the regional administration and municipalities.

Local identity

The Greens in Saale-Orla are developing strategies for reclaiming local patriotism and rural spaces from an environment-conscious perspective. They are framing their key issues, such as environmental protection, inclusion and anti-discrimination, from a local perspective, emphasising the importance of local improvement and local identity.

Political presence and consistency

The Greens are the smallest opposition party. One of the main goals and strengths in their day-to-day political work is ensuring that in every parliamentary session their political group tables at least one to two amendments, motions or requests. This sets them apart from other local parties that do not put such strong emphasis on regular and structured political intervention and following a consistent policy line.

"We do this above all to show citizens that we take our claim to shape things seriously and really want to change something, even if we currently lack majorities for this." (SR)

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

A common allegation brought up against the established parties in Saale-Orla is that they are not as engaged with the local population outside the election season as they are while campaigning for their votes. This perception only feeds into the widespread political disenchantment. It also demonstrates the importance of local politicians and party members consistently reinforcing and maintaining their proximity to local citizens.

Proximity by the far right

On a regional and local level the right wing populist AfD have nominated certain candidates who may be considered "strong characters", who are well connected locally and have proven effective in addressing the rural community. They approach citizens intentionally and offer regular round tables. The direct mandate holder of the Saale-Orla AfD and member of the regional parliament even travels frequently to small villages with a "citizen's mobile" and invites people to talk to him.

In addition to maintaining a well kept website where the AfD informs viewers about local issues and presents its candidates in a humble "close to the people" language, the party has created a considerable online presence on social media where they often spread misinformation in their interest. The Greens find it especially hard to counter this strategy, since the online network of the far right is vast and well established.

PROXIMITY BY THE GREENS

Because the Saale-Orla Green Party is the smallest opposition party, they do not have a physical administrative space or citizens' office. While this complicates the management of their political work and their direct contact with local citizens, it has also led to them developing other coping mechanisms to make up for a lack of physical proximity. As a result the party has become one of the most consistent in presenting citizens' interests in the parliament. They have made sure to reach out to their constituency, establishing an unbureaucratic presence and remaining known as dependable representatives. The party tries to keep their voters up to date on its work through regular press announcements and occasional information events.

"If one includes parliamentary engagement in the analysis, we are far ahead of all the others, at least in the largest city of the district. Here, people know where to find me and have the opportunity to present their concerns quickly and unbureaucratically." (SR)

For the local Green Youth the contact with local young people is very important. Unlike the local regional party, which is vastly understaffed, Green Youth reach their peers rather effectively over social media or through hearsay and friends. They also gain visibility with small-scale public initiatives. For instance, at the suggestion of Green Youth, the Pößneck town council invited all citizens to a tree planting campaign in the town forest, which ended up reaching people of all groups and ages.

"People between the ages of 5 and 70 came together and also people who otherwise don't have much to do with Fridays for Future. But over the course of these days, we managed to plant several hundred trees together." (KJ)

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Build local alliances
The Greens aim to establish local alliances that reach beyond the partisan level and activate other actors and local people. When organising against right wing populism they gather those who can unite behind certain progressive ideas and join forces for counter-protests or events.

"We are part of loose local alliances that regularly organise actions against right wing populist protests and events. When there is a need for action, mostly actors from the Left Party, the Greens, Green Youth, Leftist Youth, the unions and various private individuals come together and organise together." (KJ)

Hold open discussion events
An important measure to keep up a democratic dialogue is to organise information events on critical issues. These were held in open discussion formats where local people, including right wing populist actors, were able to express their opinions and hear each other out. For example they organised an event with opponents and supporters of wind power, which, as mentioned earlier, is often instrumentalised by regional right wing populists.

"Through the moderation, all participants had their say and at the end some rather right-wing participants thanked us for the discussion and gave positive feedback. It really showed that conversations are possible and important to pick up citizens and inspire them to have a more open discussion about political ideas." (KJ)

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Don't let the far right dictate the programme
In light of the rather unsuccessful experiences of simply trying to disprove statements from the far right or mitigate the effects of their policy proposals, the Saale-Orla Greens have concluded that these cannot be the strategies for progressives to follow in their fight against right wing populism. Instead they argue that it is essential to establish a distinct and convincing programme which promotes issues that are not directed by the narratives of the far right. Any accommodation of far right narratives has in their experience only led to the progressive parties losing credibility.

"As Green Youth we try to put our key issues in the foreground and act proactively instead of reacting to right wing agenda-setting. A good strategy must include putting issues on the agenda and not being 'directed' by right wing populists." (KJ)

Promote a positive concept of homeland
From experience they also recommend positively redefining terms such as homeland *(Heimat)*, markers of identity that have lately been discursively dominated by the exclusionary and divisive ideology of the AfD and other right wingers. Becoming proactive in framing discussions about local and regional identity is key in the predominantly rural Saale-Orla region.

"For the Alliance 90 and Green Party, it cannot be about winning back AfD voters. There are simply worlds between us. What we should be concerned with, however, is to use and define the term 'homeland' in a positive way, which is what we do in our communication." (SR)

Remain accessible and honest
The Saale-Orla Greens further recommend progressives to promote their work transparently to the public, even if this means admitting to the limits of their influence in the local parliaments. Successes as well as failures should be communicated openly. This provides a level of authenticity that can establish trust, particularly at the local level.

"Honesty, sincerity and courage. That's all it takes. The fear of the voter, the drifting with the polls, that has to end." (SR)

A FACE OF SAALE-ORLA: KAROLINE JOBST

Full name	**Karoline Jobst**
Profession	Student (Subject: Urban Studies)
Role in party politics	Spokesperson Green Youth Saale-Orla, spokesperson Green Youth Thuringia Party: Alliance 90/ The Greens
Age	18
Place of Residence	Krölpa
Contact	Karoline.Jobst@gj-thueringen.de Instagram: karojobst | Twitter: KaroJobst

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

I firmly believe that it is possible to shape politics together with all people and to achieve a lot. After living in a boarding school in Jena for two years and then coming back to Krölpa when I was 16, I noticed that the atmosphere and the way politics is dealt with here in rural Thuringia is very different from what I had experienced in the city where I started to get involved in politics. Local politics seemed to me to be very deadlocked here, quite lacking in perspective and very uninteresting for young people. In my environment, I kept noticing how frustrated many people were with political decisions and the high number of people voting for the AfD in my home village shocked me. I wanted to do something and also be active in the Green Youth outside Jena. When five of us founded a branch of Green Youth in Saale-Orla (SOK) in June 2019 and the first climate demo we organised in Pößneck had more than 70 participants, I realised that progressive politics also has supporters here. Above all, the many positive comments and the sentence "Finally someone is doing something like this", which I often heard from people who are important to me, motivated me to keep at it and to leave behind the contemptuous comments that the Green Youth had sometimes received after our foundation. Finally, the people I met in the SOK are a great motivation. Young people who go to every demo, the elderly ladies with whom we have long conversations about littering while handing out flyers on the street, or my family with whom I talk a lot about local political decisions, are just a few examples of all those who motivate me.

I want to raise my voice for the most important issues of our time and show that local politics is anything but boring, without prospects or only for old men. I want to engage in conversation and discussion and get more people involved.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

We have (re-)founded a local Green Youth group here in the SOK and have thus managed to put important political issues on the agenda in the press and in public discussion. Through climate demonstrations together with Fridays for Future, waste collection campaigns or press releases, we were able to show the importance of environmental and climate protection at a local political level and (hopefully) stimulate discussions about them. I think that the things we do as Green Youth, which are publicly recognisable in the cityscape (for example, we organised rallies or publicly drew attention to the pollution caused by cigarettes in the city centre of Pößneck), give other people courage. They also show that there are not only AfD and lateral thinkers in the SOK but also progressive, left wing forces that stand up for local people's issues and are on the ground.

In 2019, we organised a discussion event on the topic of wind power with opponents and supporters of wind power. Well-known right wing populist actors from the AfD or opponents of wind power attended. We discussed this very emotional topic with Fridays for Future, a citizens' initiative, and the district administrator. I think that this event has defused the fronts somewhat, at least selectively and in the short term, and has shown those present that it is not the shouting men from the AfD in the back row who have the ideas and solutions, but those who discuss the topic at eye level and are prepared to sit down together.

I think that every action, no matter how small, reaches people every time and is therefore a small success story in itself. Last year, for example, two of us stood in the city centre of Pößneck with a stand for the worldwide climate strike day. We spoke to about 20 people in total and a few even drove to Pößneck especially for

that occasion. But there were also parents with children or some older women who came past by chance, talked and discussed with us and stocked up on flyers on the topic. Or I remember an action where ten of us cleaned a section of a stream in Pößneck and collected a whole trailer full of rubbish after two hours. A local resident brought us tea and biscuits that day.

> I think that every action, no matter how small, reaches people every time and is therefore a small success story in itself.

What influence has this had on your private life?

I was able to grow personally through all the experiences I was allowed to have in the context of political engagement and I learned much more than in four years of social studies classes at school. I was able to learn a lot about how people act in political disputes and about how local politics works. Most importantly, I get to know many new people and thus many perspectives that I didn't know before. Today, I also count many people I met in the Green Youth and the Greens among my friends.

However, I have also experienced that it can be really hard when an article about one of our actions is suddenly followed by 150 contemptuous and sometimes even violence-threatening hate comments. At the beginning of my involvement, I was very concerned about this and took things very personally. Over time, however, I have learned to deal with these comments and other statements in real life and to classify them.

In my private life, my political engagement plays a role when I speak out publicly about things or plan political actions and am present. My family is always behind me and proud of me. For example, when we are in the local newspaper with the Green Youth, my grandparents always send me a photo of it. We also discuss political issues a lot more. In my circle of friends, there are of course jokes about the Greens from time to time, but never meant badly, and some of my friends even come along to demonstrations or events.

What barriers did you face?

I think one of the biggest challenges was to build something completely new in the SOK. There had been a Green Youth here a few years ago, but it had been dissolved and we had to build up our own structures and had few points of contact. It takes some effort to plan events with just a few people, like the first climate demonstration in Pößneck. If you don't have any experience in planning and promoting such events, you run the risk of ending up with ten people on the market

square and not having reached anyone. In the beginning I was like that, I threw myself into press work, public relations and event planning without any special previous knowledge. It would probably be helpful, especially for young people in rural areas, if there were accessible educational offers or handouts on these topics. That would have helped me at the time.

Another hurdle is always that a lot of people express their disfavour about political engagement through anonymous hate comments on the internet. That made me personally very insecure at the beginning and I was fortunately able to turn to friends and family. Others may not be able to do this and I often wish there was a concrete reporting and counselling centre for those affected by hate on the net. One that is easy to access, preferably online.

I believe that the Partnership for Democracy, which exists in my district, could be the right "institution" for this, if it also proactively approaches (young) people, breaks down barriers and perhaps acts as a mediator between democratic forces.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

I would say above all: Have the courage! Just do it! Especially if you are young and have hardly any experience, it is a big step to start getting politically involved and takes a lot of courage, especially in regions where progressive forces have no majorities and right wing populists are on the rise. But it is worth it: people see and hear you. I believe that every instance of activism leaves traces and moves other people to do something too. Above all, don't be afraid to make mistakes. Find fellow activists and start with small things: For example, if you want biodiversity protection to finally play a role in your local parliament, why don't you get together, build insect hotels, invite the local press and convey a political message? I believe that small things can often be the beginning of big changes and that we need courageous, committed people in every village and small town.

