Lessons from Bavarian elections

Why in news?

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The election results of Bavaria in Germany raises afresh concerns about the surge of nationalism in the West.

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What does the results show?

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- Bavaria is a state in south eastern Germany bordering Liechtenstein, Austria and the Czech Republic.
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- It went to the polls on Sunday to elect their new state parliament for the next five years.
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- The ruling conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) is the Bavarian sister party to German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democrat Union (CDU).
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- It has lost its majority in the 180-seat local parliament for the first time since the end of World War II.
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- The CSU's majority shrank to 37.2% of the vote from 47.7% in 2013, which translated into 85 seats (from 101 in 2013).
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- It has also lost some of it to fringe parties such as the pro-Nazi Party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has an anti-immigration stance.
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- The other big loser in the largest of the German states was the Social Democrats, or SDP, a member of Ms Merkel’s federal “grand coalition”, which won only 22 seats against 42 in 2013, putting it on a par with the AfD.
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What does it imply?

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- The right-wing nationalist parties are gaining ground around Europe, where they get between 10 and 29% vote shares in every election.
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- The results of Bavaria’s elections also echo a relative decline in the power of the German chancellor.
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- It also reflects the growing centrifugal forces that assail the European Union (EU), arguably the most successful political project in the post-war world.
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- The waning popularity of her leadership and that of her party are linked to the refugee crisis from Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq.
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- Both the EU and non-EU countries opened their borders with varying degrees of reluctance, with the Germany welcoming over one million refugees in 2015.
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- Bavaria received the lion’s share of this influx, and it continues to receive the refugees.
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- But with the further influx and the fragile economic growth and high unemployment, xenophobia inevitably raised its head in the region.
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- Ms Merkel’s failure to deal with the outbreak of crime by a section of refugees has weakened her cause immeasurably.
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- EU leaders introduced compulsory quotas in 2015 at the height of the migration crisis, as thousands of people arrived daily on Europe’s shores, many of whom were refugees from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea.
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- Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic voted against the move, but the policy was forced through by a majority vote.
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- Hence talks were on to abandon the policy altogether which has created bitter splits across the continent.
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- Also, higher spending on schemes aimed at keeping refugees and would-be migrants outside Europe could have created concerns among the people regarding the pro-immigration stance of Germany.
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- Hence, the rise of AfD shows that demands on tighter immigration controls from the government are rising and the fuelling of nationalist stance has been witnessed in a country that was praised globally for its open refugee

policy three years back.
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- But a lack of decisive victory for the parties holding anti-immigration stance shows that an unapologetically pro-immigrant and pro-European party can still succeed in European politics.
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Source: Business Standard

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