

Federal Election in Germany

BACKGROUND

SEPTEMBER 2021

“The Bundestag [...] is the cornerstone
of the German system of government.”

– *Encyclopedia Britannica*



Germany's electoral system



**THE
CHANCELLOR
IS NOT
ELECTED
DIRECTLY BY
VOTERS**

Germans vote for the members of the Bundestag. The chancellor is then elected by a majority of MPs. There is no guarantee that the winner of the election will also become the chancellor.



**COALITION
GOVERNMENTS
ARE THE RULE,
NOT THE
EXCEPTION**

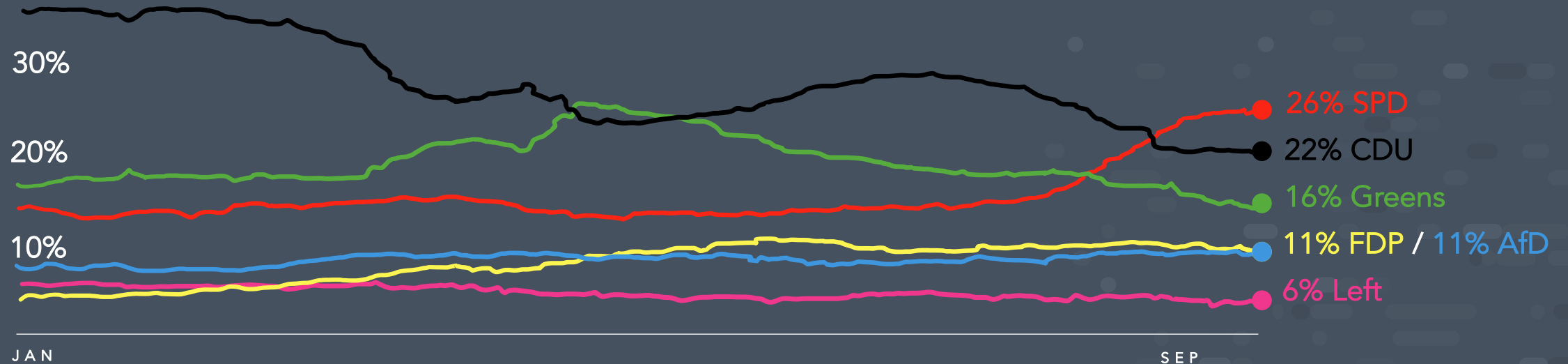
Unless a single party wins an absolute majority (this has only happened once), parties will need to join forces to form a governing coalition with a majority in the Bundestag. This year, for the first time, a tripartite coalition is more likely than a two-party coalition.



**ONE
CITIZEN,
TWO
VOTES**

Every four years, Germans cast two votes on election day: the first "winner-takes-all" vote is for the constituency representative (299 constituencies in total). The second vote determines the proportional representation of the political parties.

A look at the polls



Average of all election polls in 2021. Source: www.spiegel.de

PUBLIC OPINION IS VOLATILE:

What looked like a head-to-head race between the Christian Democrat Party (CDU) and the Green Party (Greens) in spring, turned into unexpected increasing support for the Social Democratic Party (SPD). While the CDU are still in the race, but unlikely to come in first, the Greens' momentum seems to have faded.

HOW TRUSTWORTHY ARE THE POLLS?

Since a large number of voters are still undecided and polls are estimated to have an official error rate of around 3% up and down, the race is still not fully decided. Very different results are within the realm of possibility.

In this year's state elections in Saxony-Anhalt in June, the last poll before the election predicted 27% for the CDU and 26% for the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The election result turned out clearly different: CDU 37%, AfD 21%. (Other parties mentioned: Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Left Party (Left))

Angela Merkel's potential successors



**ARMIN
LASCHET**

Strengths:

- Experience in government as Prime Minister of the most populous Federal State, North Rhine Westphalia.
- Backed by Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Challenges:

- Perceived lack of a clear political profile.
- Internal disputes with CSU leader Markus Söder and declining support within the party.
- Struggles to reconcile conservative and more progressive positions.



**OLAF
SCHOLZ**

Strengths:

- Public perception as the favored Chancellor.
- Experience in Federal Government as current Minister of Finance.

Challenges:

- Although quiet at the moment, a conflict with the leftist SPD leadership regarding a potential coalition with the Left Party is likely – something Scholz has ruled out.