Country	Austria
Region	Upper Austria
District/City	**WELS**
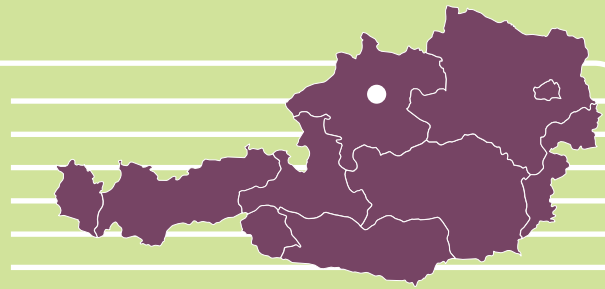
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2020
District/City: **1,360.0** | Nation: **106.1**

Average age[2] → 2019 District/Town: **42.0** | Nation: **42.8**

(Hightest) **educational attainment**[3] → 2018
Lower secondary education: District/City: **21.6%** | Nation: **17.9%**
Higher secondary education: District/City: **13.1%** | Nation: **15.8%**
Vocational training: District/City: **51.9%** | Nation: **48.2%**
Teritary/Academic education: District/City: **13.4%** | Nation: **18.1%**

Due to rounding to one decimal place, inaccuracies may occur when adding the values to 100%

Average income (gross)[4] → 2019
Upper Austria region: **35,952 €** | Nation: **35,027 €**

Unemployment rate[5]→ 2020
District/City: **8.7%** | Nation: **9.9% %**

Longterm unemployment rate[6] → 2017
District/City: **1.1%** | Nation: **1.9%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2019 **1.0%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)[8]
→ 2019 District/City: **28.0%** | Nation: **23.7 %**

ELECTION RESULTS

Local council elections (2015)*[9]

Turnout   70.9 %

Municipal council elections 2015 Wels city. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).

FPÖ	SPÖ	ÖVP	GRÜNE	NEOS	KPÖ	Others
43.1% +13.9	26.9% -8.8	17% -4.3	8% -1.8	3.1% +3.1	0.8% -0.2	1% -2
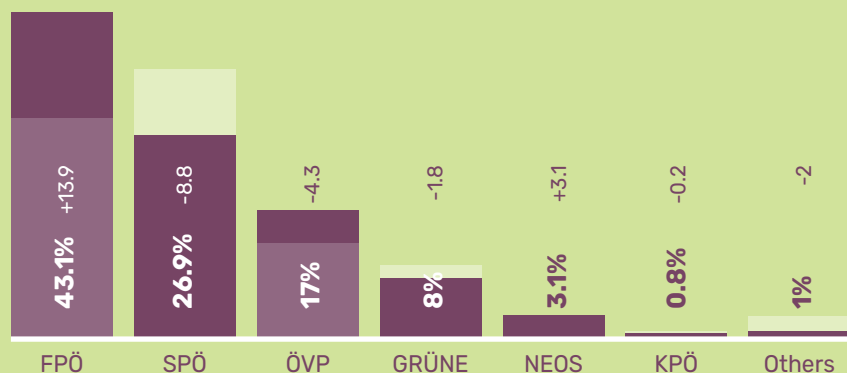
Most significant shift of voters: **From:** SPÖ, ÖVP, KPÖ and GRÜNE **To:** FPÖ (+13.9)

Regional elections (2015)* [10]

FPÖ	**34.6%**	(+13.6)
ÖVP	**30.4%**	(-5.9)
SPÖ	**21.1%**	(-7.2)
Grüne	**10%**	(-0.4)
NEOS	**3.1%**	(+3.1)
KPÖ	**0.7%**	(-0)
Others	**0.2%**	(-2)

Turnout   76.1%

Results for the regional elections 2015 from the municipality Wels city

National elections (2019)* [11]

SPÖ	**28.44%**	(- 5.31)
ÖVP	**27.28%**	(+ 5.08)
FPÖ	**19.78%**	(-9.93)
GRÜNE	**14.32%**	(+ 10.48)
NEOS	**7.51%**	(+2.65)
JETZT	**1.53%**	(-2.39) **

Turnout   69.65%

Results for the national assembly elections 2019 from the municipality Wels city
**JETZT was formerly known as Pilz List*

European elections (2019)* [12]

SPÖ	**30.5%**	(+2.06)
ÖVP	**25.12%**	(+6.71)
FPÖ	**21.56%**	(-4.86)
GRÜNE	**13.48%**	(-0.47)
NEOS	**7.74%**	(+0.55)

Turnout   56.6%

Results for the European elections from the municipality Wels city

LEGEND ÖVP: Austrian People's Party • **SPÖ:** Social Democratic Party Austria • **FPÖ:** Freedom Party of Austria • **GRÜNE:** The Greens • **NEOS:** The New Austria and Liberal Forum • **JETZT:** Pilz List • **KPÖ:** Communist Party Austria

This case study was created in cooperation with Mathis Dippon and Katharina Zangerl from the Innovations in Politics Institute.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Wels is the second largest city in Upper Austria and is located in the centre of a wealthy region. It is an industrial city, its main sectors being construction, industry and pharmaceuticals. As the city has a high proportion of service oriented industries, some people from outside the city come to work in Wels. An unusual feature of Wels is that a quarter of the city's population has a migration background. The population is very segmented as most non-native inhabitants live in the same district of the city, so although Wels is diverse and colourful, people co-exist rather than live together. Besides its failed integration policies, Wels has a variety of failed social policies and lacks social workers.

In the population of Wels, there is a large degree of drug and gambling addiction, particularly among the younger generation. The city has a bad reputation in the region and beyond as a capital of drug addiction and xenophobia. One further major point in Wels is traffic safety, as although Wels is far from the largest city in the country it has the second highest death rate in inner-city traffic accidents.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Wels has a long-standing and deep-rooted tradition in right wing even national-socialist political ideology. The right wing ideology is well institutionalised as there are many families who are powerful in political and economic terms who have a background in national socialism. Recently Wels has been governed by Social Democrats who have held the mayor's post for a very long time. The politics of the town have been stagnating under this long governance of the Social Democrats, while social problems in the city have increased. The already well-institutionalised right wing populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) won the latest mayoral election in 2015 and has been in power since. In the local government there is relatively weak opposition as the FPÖ is in coalition with the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the SPÖ is in very close contact with the local government and does not exercise its opposition role strongly.

Notably, the green candidate won the runoff for federal president against the populist opponent in Wels. The election campaign demonstrated that a trustworthy and moderate progressive candidate can win against a populist who has been received as "too hard and strict to become president".

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN WELS

We vs the others
Wels has a large population with a migration background. The FPÖ uses this as an instrument to campaign with the typical right wing sentiment of "we vs the others". Integration and assimilation of inhabitants is one of the party's main concerns, for example, they are calling for young pupils not to be allowed to speak their mother tongue in school breaks.

More control means more security
The FPÖ in Wels considers itself as the party for law and order, calling for video surveillance in public spaces as a measure to prevent crimes.

Renewing the city
Wels has a baroque city centre with nicely decorated townhouses. The FPÖ has invested money into renovating this city centre to revitalise it. Local people have campaigned very successfully that the money spent on this renovation didn't lead to new debts for the city. The FPÖ has sold some of the city's property and started construction with the profits.

KEY TOPICS OF THE GREENS IN WELS

The main campaign claim is: "A different Wels is possible".

Environmental protection
The Greens in Wels campaign on the protection of the environment, particularly concerning the river (Traun) which is increasingly polluted.

Social justice
The Greens in Wels campaign for an increase in budget for social workers and social policies in general. They lobby for social policies to be taken more seriously and for an increase in social workers due to the increasing social problems in the city:h drugs and gambling addictions as well as violence against women. As the FPÖ took office, the budget for social work decreased, the Greens in Wels lobbied strongly against this reduction in funding.

Diversity
The party campaigns for a colourful and open Wels, which considers its diverse population to be a resource rather than a problem. Colourful, open and friendly images are used to portray the city's diversity.

Traffic policies
Traffic and mobility reform in Wels is necessary, as this city has a very high mortality rate from car accidents. The city has a young scene of car-racers and dangerously shaped roads. The Greens campaign for more safety in traffic and an increase in public mobility as well as the construction of safe bike lanes.

The role of proximity
Proximity between citizens and politicians is rather important in Wels. It is a small city, with one clear centre where people can walk and stroll around, and this area is used by political parties for campaigning. The size of Wels makes it easier for politicians to be personally in contact with citizens and to have small non-formal conversations with citizens on issues. Politicians from all sides go out and visit associations, organisations and initiatives as well as town gatherings for traditional holidays.

Proximity by the far right

The FPÖ in Wels contacts its citizens through a variety of activities. Interestingly the current mayor walks around in the city to have personal connections with people and joins them in conversation. Nonetheless his private life is distant from local people as during the weekends he spends his time outside the city and his children don't attend the schools in Wels. Therefore his personal proximity to the citizens takes place during his working hours rather than occurring naturally at any time and day of the week. Besides that the FPÖ as a party and organisation manages to create a feeling of proximity by holding events, giving out free drinks and food, and largely plays on patriotic feelings by wearing traditional clothing. Interestingly, this campaign usually targets the population originating from Austria with traditional folk events dedicated to the population in Wels who don't have a migration background. The locations of the events, discussions and FPÖ activities frequently take place in the districts of the city where the inhabitants are mostly Austrian and have no migration background.

"They give out free beer in the streets, they walk among the people and especially in those areas where they know that they have their voters. They don't campaign in the city districts where a lot of migrants live. They wear traditional clothing, bring gifts to people and invite people for parties. People in the city like that and so I consider it successful." (MF)

PROXIMITY BY PROGRESSIVES

Proximity is also important for the Greens in Wels. Unlike the typical Green Party structure, in Wels the majority of the members of the party stem from the working class. Whereas members of the Greens in Austria are usually highly educated and in well-paying jobs, in Wels this is not the case. Therefore there is a closer proximity between party members and the citizens in class-socio-economic terms.

The main candidate of the Greens in Wels has been working as a caretaker in an old people's home in Wels, which makes him well known in the population. There is a close proximity between him and the people of the city due to his long-standing political activism and his profession. The Greens in Wels cannot hold many events and don't have the financial and personal resources to be present at the activities that are traditionally held in the town, nor to give out free gifts. Therefore they organise their events with the limited resources they have. For example, the main candidate has offered several hiking tours around the region, and many people joined in.

Other events are designed for informational purposes, like Zoom calls on specific topics, or handing out information leaflets or newspapers to inform the citizens about their city, the structural issues and challenges as well as how the Green Party plans to overcome them.

"As we are very small and don't have a lot of money, we cannot give out free gifts and beer and don't have enough people actively participating to stand everywhere and be at every party but we offer activities like going hiking." (MF)

A main focus is placed on working with the local press, and as the main candidate has experience in journalism, this can be done very professionally. The challenges here lie in the fact that many companies that finance the local media through buying advertising space are also intertwined with right wing populists. Therefore, the Green Party finds it difficult to place their issues in the local newspapers. Extra effort and a very close relation with reporters is needed and the Green Party directs resources to that goal. The Green Party is very active on social media and connects with people over diverse platforms. When people comment critically they are invited for personal conversations on the issues that are discussed online.

"We consider proximity as giving people information and listening to them. So we produce newsletters, have social media accounts, we make events where we discuss certain topics. So we give people information." (TR)

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

The Green Party in Wels does not follow a general strategy to counter populism, but pursues "a clear anti-rightwing approach". They consistently inform citizens about corrupt deeds of the right wing politicians and the Green leader adopts a critical and public stance against the mayor.

