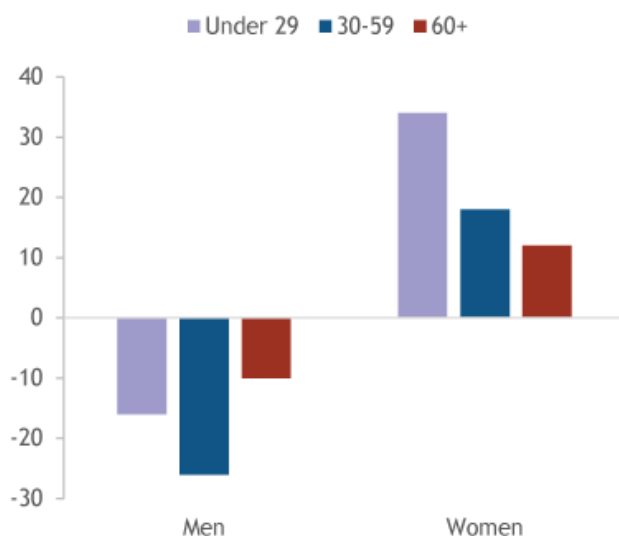


# Women and the far right

Blog post by Associate Adviser Roberto Robles, 24 May 2016

The European political establishment breathed a sigh of relief when the former Austrian Green leader Alexander Van Der Bellen won that country's Presidential election by a razor-thin 0.7% margin a couple of days ago. Although Van Der Bellen is himself an outsider, he was more palatable to the mainstream, and his victory prevented FPO candidate Norbert Hofer from becoming the EU's first far-right head of state.

This close run thing cannot be disentangled from the refugee crisis, which has also had a political impact on neighbouring countries. An election to a largely symbolic presidency is also more likely to attract a protest vote than a general election. But Hofer's near-victory nevertheless highlights what type of voter coalition a far-right party needs to build in order to earn a popular majority. In this respect, the election revealed some stark and interesting demographic differences, notably a gender divide, an urban-rural divide, and an educational divide.



**Fig: Lead for Van Der Bellen, by gender and age group**  
Source: FAZ

Urban areas were much more likely to support Van Der Bellen, who won cities like Vienna and Graz with 63% and 64% of the vote respectively. Even more pronounced was the divide along educational lines; 62% of those without a high school degree supported Hofer and 86% of blue-collar workers voted for Hofer. Van Der Bellen won over 81% of university graduates. As these demographics might predict, Hofer won 28% of centre-left SPO voters - a reminder how fragile a 'cordon sanitaire' against the far-right can be.

Also striking was the fact that women were much less likely than men to support Hofer. By a 60-40 margin, they voted for Van Der Bellen, with younger women in particular more likely to vote mainstream. 60% of Austrian men voted for Hofer, and while he performed best among middle-aged men, support from younger men was actually higher than for the over 60s.

To some extent, these are common characteristics of far-right support across Europe. They are worth having in mind when we think about what it might take to carry Marine Le Pen over the line in France next year. Men were 30% more likely than women to vote for Marine Le Pen in the 2012 presidential elections. Without getting into the reasons why women seem more reluctant to vote far right, we can probably say that that reluctance looks like an important potential factor in Le Pen's bid for the Elysée.