**ANNALENA
BAERBOCK**

Strengths:

- Presents a new, Green vision for Germany and is able to reach a younger audience of first-time voters.
- More freedom to criticize government policies than the SPD and CDU.

Challenges:

- Lost public credibility over the past months after several campaign hick-ups.
- Seen as the most inexperienced candidate as she has not held a position in government before.
- Latest media reports suggest growing tensions between her and co-party leader Robert Habeck.

For the first time ever, the Green Party has entered their own chancellor candidate resulting in a three-way race for the chancellorship: Armin Laschet for the CDU/CSU, Olaf Scholz for the SPD and Annalena Baerbock for the Greens.

Coalitions: Germany's color coding

Since 1961, no party has been able to achieve an absolute majority in the German Bundestag. At least in 2021, two-party alliances will likely no longer suffice to form a government. A future governing coalition will probably have to consist of at least three parties.

Germans love to associate coalition options with certain national colors (flags) or similar signs.



TRAFFIC LIGHT COALITION

between the Greens, SPD and FDP



JAMAICA COALITION

between the CDU/CSU, FDP and Greens



R2G COALITION

between SPD, Left and Greens



KENYA COALITION

between CDU, SPD and Greens



GERMANY COALITION

between CDU, SPD and FDP

Newcomers: keep an eye on...



SPD

Kevin Kühnert

- Former chair of the Social Democrat's youth organization.
- Gained political standing through his opposition against the renewal of the grand coalition in 2017.
- Vocal on progressive social policy.
- Running for MP in Berlin Schöneberg.



CDU

Joe Chialo

- Former Universal Music Manager.
- Member of the CDU's "Zukunftsteam".
- Running for MP in Berlin Spandau and Charlottenburg.



Greens

Jakob Blasel (20)

- Activist and Germany's Fridays for Future No.2.
- One of the youngest candidates running for a seat in parliament.
- Key political areas: climate policy and generational equality.
- Running for MP in Eckernförde, Schleswig Holstein.



FDP

Ria Schröder (29)

- Former chair of the Liberal's youth organization.
- Progressive liberal voice, vocal on climate, human rights and education policy.
- Running for MP in Hamburg.

Bundestag candidates: gender equality

A total of **6211** people are running in the 2021 federal election—1400 more than in the last election and more than ever before. Only **33 %** of all candidates are female. This is about the same as the proportion of women in the current Bundestag, which is **31.4 %** (from 2013 to 2017 it still was at **37.3 %**). But there are massive differences within the political parties.