Building alliances

A valuable boost is the Fridays for Future movement as they raise awareness of green topics in a young, fresh and likeable way. In Wels there is a civil society initiative against fascism with over 200 paying members. This anti-right civic engagement counterbalances extremist movements on the right. Therefore, it is very important to connect all the groups in society which do not belong in the right spectrum like associations, student clubs or civil society organisations. It is beneficial to cultivate a constant and long-term connection with these groups instead of showing up just before elections. People notice such a short-term approach, which damages credibility.

Don't moralise but find commonalities

It can be counterproductive to moralise, for example call people racist for voting for the right wing party. It does not pay off to call people racist, they feel threatened and won't listen to your political progressive views. Instead, progressives should concentrate on the needs and interests of local people and find out what they have in common, which is usually a desire for a safe and likeable city.

Avoid inconsistency and internal conflict

Furthermore, when the Green Party on national level "acts inconsistently" it becomes a severe problem for party col-

leagues at the local level as they have to deal with the discontent of frustrated or disappointed citizens. As the Green Party is now in federal government in Austria, they become part of laws and initiatives that go against Green Party values. This falls back to the people on the ground on the local level. Last but not least internal conflicts are always punished by voters.

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Being optimistic and inclusive
To generate proactive plans for progressive political actors, it has been considered beneficial to develop, present and communicate an optimistic future scenario for a creative and diverse society and be open and inviting for other progressive forces to join.

In Wels, the Green Party aims to be more diverse and inclusive in their communications. It helps that the current main candidate is "charismatic and smart". He speaks in dialect, knows how to deal with the media and has a funny cam-paigning style. On social media the party targets citizens with migration experience. Building and sustaining new alliances with specific groups in society on certain topics is key.

Participatory structures and transparency
It is important to set up a transparent and participatory but also efficient internal structure. Progressives have to find the right balance between basic democratic principles and the ability to move fast. In politics, situations require instant action which can be hindered by long internal decision-making processes. Therefore it is highly important to ensure transparency once you are in office as people need "to understand the why and how". People need to be informed about why a party does or does not agree on certain issues, particularly when those issues are crucial for the party identity.

"We have to work on our internal structures, they are not always helpful and sometimes slow down the process – we work with basic democratic principles, which sometimes makes it difficult to keep internal conflicts internal." (TR)

A FACE OF WELS: THOMAS RAMMERSTORFER

Full name	**Thomas Rammerstorfer**
Profession	Journalist and caretaker
Role in party politics	Main candidate for Wels Party: The Greens - The Green Alternative
Age	45
Place of Residence	Wels
Contact	Email: t.rammerstorfer@gmx.at Twitter: @TRammerstorfer

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?
I have been increasingly engaged in a variety of civil society activities, as I have for a long time now noticed many grievances in my town. I want to actively work against right wing populism in my hometown for the people who live there, my family and kids. It's important to foster improvement for my town and optimise the conditions that people live in. I believe I can have the most impact in the place where I live, as this is where I have significant experience and insights.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?
I have been politicised to confront right wing extremism, and even before engaging in party politics I had the chance to uncover many misdeeds in the political field.

These include crimes conducted by right wing politicians in my hometown. I have been active against right wing populism since before I joined the Green Party. I wanted to do something about the racism, the language they use in my city and also the blue-collar crime the populists continue to conduct. I no longer wanted to see my city as consisting only of right wing people and wanted to show that there is more. I consider it a success when people learn about what right wing populists do and how much that harms the town and themselves. It's important to protect people from worse.

As a councillor in my hometown, I emphasised the value of social workers and street work, wanting to direct public funds to helping vulnerable populations – such as those affected by drug use and other addic-

tions – as opposed to ignoring them. The biggest success for us is when we can offer alternatives to people and show them that it is possible to be kind and supportive rather than accusatory and punishing. Directing funds to more council schemes and support centres proved a highly rewarding initiative for people.

Through international networks, I could support people across the world and be an ally from the West for many democracy activists in countries where political engagement is dangerous.

Something that helps when outing populists is consistency and persistence, to continue directing attention at their activities. Often our demands are initially dismissed, but after pressing a long time, people give in and implement them. We see that happening in a variety of fields like traffic and transport policies, public transport offers, etc.

What influence has this had on your personal life?

I am a political person through and through: I am a politician for 24 hours a day. I have been politically active since the age of 14, therefore it's difficult to remember a time when politics wasn't embedded in my daily life. I get contacted a lot by people in my town. Throughout the day I have a lot of appointments and actively engage with the community: I visit a lot of places, people and initiatives.

My whole family is political as well: we discuss politics a lot. My wife is a journalist. It can be really difficult to separate politics from private life. When we are on holidays, we also visit places, NGOs and support people, we write reports and documents. Therefore, politics does definitely have a severe impact on my personal life!

What barriers did you face?

My hometown Wels is at the forefront of right wing populism. The populists here are overwhelmingly powerful and this is the main challenge. There are not many Greens in my town, we have few personnel and our financial resources are very limited. Because the right wing populists are so strong here, the federal party has decided it is not worth spending resources on our town, because they believe the fight can't be won. I differ on that, I believe it is really important especially in towns like mine to keep our head held high and to continue the fight, even if it's just symbolic.

Judicial barriers were a main challenge in that context. I don't have sufficient knowledge of law and so very often I need to ask legal experts for advice. For a few years now, my colleagues and I have been brought to court many times for minor offences like imprint infringements and so forth. All this to keep us busy and drain our financial resources. I wish the federal party supported us, particularly by giving us judicial support.

The media, particularly local newspapers, have not been supportive. They are financially dependent on the advertisements that right wing populists and/or their business friends buy. Therefore they will not write critical articles on what is happening in the town. I find it hard to get information out, when the newspapers are too dependent on the right wing populists. Therefore, I have to give them information that they can write about without harming themselves financially.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

> **Many people in my hometown depend on right wing politicians and they cannot speak up. Therefore you can be a voice for them and support them. Be prepared to be the first in line and people might get behind you.**

Be absolutely sure about what you want to invest in this cause. You have to pay attention all the time, because you will be under scrutiny. To get your message across, you have to make allies with populist media outlets and work in their logic. Always be open for dialogue and conversations, rather than pointing fingers at people. It is crucial to form alliances and get together with people who also want to work against populism but are too afraid to do so. Many people in my hometown depend on right wing politicians and they cannot speak up. Therefore you can be a voice for them and support them. Be prepared to be the first in line and people might get behind you.

Country Poland

Region **PODKARPACIE VOVOIDSHIP**

City /District Rzeszów
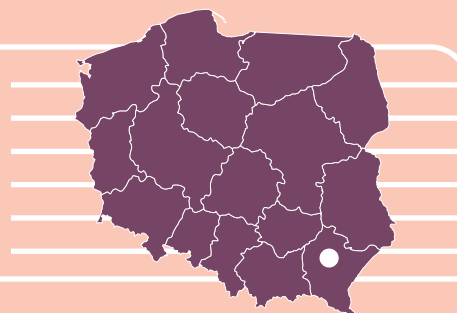
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density* (per km²)[1]
→ 2020 Region: **119.2** | → 2020 Nation: **124**

Average age[2] → 2019 Region: **40.4** | Nation: **41.3**

(Hightest) educational attainment* [3]
→ 2019 Region | → 2020 Nation
Lower secondary education: Region: **13.2%** | Nation: **12.8%**
Higher secondary education: Region: **10.9%** | Nation: **10.5%**
Vocational training: Region: **50.2%** | Nation: **47.5%**
Teritary/Academic education: Region: **25.7%** | Nation: **29.2%**

*To the best of our knowledge the local and the national data is not available for the same year

Average income (gross)[4] → 2019
Region: **10,980 €** | Nation: **12,768€**

Unemployment rate* [5]
→ 2019 Region: **5.1%** | → 2020 Nation: **6.2%**

Longterm unemployment rate* [6] → 2020
→ 2019 Region: **1.4%** | → 2020 Nation: **2.4%**

Regional migration (+/-)[7] → 2019 **-0.1%**

Immigrant population (foreign passport)* [8]
→ 2020 Region: **0.4%** | → 2019 Nation: **5.5%**

ELECTION RESULTS

Regional elections (2018)*[9]

Turnout 49.6%

*Results for the Podkarpacie Vovoideship regional council elections 2018
**The Civic Platform (PO) and Nowoczesna formed a party allliance and run this election togehter as the Civic Coalition (KO). Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-).

PiS	KO (PO. Nowoczesna)	PSL	SLD
52.25% +6.59	**13.44%** -0.75**	**11.88%** -13.56	**0%** -6.65
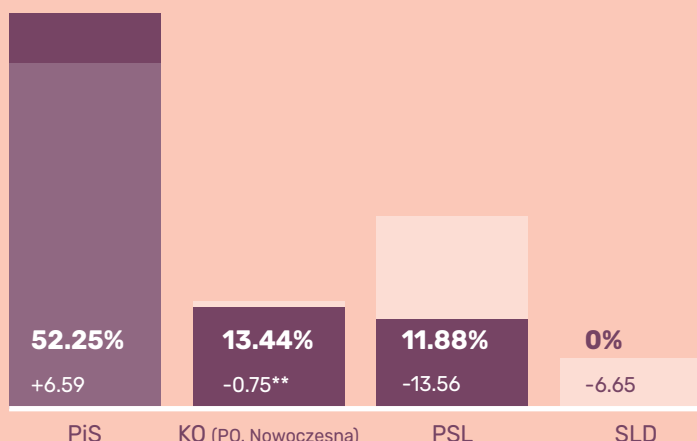
National elections (2019)* [10]

PiS	**62.77%**	(+7.68)
KO	**15%**	(+1.63) **
PSL	**7.81%**	(+2.12)
Konfederacja	**7.68%**	(-)
SLD	**6.37%**	(-)
KUKIZ'15	**-%**	(-9.23)

Turnout	**58.6%**	
(National	**61.7%)**	

*Results for the national elections 2019 from the Podkarpacie Vovoideship **The Civic Platform (PO), Nowoczesna, Inicjatywa Polska and Zieloni formed a party allliance and run this election togehter as the Civic Coalition (KO)

European elections (2019)* [11]

PiS	**65.07%**	(+22.78)
Koalicja Europejska	**21.56%**	(-4.14) **
Konfederacja	**5.89%**	(+5.89)
Nowa Prawica	**-%**	(-7.15)
Solidarna Polska	**%**	(-5.91)

Turnout	**44.3%**
(National	**45.7%)**

*Results for the European Elections 2019 from the Podkarpacie Vovoideship **The Civic Platform (PO), Nowoczesna, Zieloni, Inicjatywa Polska, SLD and PSL formed a party allliance and run this election togehter as the European Coalition (Koalicja Europejska)

LEGEND PiS: Law and Justice • **KO:** Civic Coalition (PO, Nowoczesna, Inicjatywa Polska and Zieloni) • **PO:** Civic Platform • **PSL:** Polish People's Party • **SLD:** New Left (Poland) • **Zieloni:** The Greens • Inicjatywa Polska: Polish Initiative • **Nowoczesna:** Modern • **Koalicja Europejska:** European Coalition (PO, Nowoczesna, Zieloni, Inicjatywa Polska, SLD, PSL) • **Wiosna:** Spring • **Konfederacja:** Confederation • **KUKIZ'15:** Kukiz Movement • **Solidarna Polska:** United Poland • **Nowa Prawica:** Congress of the New Right

This case study was created in cooperation with Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek and Filip Pazderski from Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The Podkarpacie voivodeship (Subkarpathia) is located in the south-eastern corner of Poland, bordering Slovakia and Ukraine. The region is considered to be very conservative, with a strong orientation towards the Catholic Church and much attached to tradition. Podkarpacie struggles with increased economic emigration and slow depopulation of smaller towns and villages. This part of Poland, as well as the entire strip eastwards of Warsaw, is the so-called "Polska B" – poorer than other areas of the country, with less developed industry and infrastructure, located on the periphery of the European Union.

