

Elon Musk Is Trying to Break Germany Quarantine on the Far-Right Nazi AfD

Elon Musk is not just dabbling in German politics. He is attempting to break a political blockade that has kept the nation's most prominent far-right party out of government even as it has gained strength with voters.

Mr. Musk will be the host of a live interview on Thursday with Alice Weidel, who is the chancellor candidate for that party, the Alternative for Germany, known as the AfD, in the country's snap election scheduled for Feb. 23. The event, on X, the social media platform that Mr. Musk owns, has raised alarms and threats of legal consequences among Germany's political class.

That is, in large part, because Mr. Musk is offering the AfD a level of publicity and legitimacy that it has long been denied in German public life.

The AfD has risen to the second position in German national polls, backed by about a fifth of the electorate. It has gained support with an unwavering anti-establishment campaign, which rails against the millions of migrants and refugees who have entered the country over the last decade from the Middle East and Ukraine.

Parties with similar immigration messages elsewhere in Europe, like the Brothers of Italy and Austria's Freedom Party, have risen to federal power. But in Germany, still haunted by its Nazi past, no other party will work with the AfD. Its candidates [complain they receive far less airtime](#) than other candidates on the nation's political talk shows.

At the same time, the AfD has made forays into language and actions German leaders deem extreme. The party has been forced to expel members for using racist and antisemitic language. One of its leaders has been repeatedly penalized by German courts for repeating banned Nazi slogans.

The party is under observation by domestic intelligence. Three of its state chapters as well as its entire youth wing are classified as confirmed right-extremist, a designation that intelligence services make after extensive observation. More than 100 employees working for AfD members of Parliament are also confirmed right extremists, according to an [investigation by a public broadcaster](#).

[In a 2016 speech](#), with the AfD gaining steam before federal elections, former Chancellor Angela Merkel urged all German parties to unite against the AfD. It was, [she said](#), not just a problem for her own conservative party but "a challenge for all of us gathered in this house."

The anti-AfD collective has not broken since. Not after the party climbed in the polls and won victories in major state elections last year, and not after it tried to put a more moderate face forward as its chancellor candidate: Ms. Weidel, a former investment banker who lives with her Sri Lankan same-sex partner and their children in Switzerland. Enter Mr. Musk, who controls a powerful media platform that is increasingly populated with right-wing influencers. He has become a close confidant of President-elect Donald J. Trump and in online posts has begun promoting far-right candidates and parties across Europe.

In December, Mr. Musk reposted a video from Naomi Seibt, a 24-year-old German conservative social media star who has gained a large following on X and on YouTube, through her [harsh criticisms of climate scientists](#) and efforts to combat global warming. She is also close with the AfD, and appears to have helped sway Mr. Musk to support the party.

“Only the AfD can save Germany,” Mr. Musk wrote, in his post, which included one of her videos.

Ms. Weidel welcomed the support. “You are perfectly right, @elonmusk!” she wrote in response.

Mr. Musk has since [written an opinion piece](#) in the German newspaper Die Welt expounding on his support for the party, which he called the “last spark of hope” for Germany. In it, he cast the AfD not as extreme, but as a reasonable alternative to a calcified political establishment.

“The portrayal of the AfD as far-right is clearly wrong considering that Alice Weidel, the leader of the party, has a same-sex partner from Sri Lanka! Does that sound like Hitler to you? Come on!” he wrote.

On Thursday evening in Germany, Mr. Musk will go even further, playing host to Ms. Weidel in an X “Spaces” conversation, akin to one he held with Mr. Trump last summer. Mr. Musk, and many of his X users, are fascinated with European right-wing political parties like the AfD. But in many ways the party’s positions diverge from Mr. Musk’s personal and business views — and his role as an adviser to Mr. Trump.

The AfD has [famously fought back](#) against the construction of a factory in Germany for Tesla, the electric car company also run by Mr. Musk. In an interview with The American Conservative this week, Ms. Weidel praised Mr. Trump, but she suggested that Germans have become “slaves” to the United States, including aiding America in wars over the last 30 years.

“We Germans have lived in this situation for a long time, definitely to the advantage of the U.S.,” she said.

The European Commission has said it will examine Mr. Musk's interference in European politics given his enormous power through his ownership of X and his close ties, however impermanent they may turn out to be, to the incoming American president. Europe's center-left political parties — Germany's Social Democrats among them — have jointly released [a statement](#) urging Brussels to use "all the legal means available" to protect democracy against misinformation and foreign interference on social media. Gérard Araud, an outspoken former French ambassador to Washington, has doubts about Europe's ability to keep its unity in withstanding attacks from Mr. Musk on incumbent leaders.

"Europeans, for whom the relationship with the United States is civilizational and existential, are paralyzed by the increasingly incendiary statements of Trump and Musk," Mr. Araud [wrote on X](#). "They hope that these are just words."

German leaders have alternately criticized Mr. Musk and tried to ignore him. In an interview this week, Chancellor Olaf Scholz dismissed the billionaire's efforts to sway German voters. "I do not believe in courting Mr. Musk's favor," he said. When dealing with social media posts, he added in English, his rule is, "Don't feed the troll."

German voters also appear unswayed, at least for now. [Three quarters of respondents](#) to a German broadcaster's poll said it was inappropriate for Mr. Musk to comment on German politics.

But the same poll showed a majority of respondents believed that Mr. Musk's efforts would help the AfD in the election.

The post [Elon Musk Is Trying to Break Germany's Quarantine on the Far-Right AfD](#) appeared first on [New York Times](#).