Greens

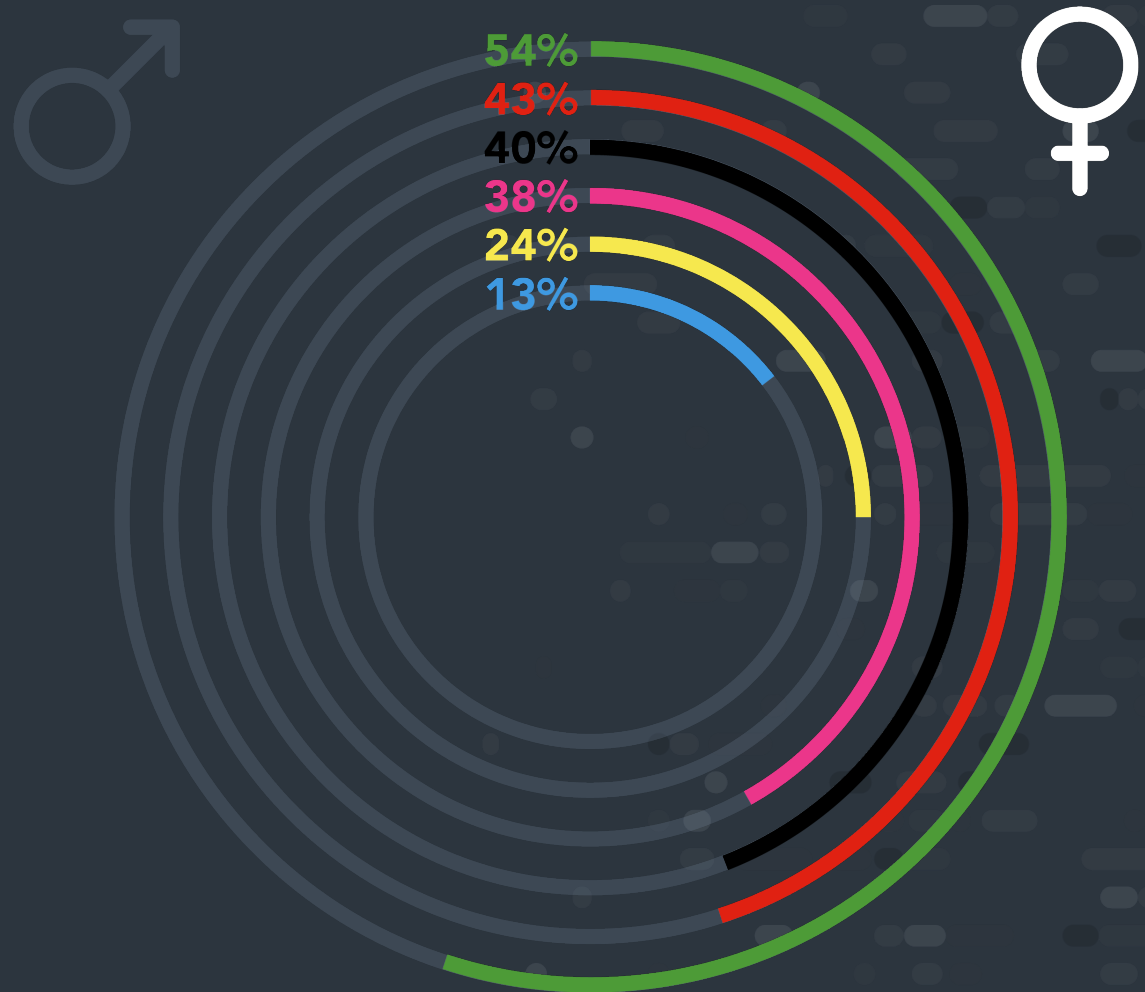
SPD

CDU/CSU

Left

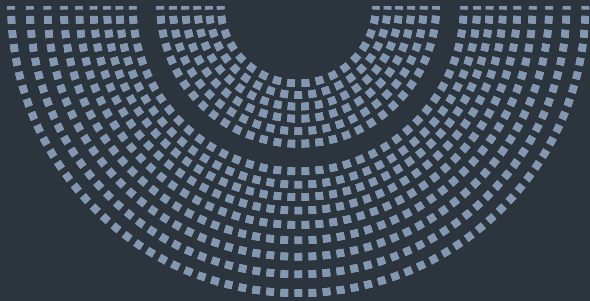
FDP

AfD

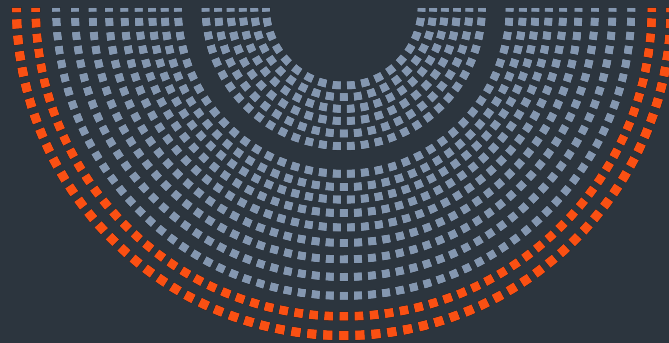


Size of the Bundestag

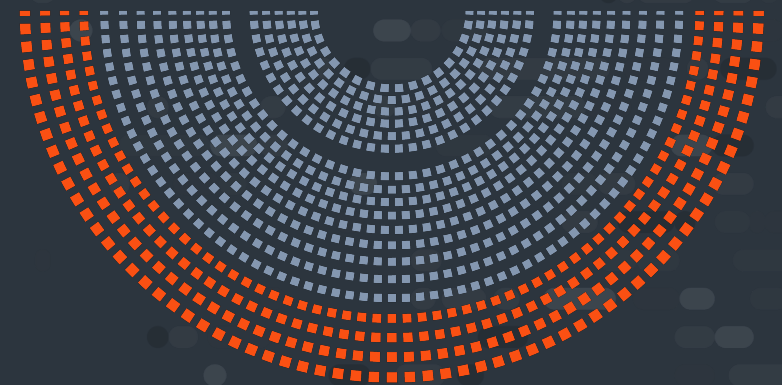
The current electoral law makes the size of the Bundestag dependent not only on the result of the second vote, but also on the splitting of the first and second votes of the electorate. After the Chinese National People's Congress, the Bundestag is the second largest parliament in the world.