At the same time, the region is changing intensively, largely due to EU fund investments. In the past it was an agricultural region, but recently has become industrial. It is now the home of the aviation and space industry of Poland, and automotive, IT and telecommunications sectors are also developing here. Academic centres, largely focused on technology and industry, are very active. Here, too, the inflow of EU funds was of great importance.

Tourism is the second largest sector and currently requires considerable expenditure on road building and the creation of a wide range of accommodation and catering infrastructure. Agriculture is no longer the dominant industry in Podkarpacie. Small rural farms are slowly disappearing and being replaced by large, consolidated farms, which invest more and more boldly and apply for EU funds.

Unfortunately, although the region developed economically and the GDP grew, local inhabitants felt their standard of living did not change much: jobs were unstable, they had low wages and a high workload, and often growing demands from their employers. Throughout the legislative period of the conservative Civic Platform and centrist Polish People's Party (PSL), the country and the region developed, but the inhabitants of Podkarpacie felt inferior and ignored by the authorities. This provided an excellent background for the emergence of right wing populism.

Political development with regard to far right populism
In Podkarpacie, the dominance of populist movements began with them winning local elections and the takeover of power by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in the voivodeship in 2013. The main reason was the persistent narrative that discredited the achievements of the previous government.

"What happened in our region in 2013 should be a warning sign for the whole country, where the populist right came to power in 2015. It happened at a time unfavourable to the emergence of such phenomena, when GDP was growing and Poland managed to emerge unscathed from the global economic crisis. Unfortunately, populists were able to express the demands and emotions of entire social groups that had been marginalised so far. They continued to fuel a sense of fear and insecurity, but pointed out who could be blamed for." (EŁ)

Since 2015, there has been a flourishing of populist parties and organisations. Their activities oscillate around social defence of the Catholic Church, anti-abortion movements, fighting alleged gender or LGBT+ so called "ideologies", full economic freedom (understood as no taxes), anti-semitism, anti-vaccination, anti-EU movements and various conspiracy theories.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN PODKARPACIE

Welfare and traditions
Podkarpacie is one of the poorest areas in Poland, which is why PiS's social initiatives, such as their child-support programme, have a large impact on living standards and election results. It is also an extremely religious region, and right-wing populists pose as simple people, true patriots, guardians of national values and traditions, defenders of a church that no one really attacks. The opposition is presented as a party of power-hungry elites, corrupt, detached from the reality of "ordinary citizens".

Blaming the others
The far right narrative claims that the European Union or, more broadly, the West are created for those who want to forbid "us" from enjoying what is Polish and impose foreign customs and way of thinking.

KEY TOPICS OF ELŻBIETA ŁUKACIJEWSKA'S CAMPAIGN IN PODKARPACIE

For the regional, national and European elections in Podkarpacie, Elżbieta's party ran as part of the Civic Coalition, a liberal multi-party coalition to which also the Greens (*Partia Zieloni*) belong.

Uniform development
...of the region to compensate for the current disproportions – the richer, better connected and industrial north and the poorer, less accessible, agricultural and tourist south.

Improving the region's communication
...and opening it up to Europe. The Civic Platform and Polish People's Party governments built an airport in the region, the A4 motorway, and started all current road investment.

Obtain funding
...from the European Union for regional development. Also important is co-financing tourism in the south of the voivodeship and creating appropriate accommodation, gastronomic and cultural facilities.

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Podkarpacie is to a large extent a highly dispersed region with lots of small towns, cities and villages where life revolves cyclically around the church and local events. It is especially visible in the summer, where harvest festivals are still popular. It is important for local communities that politicians are present so residents can meet and talk directly to them.

Proximity by the far right
The far right pose as "simple people", not as members of the local or national elite (although often their education and standard of living make them an elite by definition). They pretend to be close to people, understanding their needs, concerns and fears. They are the only "true patriots", guardians of national values and traditions, all others want the local people to give up on local traditions and habits, and force them to adopt the way of living typical for the "rotten West". Populists also pose as defenders of the Catholic Church, which is allegedly under attack.

Proximity by Elżbieta Łukacijewska and her party
In regions such as Podkarpacie, campaigns that rely on the presence of mass media have no chance of success as only people from bigger cities and young people use social media. Therefore anti-populist representatives such as Elżbieta Łukacijewska focus on direct action, and use social media as a complementary communication channel. Older people usually live in the provinces, drawing their knowledge from the local press, public television, village leaders and priests. They rarely leave their hometowns, so it is important to reach them where they live and talk to them.

"We adopted a strategy of relying on local influencers, celebrities, people of politics, culture, doctors, athletes, representatives of seniors, diabetics and deaf people. Thanks to this, I reached new groups and people who voted for me." (EŁ)

Elżbieta Łukacijewska and her party organised numerous social and charity campaigns, for example the "Active Woman" conference, held the sixth year in a row now, when some 700 women gather at the Podkarpackie Philharmonic. Many had never visited the Philharmonic before and they still spoke about that experience throughout the next year. The intention was to show that someone cares about them, that they deserve access to culture and entertainment. This encouraged the women to take their own initiatives beyond their immediate environment. Additionally study trips to the European Parliament (EP) were organised for 1,200 teachers, firefighters, schoolchildren, women from rural housewives' clubs, retirees, local activists etc. They could see the EP with their own eyes and feel that the European Union is not an "imaginary community" – but a real community of values.

"I undertake all activities with the inhabitants of my region in mind. Residents are used to visiting me during my office hours once a week. Often people just want to be listened to.

This is where populism ends. It is very quickly verified who is acting and who only makes solemn slogans and makes empty promises. The best test for a politician is presence in local communities. There you can best see who helps and who just feeds clichés." (EŁ)

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Elżbieta Łukacijewska and her party do not have an official strategy to counteract populism. However their representatives take a clear stance against far right claims and emphasise the values they promote.

"We are constantly trying to talk about the values that are the most important from our point of view: democracy, freedom, the rule of law, pro-Europeanism, tolerance. I try to build a community around myself, but not based on fear or blame towards the other side. On the contrary. I am committed to gathering together people who have similar goals. Who, instead of looking for another enemy, try to find out the source of the problem and find a solution." (EŁ)

Self-reflection
The fight against populism must begin with yourself. Nowadays, where one is flooded with information noise and media pluralism is slowly becoming utopian, we ourselves tend to categorise things, behaviours, people and phenomena. Therefore, one must constantly reflect on one's thinking, words and actions.

Confront, don't ban
Politicians around Elżbieta in Podkarpacie decided to refuse invitations to participate in public TV shows as a reaction to the hate speech towards opposition parties and governmental propaganda frequently broadcast on national television channels. However, these public television channels are the only ones that reach many of the voters living in remote areas, so this strategy resulted in the far right having a lot of presence with no opposition.

"After several months of absence of our politicians in the public media, someone finally came to the conclusion that this strategy was backfiring. We are vilified, slandered and we do not allow ourselves to defend ourselves. The absent have no voice." (EŁ)

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR THOSE DETERMINED TO TAKE ON FAR RIGHT POPULISTS

"I have never adapted my programme and narrative to current trends. It wouldn't make me authentic. I have a few hard rules that I have followed from the beginning of my political life, including: you are a politician for a while, always a human being, politicians are chosen by voters and we should listen to them only, not any presidents or party leaders. In my opinion, a sudden change of rhetoric is very easy to be detected and used by opponents." (EŁ)

Elżbieta Łukacijewska and her party learned the importance of a suitable narrative. While her party's governing coalition had invested large sums in social and physical infrastructure, this largely went unnoticed. As the far right PiS came into government and introduced the 500+ programme, a monetary child support for families, her party kept communicating that the state could not afford social support programmes and started predicting the state's bankruptcy. They disregarded the tangible positive effect the programme's appearance had had for citizens. For an economically weak region like Podkarpacie, it was obviously not a good argument and voters perceived this as taking away what they were owed. After many months, the party's headquarters realised their mistake and changed its position on the matter. They now run on the promise of preserving PiS' well needed 500+ programme once reelected, and have learned the power of strategic communication on political initiatives.

Criticise the church, if needed

It is often emphasised that Podkarpacie is a very conservative region, but even there one can criticise the church, talk about women's rights and how their roles change in society, and defend minorities and persecuted social groups.

Suggest solutions to those who are not supporters (yet)

Progressive forces should engage in discussions with people who hold different views. They should not give up, but talk and convince. One must be very humble towards people who think and feel differently. Not to criticise, but to suggest other solutions. It is important to be present in the region, taking up topics important to local communities and keeping one's word. When making promises, politicians must be aware that they will have to fulfill them.

Above all, there is a need to move away from the rhetoric of fear. Including scaring the ruling camp. Many people accuse parties such as Civic Platform of not doing anything other than scaring people with PiS for many years. It is time for the opposition to come up with its own constructive proposals, start talking openly with people, and not be afraid of confrontation.

A FACE OF PODKARPACIE: ELŻBIETA ŁUKACIJEWSKA

Full name	**Elżbieta Łukacijewska**
Profession	Member of the European Parliament
Role in party politics	Vice-president of the regional structures of Civic Platform Party: Civic Platform
Age	54
Place of Residence	Dołżyca (village in Podkarpacie)
Contact	Twitter: @elukacijewska Instagram: @ela_lukacijewska http://www.lukacijewska.pl/kontakt

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

I entered local politics almost 20 years ago. I did it to refute all stereotypes, question the fossilised image of a politician "in salons" detached from reality and prove to both myself and our society that a woman, a village resident, can influence important decisions – and it is this perspective that motivates me to work. Honesty has always been my overriding value. I am faithful to my ideals. All these factors contributed to my decision to get involved in political activities and start acting for the good of my community. As a person "from here", I perfectly understand the everyday problems of residents, my door is always open, anyone can come to me, talk to me, ask or ask for help. I cannot imagine any other way of practising the profession of politician.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

I come from a small place, from the village of Godowa in Podkarpacie. This is where I grew up before I moved to the Bieszczady Mountains. My path to the European Parliament has not been all roses. I will always be grateful to the inhabitants of Podkarpacie, my voters, for the opportunity to serve as the mayor of Cisna, then for three terms of office as a parliamentary deputy, and finally an MEP. I will not pretend that Podkarpacie is a region where it is difficult for a politician associated with a centrist or liberal party to gain votes – historically it is an agricultural area, less urbanised, very traditional. Moreover, the region was long overlooked by mainstream politicians who focused on larger cities and the richer west of Poland. Therefore, populist slogans and promises, so eagerly

cited by the right side of the political scene, may find fertile ground here.

My success story as a politician from Podkarpacie has a very simple recipe – I was among the inhabitants. I played with them during local feasts and harvest festivals, I went to fairs and markets with them, I talked with them, I helped. When someone came to my office, I never asked who they were voting for, what their values were, I just tried to help. Before the pandemic, I helped young people in their careers by organising internships in Brussels, promoting knowledge about the European Union through visits to the inhabitants of Podkarpacie combined with visiting institutions and Belgium itself. During one of the trips, an elderly man from Jasło took me by the arm and with tears in his eyes thanked me because he had never been abroad before. I organised meetings as part of the "Active Woman" series. I wanted women to know that they had the right to choose whether they wanted to stay at home with their children or go into public service or earn money.

It was the closeness, being around people and authenticity that made voters trust me more and more. People need to be among their representatives in order to be able to trust them, otherwise they will start to support extreme ideologies that are based precisely on their insecurity. This is how local or national populist movements are formed. Elections, on the other hand, are won when people believe in winning and go to the polls – with the whole community. My strategy has not changed, I have always wanted to offer people my closeness, openness and honesty. Thanks to this, I can now proudly represent them in debates and votes in the European Parliament.

> It was the closeness, being around people and authenticity that made voters trust me more and more. People need to be among their representatives in order to be able to trust them, otherwise they will start to support extreme ideologies that are based precisely on their insecurity.

What influence has this had on your personal life?
Many things are possible thanks to politics, but unfortunately there are costs to one's private life. You must always remember that politicians serve people. When you fight for people's affairs, you have to travel hundreds of miles, from city to city, and as a MEP you spend a lot of time on planes. This means that sometimes you do not visit your home for weeks and necessarily spend less time with your family, husband, chil-

dren and friends. In addition, there are conflicts with unfavourable people from competing political parties. Unfortunately, my husband paid a price for my role in politics. He became a forester when I was not yet active in public. He is a forester not only by profession, but because he is passionate about the work. After 18 years, despite his work being rated very highly, he was dismissed from his position and no one even concealed that it happened because of my political engagement. Unfortunately, populism in politics often goes hand in hand with nepotism, which is why today's rulers recommend their nominees everywhere – party fidelity is what counts, not knowledge or experience.

What barriers did you face?
One faces many barriers during the campaign – at present, public media has a very negative influence on political debate. Populists take over more footholds of liberal democracy – this was the case in Poland with the Constitutional Tribunal, then with common courts, women's and minority rights, now with the media. In any case, a given social group is first identified as a public enemy, and then it is attacked using biased media. During the last campaign, this was the biggest problem, because in Podkarpacie most people only watch national public television programmes, where materials defaming opposition politicians are broadcast. The second important problem is the use of unfair ways of influencing voters in social media. Populists rent thousands of bots – programs that create hate content on internet profiles. The way to counteract such measures remains the same – being in constant conversation with people and staying in touch with them (also on social media) so that they can assess the reality themselves.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?
Anyone who is familiar with the ideals of democracy, freedom and the rule of law can succeed in the fight against populism. It is crucial to stay in constant contact with voters, listen to them and respond to their problems, and also to be authentic. It may sound banal, but you often hear that political elites live "in salons" and are out of touch with reality. People need those who make the law to be among them so that they can be talked to and presented with their perspective. I think this openness is precisely the key to success.

Country	France
Region	**PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR**
Department	Vaucluse (as an example)
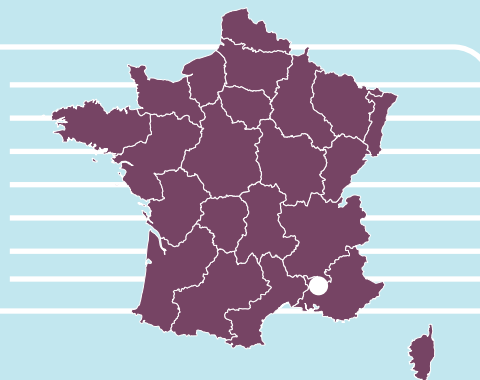
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Population density (per km²)[1] → 2017
Region: **160.9** | Department: **156.8** | Nation: **105.1**

Average age* [2] → 2011
Region: **42.0** | Department: **41.0** | Nation: **40.0**

(Hightest) **educational attainment*** [3] → 2017
Lower secondary education: Region: **22.3%** | Nation: **22.8%**
Higher secondary education: Region: **24.2%** | Nation: **22.5%**
Vocational training: Region: **23.1%** | Nation: **24.8%**
Teritary/Academic education: Region: **30.2%** | Nation: **29.9%**

Median income (gross)*** [4] → 2017
Region: **21, 350 €** | Department: **19,880 €** | Nation: **20,820 €**

Unemployment rate[5]→ 2017
Region: **14,2** | Department: **16.9%** | Nation: **13.9%**

Regional migration (+/-)[6] → 2017 **0.2%**

*To the best of our knowledge there isn't more recent data.
**The educational attainment data is for the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
***This is the median gross income

ELECTION RESULTS

Regional Election (2021)* [7]

Turnout **36.84 %**

*Results for the regional elections 2021 for the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Changes compared to the previous election are indicated with (+/-). .

1ST ROUND:

Party	%	Change
RN	**36.38%**	-4.17
LR	**31.91%**	(N/A)
Union de la Gauche	**16.89%**	(N/A)
Ecologiste	**5.28%**	+1.23
Extrême Gauche	**2.76%**	+1.28
Debout La France	**2.70**	+0.75
Oui la Provence!	**2.18**	(N/A)
Zou!	**1.66**	(N/A)
Un Nôtre Monde	**0.25**	-0.36

2ND ROUND:

Party	%	Change
LR	**57.30%**	(N/A)
FN	**42.70%**	-2.52
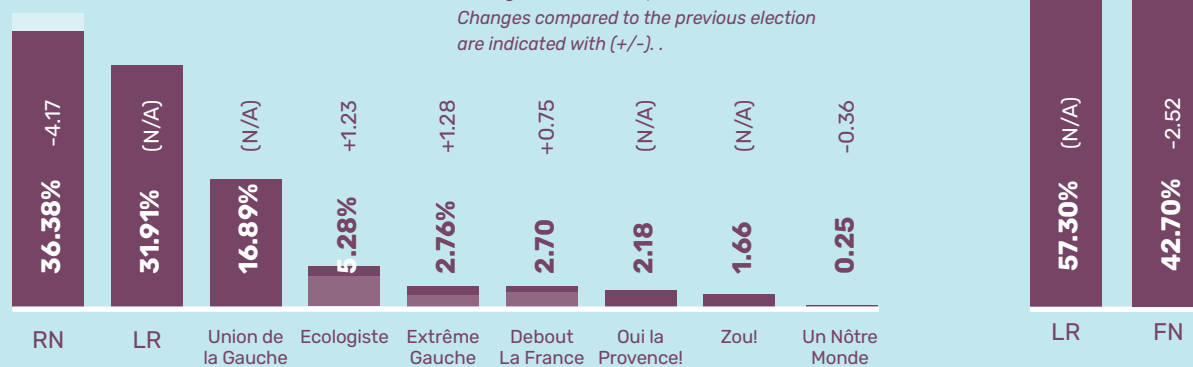
Most significant shift of voters: From: FN – Right-wing populists **To:** The Republicans - libercal-conservative

National Legislative Elections Department Vaucluse (2017)* [8]

1ST ROUND:			2ND ROUND:		
LREM	**32.07%**	(N/A)	LREM	**50.68%**	(N/A)
FN	**31.81%**	(-2.84)	FN	**49.32%**	(+7.23)
LR	**13.73%**	(-16.3)			
France Insoumise	**11.09%**	(N/A)			
PCF	**3.49%**	(N/A)			
Ecologiste	**3.37%**	(+1.62)	Turnout	**44.6%**	
Debout La France	**2.21%**	(N/A)			
Extrême Droite	**0.87%**	(N/A)	*Results for the regional		
Extrême Gauche	**0.58%**	(+0.17)	elections 2021 for the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur		

European elections (2019)* [10]

RN	**32.5%**	(-3.92)
LREM/MoDem	**19.25%**	(N/A)
EELV	**12.36%**	(+3.54)
Union de la Droite	**7.24%**	(-12.01)
France Insoumise	**5.83%**	(N/A)
Envie d'Europe	**4.57%**	(N/A)
Turnout	**51.3%**	

*Results for the European elections 2019 from the Vaucluse department

LEGEND FN: National Front (until 2018) • **RN**: National Rally* • **LREM**: La République En Marche • **MoDem**: Democratic Movement • **LR**: The Republicans • **PS**: Socialist Party • **EELV**: Europe Ecology - The Greens • **PCF**: French Communist Party • **France Insoumise**: "Rebellious France" • **Union de la Droite**: Union of the National Right • **Envie d'Europe**: Desire for ecological and social Europe • **Ecologiste**: Ecologist Party • **Debout La France**: "France Arise" • **Extrême Droite**: Extreme Right • **Extreme Gauche**: Extreme Left
*2018 the National Front changed his name to National Rally

This case study was created in cooperation with Marc-Olivier Padis and Alice Tattevin from Terra Nova.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur is marked by strong contrasts – in its scenic landscape, divergences in economic prosperity or political tendencies. Generally, the right wing nationalist National Front* has been particularly strong in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region for national legislative elections, while left leaning and Green parties have been more successful in regional and district elections. Moreover, some départements such as Vaucluse tend to favour centrist candidates, while also recording a significant shift towards right wing politics. Others, such as the département Var, are historical socialist and leftist strongholds. In this case study, we will look at how damage control was required at the legislative, as well as the regional level.

Within the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, some départements, such as Vaucluse, are still predominantly rural, with agricultural activity concentrated on fruit and vegetables subject to Spanish, Portuguese and Italian competition. The urban area of Vaucluse is represented by Carpentras, a city in which incomes are low and economic activity is very dependent on public institutions (hospitals etc.). Private economic activity is therefore limited and mainly driven by independent craftsmen and self-employed individuals with modest incomes. Finally, it is also a tourist region that hosts wealthy Parisians' second homes (particularly in the Luberon area). Although visitors to the region contribute to the local economy, the contrast in the situation between wealthy households and local residents creates tensions, even resentment. The region's residential appeal also puts pressure on real estate prices.

"These factors are accompanied by social challenges, notably a fear of the other, particularly of Europe, and a need for security. This need for security is especially felt in our district, where citizens, unaware of its true role, are suspicious of the European Union." (SD)

As in many other French regions, urban development has been poorly managed in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, with communes spreading out over their surrounding areas (urban sprawling). While the middle class seeks to live on the city's outskirts, low-income households remain in the city centre, which creates an impression of segregation, insularity or community isolation (depending on the interpretation). Moreover, the construction of shopping malls on the outskirts of cities (accessible by car) leads to business decline in city centres and an impression that the city is wasting away, emptying out, losing its attractiveness.

*National Front (Front National), renamed in 2018 to National Rally (Rassemblement National)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARD TO FAR RIGHT POPULISM

The establishment of the far right is first tied to the trauma of the Algerian war. At the end of the Algerian war, in 1962, "repatriates" arrived in France: French people called "pieds-noirs" who left during heightened violence (the Algerian independence fighters threatened them with "the suitcase or the coffin"), and "Harkis", "Muslim" Algerians who did not have full French citizenship and who had fought against Algerian independence fighters with the French army.

One example of how this plays out within the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur is the city Carpentras in the département Vaucluse. Carpentras became a symbol for the far right because of the desecration of the city's Jewish cemetery in 1990. This incident gave rise to a broad mobilisation of left wing parties, who immediately held Jean-Marie Le Pen responsible, and led to counter-demonstrations by the National Front in 1991 and 1995. They denounced a "conspiracy to gag the National Front" (young neo-Nazi militants were finally convicted for the desecration in 1997). It is undoubtedly because of this incident and its symbolism for the far right that Jean-Marie Le Pen's granddaughter, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, chose to run in this district in 2012, with her grandfather's support. Her high-profile election, since she became the youngest member of parliament in France, highlighted her political ambition and quickly caused conflicts with her aunt, Marine Le Pen.