STANDARD SIZE
598 mandates



CURRENT SIZE
709 mandates



ESTIMATED SIZE
800 - 1000 mandates

Positions: transport and mobility

The debate on the transformation of transport has shaped the domestic election campaign. Hardly any other topic has lent itself so well to polarization. In particular, the debate on a gradual increase in fuel prices and a possible ban of short-haul flights have been able to clearly emphasize the alternative policy approaches.

	(+) In favor (-) Against (0) Neutral					
POLICY ISSUES	CDU/CSU	SPD	Greens	FDP	Left	AfD
Government subsidies for e-mobility	+	+	+	-	-	-
Introduction of general speed limit on the „Autobahn“	-	+	+	-	+	-
Further promotion of road construction	+	+	-	+	-	+
Additional taxation for aviation (aviation tax, kerosene tax)	-	0	+	-	+	-
Ban of short-haul flights	-	-	-	-	+	-
Expansion of European rapid and overnight train connections	+	+	+	0	+	0

Positions: digital policy

Most digital issues are strongly linked to the EU level. In general, digital topics have played a minor role in the public debate around the election campaigns.

	(+) In favor (-) Against (0) Neutral					
POLICY ISSUES	CDU/CSU	SPD	Greens	FDP	Left	AfD
Increased surveillance of citizens with source wiretapping (Quellen-TKÜ)	+	+	-	-	-	-
Introduction of digital taxation	+	+	+	+	+	+
Stronger regulation of AI	+	+	+	0	+	0
Adaptation of labor rights to digitization	+	+	+	+	+	0
Federal Ministry for Digitization	+	0	0	+	0	0

Positions: energy & climate

Climate and energy policy are a decisive issue in this year's elections. While almost all parties (excluding the AfD) acknowledge the severity of global warming and the need for significant decarbonization and climate protection measures, their approaches differ significantly: They range from an ambitious mix of predominately regulatory measures as suggested by the Green Party to a focus on free market innovations coupled with a CO2 emissions cap as proposed by the FDP.

That said, critics argue that none of the party programs are ambitious enough to reach the 1.5°C Paris climate target.

	(+) In favor (-) Against (0) Neutral					
POLICY ISSUES	CDU/CSU	SPD	Greens	FDP	Left	AfD
The subsidization of wind energy should be ended.	-	-	-	0	-	+
Coal phase-out before 2038	-	+	+	0	+	-
Carbon price on gas and oil products should be higher than currently planned	0	-	+	0	0	-
Obligation to install solar panels in certain new buildings	-	+	+	-	+	-
Climate neutrality before 2045	-	+	+	-	+	-

What happens after election day?

The situation after the election could be described as extremely complex in terms of game theory. A multitude of actors will have different power options that can be played off against each other. How the new government will be shaped will not only depend on the concrete election result, but to a particular extent on the strategic negotiating skills of the most important actors.

Coalition building will take a long time. Since Angela Merkel will remain in office as executive until a new government is formed, she still has a chance to stay in office longer than any chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany before her.

ELECTION DAY

The election result will form the basis for the formation of the government.

EXPLORATORY TALKS

In preliminary talks, the parties will find out in which constellation they can push through most of their interests.

COALITION NEGOTIATIONS

The actual coalition negotiations will contain very precise agreements for the government program of the coming years.

LEGITIMIZATION

The negotiated coalition agreement will be legitimized by the parties by board resolutions, party congresses or a vote of the party members.

ELECTION OF NEW CHANCELLOR

The process of forming a government is informal and not laid down in the German constitution. With the election of the chancellor, normal political operations can begin.

5 takeaways



Even in the days (or even weeks) after the election, we will not necessarily know who will succeed Angela Merkel.



The expected three-party coalition will make government formation complex.



Berlin will see many newly elected officials and their staff—on average new MPs will be significantly younger and more progressive. Relationship building is more important than ever.



Lobbyists need to make positive use of the bipartisan “political awakening,” liaising with the new government will require versatile approaches and smart narratives.



The new government will be measured by the stability, assertiveness and stamina of the incumbent chancellor.

APCO
worldwide®