With Marion Maréchal-Le Pen's candidacy in 2012 the National Front's establishment in the region of Vaucluse began. Her well-known grandfather, Jean-Marie Le Pen, came to celebrate her victory. Once she and her family, accompanied by many European media outlets, arrived, people were fascinated and proud to see their region on TV.

KEY TOPICS OF THE FAR RIGHT IN PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR

Extreme stance under conservative guise
Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the district's previous MP, presents herself as ideologically focused, with the ambition of bridging the gap between the far right and the conservative right through traditionalist themes. But French identity, rejection of foreigners, and national priority remain the party's common theme and ideological foundation, both nationally and locally. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen's rhetoric highlights an evolution of the themes developed by the National Front during the two previous generations of the Le Pen dynasty.

Scapegoating the European Union
Unlike Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen displays a desire to conquer and exercise power. To do this, she has sought to polish her party's image, keep neo-Nazi groups at bay and make people forget her father's racist remarks. She has changed her discourse on institutions and now defends the

great social achievements, the protective system of the welfare state and French secularism (against the influence of Islam). She adapts her discourse to the reactions of public opinion, as she did in 2017 when she abandoned the plan to leave the eurozone, which voters deemed unrealistic. She takes up sovereignist themes from the left and the right, scapegoating the European Union for France's difficulties. These themes continue to resonate strongly at the local level, particularly in the South.

"The far right unites all discontent. It tells farmers facing competition from Spanish fruit that their difficulties come from Europe. Unemployment is high, affecting nearly 25 per cent of young people. It addresses those who feel that social services are less present whilst they are confronted with the difficulties of daily life." (BP)

KEY TOPICS OF THE GREENS IN PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR

Territorial equality

The Greens in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur operate mainly on the regional governance level. They promote equality between all areas within the region. The Greens believe territorial equality offers many solutions to the region's lack of commitment towards its citizens, and at the same time addresses problems that the National Rally is trying to solve by other more brutal means under the name of security. Concrete levers are transportation, public services and employment. The central means of tackling these issues are active involvement with everyday-concerns of citizens and involving them in public affairs.

Environmentalism

The party's other main objective is to show that environmentalism is not opposed to the economy or people's personal interests. The Greens wish to meet this issue with pragmatism: they argue that areas are revived when they can rebound economically in the ecological transition.

"When I talk about the environment to others, I tell them their health is at stake. Politics is about taking care of citizens for their own well-being. Environmentalism is also that for me." (JF)

THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY

Proximity by the far right

Legislative elections are held in individual districts, a district being a rather small area. It is therefore important to be close to voters. After her election in 2012, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen hardly ever returned to the field. She didn't know the area, didn't have any ties to it and was not present. Local elected officials who were counting on her as an MP to relay their demands were very disappointed. She only went back to support her deputy who was campaigning in her place in 2017.

"Populists pretend to create a feeling of proximity. They claim to be listening to the citizens but they only impose their ideas by castigating the policies of the majority and claiming to have the solutions without really developing them." (SD)

Proximity by the Greens

In their campaign efforts, the Greens try to meet different actors in areas where public policies are showing weakness, especially transportation, since it is one of the main challenges within the region's jurisdiction. Furthermore, showing and practising closeness to the cultural sector is key to them, as it has been neglected for a long time and plays an important role when countering the far right with the sector's expression of freedom and emancipative values.

The Greens wish to elaborate their relations with farmers and industrialists, as their goal is to reach out to everyone doubting that the region can provide solutions to their daily problems.

Jean-Laurent Félizia, leader of the Greens in the upcoming regional election in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, made it his personal routine to have a chat or discussion with people of similar or different values, every day:

"I have coffee in a bar every morning and I stay there for a while to chat with the customers. I've been doing this for years. This proximity is necessary because these conversations allow me to raise certain contradictions in many people's views. These conversations allow us to remind those who have forgotten that there are many descendants of immigrants among us and that culture is always in motion." (JF)

COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

Defend in dignity

The Greens highlight that there is no point in giving a sanctimonious speech to voters who are tempted by the populist vote. These voters should not be stigmatised. Besides the content, far right actors are best countered by better behaviour:

"But we must also maintain the dignity of the debate, not fall into invective and stigmatisation like our opponents. We must show through our behaviour that the ideals of dignity that we defend begin in the way we address our opponents." (JF)

Arguing within regional sovereignty

While politicians in the region from the far right keep addressing security as a policy issue, it is however not within regional jurisdiction. Unlike those politicians, the Greens emphasise policy issues which lie within regional sovereignty such as vocational training or transportation, but they don't simply ignore topics the National Rally raises:

"We should never desert the field. We cannot abstain because we refuse to engage in the debates that constitute the National Rally's core business, namely security and immigration. We must recall the history of mobility over the centuries and what it has brought in terms of wealth and diversity. We must remember the reality of this immigration as an economic resource." (JF)

Countering by vision, not confrontation

During the presidential campaign, for example, the liberal party La République En Marche defined a clear strategy for the far right, which was to be confrontational. Other parties had attempted before to try to reclaim National Rally themes or to get closer to voters tempted by the populist vote by agreeing with them on certain points. Since Emmanuel Macron was facing Marine Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election, the opposition of the two programmes had to be clear-cut.

"We made the choice to deal with and talk about the risks of the National Rally without naming it, because we didn't want them to become victims. In this sense, Brune Poir-son wanted to lead a positive and constructive campaign. Rather than being moralistic, our message focused on what could be done to improve the territory." (SD)

PROACTIVE PLANS FOR PROGRESSIVES

Close contact with citizens

Progressive actors should have as much contact as possible with residents; they should listen to them without judgement and attempt to instill an idea when an opening presents itself; finally, they must take citizens' complaints seriously, even if they might disagree.

While planning and operating progressives should be aware of the following pitfalls:

- Distancing oneself from the field, which makes one lose sight of voters' daily concerns;
- Making sanctimonious speeches that lecture those tempted by the populist vote; and
- Having a condescending approach that seeks to prove to people that they have no reason to complain.

A FACE OF PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR : JEAN-LAURENT FÉLIZIA

Full name	**Jean-Laurent Félizia**
Role in party politics	Leader of the Greens in the upcoming regional election in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Party: The Greens – Europe Écologique
Age	52
Place of Residence	Lavandou, Var
Contact	Twitter: @FeliziaJean

What's your motivation to engage in local politics?

It's a combination of things. Ego plays a role, but I am more motivated by my family values, namely an appreciation of differences and being available to others. I have strong positions on term lengths and limits in political office. My training in agronomy and my professional projects have taught me that the general interest is sometimes served by works, infrastructures, public services, in the end. Through my professional training in horticultural technique, I have been practising concrete ecology for 20 years.

What are important experiences in your political engagement?

Since my first experience as a candidate in local elections in 2008 (in the canton of Colobrière), voters are now familiar with my roots and links to the area, such as my role as a business leader. I am identified by my left-wing values and by environmentalism. Voters know that I speak to everyone, and that I can confront subjects by treating them in depth rather than superficially focusing on the emotional charge of local subjects like hunting, migration, discrimination. One must seek to contradict the substance, not style. And show that the National Rally doesn't offer any solutions for the future but continues to rely on fear and rejection mongering rhetoric.

> **After fifteen elections without a victory, I could have given up. But I think we have a duty to be determined. The political ideal prevails. We also have the ambition to form a broad political coalition of progressive forces.**

I have been politically active for almost 20 years in a region where the National Rally easily wins between 20 and 30 per cent of the vote in elections. After fifteen elections without a victory, I could have given up. But I think we have a duty to be determined. The political ideal prevails. We also have the ambition to form a broad political coalition of progressive forces.

What influence has this had on your personal life?

Obviously, this political commitment has had an influence on my availability. My partner and I have an 11-year-old son and I try to make him understand that politics is also a relationship with others. I teach him gently that being involved is to fight for better food, for better transportation... I try to compensate for my lack of presence in this private sphere through an intensity of relationships when I can find the time.

What challenge did you face?

Getting involved in politics is about being forced to play a kind of role in order to protect your privacy. Many of the voters we meet feel that we are putting on some kind of show. Perhaps we are not fully ourselves when we are in politics. To those who are reluctant to engage in politics, or who feel very distant from it, I would like to tell them that they are all political actors in their life choices and in their relationships with others.

But those who helped me were the people I met who weren't necessarily in the political field, in the way the media would describe it, but who were pugnacious in their words, like activists, for example the "zadists". [Zadists are activists who hope to prevent a proposed project that would damage the environment. They occupy areas they deem "zones to defend".] Rural mayors too, who were fighting for a municipal water company, to maintain employment. In the end it was a lot of people who thought more about the public space than the private space.

What would you recommend to those who want to learn from you?

I would tell them not to confuse ethics with morality. Morality is this kind of ever-present duality between good and evil. Ethics is the order of things, what is. We must be in solidarity but we must also accept otherness, the differences between us. I would advise those who want to get involved in politics to do so beyond their own sphere and to do so in order to maintain this solidarity.

Additional information on the 2021 regional elections in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur:

The recent regional elections in France in June 2021, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, attracted attention in the second round of voting. After the first round, this region was the only one in France where the far right party Rassemblement National had a realistic chance of winning. After the region's Green candidate (and leader of the left-wing list),

Jean-Laurent Félizia, briefly appeared to maintain his candidacy in the second round, he finally announced his withdrawal. This decision was instrumental in preventing a far right electoral victory. Thus, in a runoff election, the conservative candidate Renaud Muselier was elected instead of Thierry Mariani (RN).

Recommendations

The author and journalist John Nichols recently published a blog article in the context of the Progressive Governance Summit, where he emphasises the importance of a local approach when countering the growing political influence of far right populism. Nichols' thoughts resonate strongly with the findings of this handbook:

"The first lesson is that the fascist impulse will not be defeated – at least not initially – at the international or even the national level. (…) The left will only prevail if it rebuilds itself, and the democratic institutions it sustains, from the grassroots upward – with local organising, local campaigning and, above all, local communicating."
(John Nichols*)

1. COUNTERING FAR RIGHT POPULISM

1.2 Dos

While the local contexts of the cases portrayed in this handbook may appear to be very different from one another, some ideas and advice on countering the far right are quite similar. Three pieces of advice were given by all interviewees in a direct or indirect manner. Many thought they were crucial when dealing with anti-democrats on the ground:

- **Differentiate between far right parties and their voters:** Far right parties often instrumentalise voters by emotionalising topics or spreading disinformation. While far right politicians are the direct opponents to progressives, far right voters are citizens who should be addressed but not fought.
- **Stand up against discrimination:** It is important to draw a red line between democratic statements that are covered by freedom of expression and statements that are not. While far right politicians frequent-

*John Nichols, 2021, https://progressive-governance.eu/blog/2021/06/02/ a-new-media-age-demands-new-strategies-for-fighting-fascism

ly make threatening and discriminatory statements, democrats must not allow their behaviour to be normalised by ignoring the statements or reacting to them with silence. They must condemn such statements and show citizens the danger posed by the far right.

- **Form alliances:** It is important to connect with a diverse group of supporters – be they artists or environmental movements or trade unions – and focus on common ground. At the same time, other groups should not be rolled over under any circumstances. Within a city, it is advisable to form positive alliances between districts that have drifted apart. Alliance-building among democratic parties is especially crucial when it comes to a run-off election against the far right. Some regions have come up with informal agreements to build a democratic safety-net for parliamentary work.

The following advice was given predominantly in the context of the "Back on track" or "Neck-and-neck race" scenarios, where progressives' outlook on voter approval is not weak but rather confident:

- **Focus on your vision:** Reflect on your own goals instead of addressing the far right agenda. Highlight a solution-oriented presence through constructive proposals. Show optimism and recall good experiences when formulating your ideas in a simple language. Frame and reframe topics and words in line with your vision and worldview.
- **Offer a participatory style of politics:** It is important not to understand citizens' consultations as an image campaign. Citizens' concerns should be understood and incorporated into one's own political programme. Following-up on how these consultations developed (effects on your policies, legal or materialistic solutions) is crucial here. Express an honest style of politics, which contrasts with that of the extreme right.

Those operating under the "Damage control" scenario and facing a strongly supported far right made the following recommendations:

- **Deal with critical issues:** Attempt to raise citizens' level of reflection by addressing and contextualising critical issues (e.g. the multiple dimensions of security concerns) through debate. Pointing out complexity is not meant to overwhelm citizens, but to show that simple slogans don't solve problems. It is possible to address difficult issues by holding open discussions or simply by giving progressive responses to far right proposals.

- **Focus on those who do not (yet) firmly support the far right:** These citizens, including supporters of other parties, usually form the majority. Use and protect the bond of believing in democratic values that unites citizens while addressing the concerns of unsettled voters.

- **Prevent far right coalitions:** If local conservatives have agreed to form a coalition with the far right, watch them closely. Encourage other parties (and your own) to ban coalition options with the far right, as they are usually the entry point to government.

One area where explicitly different answers were given is the question of whether or not to confront far right parties directly (for example concerning their misconduct in parliament). While some argue that the confrontation is very important to demonstrate publicly that promises are not being kept, others recommend that progressives should focus on their own agenda, except when far right actors have crossed a line.

1.2 Don'ts
Interviewees gave the following advice when asked about inadvisable actions:

- **Do not moralise:** Aspiring to high ideals can create pressure on individuals and suggests there is only one "right" way of living one's life, which will be difficult for Greens to live up to. Those who moralise can easily be portrayed as wishing to prohibit others from living their lives as they wish.
- **Do not hide:** Prominent stages and media presence should not be left only to the far right. Prevent them from dictating the agenda.
- **Never let go:** Don't give up your own progressive convictions or your commitment against misanthropy. If the political opponent is an anti-democrat, every day and every action matters.
- **Avoid party-internal struggles:** These fights distract from your programme, unsettle citizens and sometimes impede progress.

2. PROXIMITY TO CITIZENS

All actors interviewed for this handbook regarded proximity to citizens as essential. Observations show that often the activities of far right actors, which at first glance may appear to be "close to people", are in fact highly exclusionary. They target specific citizens whom they consider their in-group. They seem to strive for community-building but focus mainly on constructing an exclusive identity built on negative emotions towards the outgroup. "We" must stand together because "they" are threatening us is the mantra. They try to build an exclusive identity associated with (local) traditions. Therefore, it is logical that far right politicians in Tyrol show up in Dirndl and leather trousers *(Dirndl und Lederhosen)* in the district of their constituency and serve free beer, or that representatives of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Podkarpacie hold political campaign speeches in church. Beyond that, the strategy of the far right is communicative rather than practical. There is a lot of talking and in most cases little problem-solving.

2.1 Proximity for all
Progressive actors, in contrast, emphasise the fact that their approach is to work for and address all the citizens in their area. The conviction of pluralism and diversity is an authentic prerequisite for building alliances rather than the holistic claim of representation. Acknowledging different starting points while finding common solutions is the most important contribution progressives can make: to listen to local people, offer information, participate in their activities and find practical solutions to their problems. Meaningful proximity must therefore be one or more of the following:

- **Visible for all:** Citizens know and see the party and its representatives in local spaces and events, in print and online. And not only at election times and not only in districts with their own electorate.
  - → Visiting local initiatives, firms and organisations helps getting to know one another, shows interest and can create bonds.
  - → Representatives can show up unexpectedly in markets, stores or parks – not with the aim of holding a speech but to listen to citizens and answer their questions.
- **Approachable for all:** Have clear points-of-contact through offices, regular meetings, e-mail addresses and social media. Additionally, ask for opinions and make it easy for people to contact party representatives.
  - → People should feel encouraged to write to progressive parties in any language, as messages can easily be translated online.
  - → People should be able to contact a progressive party anonymously, though openness makes a dialogue much easier.
  - → Schedule office hours and events at different times of the day so that participation is possible for different people with certain time resources.

- **Useful to all**: Focus constructively on practical solutions serving different interests and taking the local context into account.
  - → If solutions to problems have been found or important steps towards solving them have been taken, progressives should not hide but communicate their decisions properly.
  - → Even a single seat in a municipal parliament can be put to good use by bringing in citizens' interests, making suggestions and asking questions when it is important.
- **Participatory:** Offer different ways of contributing to political work through hearings, idea-postboxes, opening working groups to non-members, suggesting citizen budgets that can be voted on, or creating one own's programme in consultation with citizens.
  - → Participating in decision-making means bearing responsibility. Going through a decision-making process together can have the positive side effect of citizens experiencing political complexity, team spirit and responsibility.
  - → It is particularly important to find allies to develop shared goals and build networks with civil society groups. The relationship in such a network should be open and equal.
- **Transparent and honest:** Informing citizens about current initiatives and positions in a simple language is as important as informing them about how they develop.
  - → Especially when a political project could not be realised, it is crucial to inform the public why it did not go ahead and what the latest plans are.
- **Here to listen:** Put citizens in focus by listening closely to what they have to say, and being open to criticism, counterspeech and sorrow.
  - → There should be no encounter where listening does not play a role. However, it is advisable to have a systematic approach to when, how and to whom one listens and how to use shared remarks in a constructive process.
  - → Openness, dialogue and liability are rewarded and are crucial to reach beyond one's own constituency.

3. TO PARENT PARTIES

Drawing on the case studies conducted, some recommendations are addressed to the parent parties or party family of Green and progressive actors:

- **Advance networking:** Create new and strengthen existing networks within the Green Party family and outside its party structures. More exchange and cooperation seem desirable, as those who engage in party politics locally often share similar challenges and goals. The parent parties can help set up transnational channels of communication. Additionally, local alliance building is key. Practical tips can be collected and shared.
- **Collect good strategies:** Gather experiences and approaches pursued at various levels and across regions for all to learn from best practices. Most interviewees stated that they did not know of a consistent strategy or recommendation by their parent party on how to counter the far right. Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution, suggestions would surely be welcome.
- **Strengthen the legal situation:** Strengthening the situation of those who are directly targeted by hate speech is important. So is a fundamental strengthening of liberal democracy, e.g. by banning extreme right wing organisations or advocating for better prosecution of hate crimes.

We hope this handbook will serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for those who practise the power of proximity locally, or who contribute professionally or voluntarily by listening, talking and finding solutions to ensure we have social cohesion as we move together towards a sustainable future.

Acknowledgements

Appendix

Appendix
Country's Contexts Reports

AUSTRIA

Austria is a parliamentary republic, with strong presidential elements consisting of nine federal states. The Parliament consists of two chambers – the National Council *(National-rat)* and Federal Council *(Bundesrat)*. The National Council has the highest significance for Austria's political landscape. Since 1945, there have been 33 governments in Austria, 18 of which have consisted of a so-called grand coalition of the two major parties, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democractic Party (SPÖ).

This political arrangement has coined Austria's landscape and appealed to its people, because it represented the interests of workers and progressives on one side and entrepreneurs, farmers and conservatives on the other, and so symbolised a reconciliation between social groups. Far-reaching social and economic trends were beginning to affect the country's political landscape in the middle of the 1980s, when the dominance of the ÖVP and SPÖ was challenged by the emergence of the right wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ). The party appealed to nationalist sentiment, people in the rural areas, of lower education, and attracted increasing numbers of voters.[1] Around the same time, concern over environmental issues started to formalise and was institutionalised with the entry of the Austrian Greens into parliament in 1986.

In 2016 there was a presidential election, which marked an important step in the demise of the grand coalition. Neither of the candidates from the ÖVP and SPÖ made it to the second round. This resulted in Austrian voters having to decide between a green left wing candidate (Alexander van der Bellen) and a far right candidate (Norbert Hofer), which posed a difficult choice for voters in the middle. After two rounds of elections in December 2016, the Green candidate (now formally independent) won the presidency and for a short time one had the impression that progressives won over populists in Austria. Shortly afterwards, however, the National Council elections were held in 2017 and the parties of the right ideological spectrum won over 58 per cent of the vote, resulting in a coalition government of the ÖVP and FPÖ. At the same time, following intra-party conflicts and a variety of campaign mistakes, the Greens were unable to reach the minimum 4 per cent of the vote and lost their right to sit on the National Council. After a scandal (Ibiza-Gate) mainly concerning the FPÖ, the coalition government collapsed and new elections were held in 2019.

The National Council election that followed resulted in a huge victory for the Greens, who reentered the National Council and the Federal Government for the first time as a coalition partner with the ÖVP. Since January 2020, Austria has had a coalition government consisting of the ÖVP and the Greens with Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) as Chancellor and Werner Kogler (the Greens) as Vice-Chancellor.

Obviously the Corona pandemic is shaping the work and public perception of the coalition government between the Greens and ÖVP. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, the public has lost confidence and trust in the performance of the government and its crisis management skills.

FRANCE

France is a centrally organised democracy with a semi-presidential system of government. The French party landscape is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation and a high degree of dynamism. New parties emerge and existing parties frequently change their names.[2]

Founded in 1972 and led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, the Rassemblement national, or National Rally, (called Front national, or National Front, until 2018) is a far right party now chaired by Le Pen's daughter, Marine Le Pen.

Highly visible on a national scale, especially in the media, but with little presence in local government, the National Rally is both omnipresent and free of direct political responsibilities. However, its ability to influence the political agenda, to impose its campaign themes and to disrupt a political system designed largely to keep extreme parties out of power is in itself a remarkable political achievement. Several characteristics clearly link the National Rally to a right wing populist movement:

1. Like the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the National Rally of Marine Le Pen finds its coherence above all in the image of the leader.[3] Rather than a party, the National Rally is a family-run business, where legitimacy is based on the name Le Pen, father, daughter and niece (Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who today is considered the party's best hope).

2. The cult of the leader is consistent with a rudimentary vision of political representation. The French people are seen as One People, unanimous and homogeneous, threatened by foreign influences, European construction, globalised elites and rulers cut off from the "real people".[4] The party continues to be marked by racism and anti-semitism, but integrates these messages today in a more subliminal way into a victimised rhetoric of the "small against the big".

3. The refusal of mediation and the choosing of scapegoats are accompanied by a vehement and outrageous rhetoric style, sometimes deliberately vulgar, in order to break with the polite codes of political communication. To position oneself as an outsider, a spokesperson for "the forgotten" *(les oubliés)* is also to appeal to passions rather than to reason, and to refuse the complexity of addressing political choices.

The Green Party, which is growing with each election, is not in a position to rally the other parties behind it and federate the entire left. Instead, it is a "junior partner" in large cities such as Paris, Marseille, Rennes and Nantes, where it is part of the left wing municipal majority. Lyon, Bordeaux and Grenoble remain exceptions in this respect and will test the Greens' ability to federate those around them. In fact, a part of the Green Party has always adopted a "neither right nor left" strategy to assert its autonomy and its refusal to serve as a mere back-up force for the Socialist Party.

The strategy of La République en Marche consisted in proposing an offer that responded to the profound desire to renew the political class (called "clearing"). It was a way of responding to voters' anger by inviting them to contribute to the party's presidential project through a very large open consultation operation *(La Grande Marche)*. But the weak structure of the party, which remains essentially the party of the President, and its poor results in the municipal elections, mark a failure of local implementation, which leaves some doubt about the durability of this project.

The response of progressive movements to the electoral progression of the National Rally has remained hesitant and dispersed.

GERMANY

Germany is a federal parliamentary republic with its legislative power invested in the federal parliament *(Bundestag)* as well as the federal council *(Bundesrat)*, which is made up of members of the 16 regional governments of the federal states *(Bundesländer)*. Consequently, the regional politics of the federal states have a strong influence on national political dynamics.

For decades, German party politics have been dominated by the people's parties, the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Over the years many smaller right wing groups have been established and broken up again. Smaller parties such as the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) have existed since the 1960s but have only ever registered very marginal successes. While there was a brief upsurge of right wing extremist groups and violence in the 1990s, only the Republicans (REP) made it as a far right party in two state and several municipal parliaments, but they lost significance around 2001. No far right party had been permanently successful on the national level in Germany since the end of the second world war.[5]

In the context of the euro crisis Alternative for Germany (AfD) was founded in 2013 as a political protest party. It focused on German involvement in the Greek sovereign debt crisis and campaigned in opposition to the German federal government against the eurozone's bailout policy.[6] In the early days the party's eurosceptic position set the AfD apart from the CDU and the liberal-conservative Free Democratic Party (FDP), but around 2014 its anti-immigrant, islamophobic and more radicalised positions became increasingly dominant.[7] Since then, the AfD has had an increasingly radical nationalist and ethnocentric ideology, maintaining an anti-establishment rhetoric[8] similar to that of other European right wing populist parties. In the last national elec-

tion the AfD became the strongest opposition party in the federal parliament with 12.6 per cent of the vote share. In 2019 they achieved their greatest successes to date, particularly in the East German states Thuringia, Brandenburg and Saxony, where the AfD became the second strongest party in the regional parliaments.

Germany's Green Party (Bündnis90/Die Grünen) emerged from the environmental, anti-nuclear, peace and women's movements of the 1970s and early 1980s as well as the GDR* civil rights movement.[9] In 1983, they narrowly succeeded in entering the Bundestag.[10] For decades the party served in different coalitions at state level before first entering a federal government coalition with the Social Democrats from 1998 to 2005.[11] The party's historical emergence from civic movements has brought with it the challenge of uniting its political ideals with the goal of achieving political relevance. Notwithstanding occasional criticism for political compromises made in governing coalitions, the Greens have succeeded in making a significant contribution to developing progressive values in the German political landscape.[12]

Since autumn 2018, the Greens have risen in popularity, even taking the second place in the 2019 European elections. The reasons for their most recent success, apart from the new personnel line-up, are the dramatically declining approval ratings of the two governing parties (SPD and CDU) as well as the worldwide Fridays for Future protests, whose core issue (climate protection) rose to become the most important domestic political issue. Although the outbreak of the Corona crisis has temporarily halted the upswing, the Greens are nevertheless in a good starting position to achieve their goal of participating in government after the next federal election in 2021.

*German Democratic Republic

POLAND

The definition of populism, as "a general protest against the checks and balances introduced to prevent 'the people's direct rule'"[13], captures the key elements of the overarching political narrative of Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS), which links populism (the claim to exclusively represent the "will of the people") and authoritarianism (the dismantling or subjugating of institutions that limit the power of elected populist leaders). In addition, recurring references to "traditional values" and the claim that the party is a sole defender of Polish Christian heritage against both Islam and Western secularism makes PiS a handbook example of European right wing populism.

In 2015 PiS returned to power after eight years of government by the centrist coalition government of Civic Platform and the Peasant Party. Starting with the assault on the independence of the Constitutional Tribunal, it has proceeded to dismantle checks and balances and systematically limit civil rights and liberties, targeting vulnerable minorities, including migrants and LGBT+ persons.[14]

Poland's post-1989 political scene was dominated by the division into post-communist and post-solidarity groupings and the left of the political spectrum was dominated by the Social Democrat Party (SLD). In spite of SLD's electoral victories in 1993 and 2001 and its crucial role in Poland's accession to the EU, SLD was marginalised in the aftermath of corruption scandals in 2004. Since then, Poland's political scene has become dominated by two "post-solidarity" forces: moderately conservative and pro-European Civic Platform (PO) and authoritarian–populist PiS.[15]

The political decline of the SLD opened up opportunities for new progressive movements. In 2011 the newly formed Palikot Party became the third force in the Polish parliament, espousing a number of progressive issues, mainly concerning the dominant role of the Catholic Church in public life. The Palikot Party survived only one term of parliament, yet it became a springboard for a number of progressive politicians and political initiatives, including Barbara Nowacka (and her Polish Initiative (*Inicjatywa Polska*)) and Robert Biedroń (Spring Party (*Wiosna*)).

The Polish Green Party was founded in 2004 as a group of activists mainly from the fields of ecology and women's rights. The group has repeatedly tried to win elections at local, national and European level, but apart from a few seats in local governments, the results of these efforts have been rather meagre. The left now has 48 MPs in the parliament and forms the third largest political faction. Since 2019 Spring and SLD have been establishing a single political party under the name New Left (*Nowa Lewica*).

However, the representation of progressive forces in Polish politics is not limited to the left parliamentary faction and many progressives (including the Greens) are currently members of the Civic Coalition. They have a significant impact on setting the terms of the public debate within the oppositional parties (e.g. the debate on reproductive rights). The presidential elections in 2020 during the Covid pandemic were the most recent opportunity for the democratic opposition to reverse the process of authoritarian consolidation. With a 68.8 per cent electoral turnout in the second round, Duda (and PiS*) gained over 10 million votes, defeating PO by just 400,000 votes

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*In May 2015, as a result of his election as president, Duda resigned from PiS for symbolic reasons, but appears to be programmatically loyal to it.

SWEDEN

Right wing populist movements in Sweden are not a new phenomenon. In 1991, the party New Democracy won 25 seats in parliament after pursuing an anti-immigration and anti-establishment agenda. They lost all seats in the following election in 1994, but set an example for populist movements to come. The dominant populist force in Swedish politics in more recent years is the Sweden Democrats (SD). Founded in 1988 by White Supremacists, the party is now the third largest in Sweden.[16] The Sweden Democrats elected their current leader Jimmie Åkesson in 2005. Five years later they entered the Swedish parliament, having received 5.7 per cent of the vote and thereby securing 20 MPs. Their share of the vote increased to 12.9 per cent in 2014, and finally 17.5 per cent in the most recent national election of 2018. They have generally been less successful in local elections.

In the footsteps of the Sweden Democrats, smaller and more extremist right wing movements have grown in recent years. The Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR), attributing themselves to neo-Nazi ideology, is one of the more successful examples, having organised disruptive protest actions as well as won two seats in local parliaments.

Since 2018 the two conservative parties, the Christian Democrats and the Moderates, have split with the liberal parties they were previously affiliated with. The leader of the Moderates, Ulf Kristersson, has expressed interest in joining forces with the Sweden Democrats to challenge the current government.[17] The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the support for the Sweden Democrats, mainly because public attention has shifted from issues of migration and crime to healthcare and the general functioning of the welfare systems. The party's support plummeted by 5.2 percentage points from February 2020 to February 2021.[18]

The Swedish Green Party (Miljöpartiet de Gröna) was founded in 1981. Its roots are in the environmental, climate and peace movements. The organisation of the Greens differs from other Swedish parties, always having one woman and one man as joint party leaders. They currently have around 10,000 members.[19] Sweden has largely missed out on the European green wave. Their support in national elections has been steadily declining after a peak result of 7.3 per cent in 2010.[20] In general, the party does best among young middle-class voters in urban areas.[21] The Greens have been part of the governing coalition together with the Social Democrats since 2014. The party currently holds five ministerial posts: Minister for Environment and Climate, Minister for Gender Equality and Housing, Minister for Financial Markets, Minister for Culture and Democracy and Minister for International Development Cooperation.[22] Prior to 2014, the Green Party usually cooperated with the Social Democrats and the Left Party, only occasionally striking deals with the right wing conservative–liberal bloc.

List of interviewees

AUSTRIA - TYROL - INNSBRUCK

TE: Tabea Eichhorn | Head of Office for the Mayor of Innsbruck, former Head of Campaign

TG: Tobias Gutman | Aide at old people's home, state committee delegate volunteer of intra-party organisation

JB: Janine Bex | Janine Bex | Spatial planner, member of municipal council for the Greens

SWEDEN - DALARNA - LUDVIKA

MS: Maria Strömkvist | Member of Parliament for the Social Democrats, previously chair of the local parliament

KL: Kerstin Lundh | Nurse, regional MP for the Greens

FRANCE - ÎLE DE FRANCE - MANTES-LA-VILLE

SD: Sami Damergy | Company manager, mayor with no party affiliation

FD: Fatima Diop | Student, youth worker

GERMANY - BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG - PFORZHEIM

SiS: Sibylle Schüssler | Major of the City of Pforzheim, former spokesperson of the Green parliamentary group in the city council

RT: Renate Thon | Former chairwoman of the regional association Nordschwarzwald, The Greens

POLAND - SILESIAN VOIVODSHIP - MYSŁOWICE

AMM: Anna Meres-Mikołajczyk | Marketing communications expert, chief of PR of the candidate's electoral staff and adviser to the Deputy Speaker of the Senate

GMS: Gabriela Morawska-Stanecka | Lawyer, Vice-President for Legal and Legislative Affairs, Spring (Wiosna) Party, currently Deputy Speaker of the Senate

KM: Katarzyna Majchrzak | Psychologist and coach, regional Spring (Wiosna) Party coordinator, director of the senator's office

SWEDEN - BLEKINGE - SÖLVESBORG

ELU: Eva-Lena Ulvsfält | Party and group leader of the Greens in Sölvesborg

WS: Willy Söderdahl | Teacher, former MP

GERMANY - THURINGIA - SAALE-ORLA

SR: Steve Richter | Self-employed retailer, spokesperson of the Saale-Orla, mandate-holder to the regional parliament for the Greens

KJ: Karoline Jobst | Student, spokesperson of the Green Youth Saale-Orla

AUSTRIA - UPPER AUSTRIA - WELS

TR: Thomas Rammerstorfer | Journalist, main candidate for local election for the Greens

MF: Miriam Faber | Social worker, member of the party council

POLAND - PODKARPACIE VOVOIDSHIP

KD: Karolina Domagała | Head of the regional offices of MEP E. Łukacijewska, head of the electoral campaign 2019 and 2014

EŁ: Elżbieta Łukacijewska | MEP, EPP, Civic Platform, Vice-President of the Regional Structure of Civic Platform

FRANCE - PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR

JF: Jean-Laurent Félizia | Leader of the Greens in the 2021 regional election in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

BP: Brune Poirson | Consultant, Member of the National Assembly (Parliament) for La République En Marche

SD: Stéphanie Davau | Social youth worker, Brune Poirson's chief of staff, parliamentary attaché

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NECK-AND-NECK RACE

Poland - Silesian Voivodship - Mysłowice

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Austria - Upper Austria - Wels

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