

European issues
n°605
7th September 2021

Who will succeed Angela Merkel? Germany in a state of uncertainty three weeks before the federal elections

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On 9 December, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, informed his fellow citizens that the next federal elections would take place on 26 September 2021. 54 political parties are standing for election, a record number in Germany's history. In the 1990s and early 2000s, fewer than 30 parties ran. In the last federal election in 2017, there were 42.

The only certainty of the election is that Germany will have a new chancellor since Angela Merkel, after 16 years of government by her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in a "grand coalition", with the exception of the years 2009-2013 when she governed with the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), is not seeking re-election.

After four terms as the head of the country's government, Angela Merkel remains very popular: last May, she held 60% of positive opinions and was ahead of all other political figures in Germany. "*Germans appreciate Angela Merkel as a good manager, a chancellor who always seeks compromise,*" declared Markus Inden of Trier University.

Angela Merkel came to power in 2005 in a country where growth had been stagnating at a low rate for 10 years, unemployment exceeded 11% and the public deficit stood at 3.2% of GDP. During her four terms in office, the Federal Republic has become the fourth largest economy in the world and the driving force behind Europe. *Mutti* (Mum in German, as she is known to her fellow countrymen) has driven unemployment below 5%, established balanced public finances as a dogma and helped her country achieve a record trade surplus.

In Europe, the outgoing Chancellor has often held back progress on European economic integration under the guise of the fiscal orthodoxy to which she is so committed. In recent months, however, against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, she agreed to a historic €750 billion stimulus package and debt pooling. Some analysts criticise Merkel for her continued close relations with Russia and China, which she is said to have safeguarded for German exports.

The chancellor has illustrated herself on two occasions. Firstly, in 2011, when she decided a few days after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan (11 March 2011) that Germany would gradually withdraw from nuclear energy. And in autumn 2015, when she decided to open her country to hundreds of thousands of refugees, mainly from Syria and Iraq, as they fled war and the catastrophic situation in their country.

On 20 May, the chancellor, whose political career has been exceptionally long (31 years in total, almost half of which she has held office), declared that she had only one wish: "*that no one should ever say of her that she was lazy*".

For the first time in the country's history, there will be no incumbent candidate in the federal elections.

And for the first time too, there will likely be a government coalition requiring three parties after the election. The first televised debate on 29 August brought together a Triell, i.e. the three main candidates: Armin Laschet (CDU/CSU), Olaf Scholz (SPD) and Annalena Baerbock (Greens).

The end of the "Grandt Coalition" (GroKo) seems to be programmed, as the two parties in office have been weakened and have suffered continuous erosion

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for years, thus reinforcing the multiplication of political forces. The CDU/CSU has lost 40% of its members since 1960, while the SPD has lost even more. But nothing is certain.

Although the left/right divide is, as in many European countries, becoming less and less relevant when people vote, it is still fundamental when governments are formed.

The number of possible coalitions after the election remains large: an alliance comprising the CDU/CSU and the Greens/Alliance 90; the same CDU/CSU and Greens/Alliance 90 alliance with the FDP; an alliance of the CDU/CSU, the Greens/Alliance 90 and the SPD; a coalition of the SPD and the Greens/Alliance 90; the same coalition with the FDP, an alliance composed of the SPD, the Greens/Alliance 90 and the Left Party (Die Linke) or, finally, the renewal of a "GroKo."

However, in the last few days, for the first time in a long time, the SPD has taken the lead in opinion polls, ahead of the CDU/CSU. The Social Democrats have not overtaken the party of the outgoing Chancellor in national voting intentions since 2006. The difficulties experienced by the candidates, Armin Laschet (CDU) and Annalena Baerbock (Greens), are undoubtedly playing into the hands of the SPD. According to the latest poll carried out by the INSA institute between 23 and 27 August, the party led by Olaf Scholz (SPD) would garner 24% of the vote and Armin Laschet 21%, its lowest result since the 1980s. The CDU/CSU was credited with more than 30% of the vote at the beginning of the year and until March. It was then overtaken by the Greens, regaining the lead before falling back in the polls as of 10 August.

The Greens are expected to take third place with 17% of the vote. The Greens were credited with more than 25% of the vote last April and May and had even pulled ahead of the Christian Democrats in opinion polls.

The Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) is expected to win 13%, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) 11% and the Left Party (Die Linke) 6% of the vote.

THE CDU AND ANGELA MERKEL'S DEPARTURE

The CDU was the favourite until a few weeks ago, but it has recently declined in the polls. Last June, the party's

victory in the elections in Saxony-Anhalt had given it some breathing space after its two defeats in March in the Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg Länder, where the CDU was defeated by the SPD and the Greens/Alliance 90 respectively.

Some political observers explain this setback by the floods that occurred mid-July in the country, especially in North Rhine-Westphalia. Armin Laschet, who has been the Minister-President of Germany's most populous state since 2017, was accused of being slow to warn the population about the risk of flooding and of the slow implementation of the public aid system for victims. Finally, he appeared to laugh out loud while attending a ceremony for the victims of the disaster in the town of Erfstadt, near Bonn, alongside head of state, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), who was giving a tribute speech in a video that has now gone viral. His laughter was all the more appalling because it was preceded by another blunder: when asked whether the floods would change his environmental agenda, Armin Laschet replied: *"You don't change your policy because of an event like this"*. Subsequently he made a public apology, describing his outburst as *"inappropriate and unseemly"*. Around 190 people died in July's floods, which also destroyed hundreds of homes.

The difficulties facing the CDU forced Angela Merkel to come to her party's rescue a few days ago. *"I am firmly convinced that Armin Laschet will be the next chancellor of Germany,"* she said, indicating that the candidate was the guarantor of stability and the continuation of her policy. She highlighted the human qualities of her candidate, *"capable of building bridges between people"*. *"It has always been important for him to place individual and inalienable dignity at the centre of everything (...) I am deeply convinced that it is with this attitude that he will serve the Germans as Chancellor"*, said Angela Merkel. She had previously chosen to stay out of the election campaign. *"Politicians who stop their political work should not interfere in a campaign. This is my position and my deep conviction,"* she said.

Centrist and Europhile, Armin Laschet is a man of consensus. He is very close to Angela Merkel, which is

both an advantage in view of the outgoing chancellor's popularity but also a disadvantage. The candidate has the difficult (impossible?) task of defending the legacy of the outgoing chancellor whilst trying to embody a renewal. "Armin Laschet is trying to occupy the centre of the political class like Angela Merkel, whom he has always supported," says Uwe Jun, professor of political science at the University of Trier.

Supporters of the CDU/CSU candidate like to remember how much Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel were underestimated before they won the election.

Armin Laschet was elected CDU leader on 16 January with 521 votes to 466 for his main opponent, Friedrich Merz, a former member of parliament turned businessman and representative of the party's right wing.

On 20 April, he was chosen as the joint candidate of the CDU and the CSU for the chancellorship for the federal elections of 26 September. He won 77.5% of the votes of his party's executive committee, ahead of Markus Söder, president of the CSU. The battle between the two men was tough. The two parties had great difficulty in reaching an agreement, a first in 70 years. Armin Laschet finally won 31 of the 46 votes in the executive committee. It is worth remembering that the German right has twice been led by CSU candidates in federal elections, in 1980 (Franz-Josef Strauss) and in 2002 (Edmund Stoiber). Both were unsuccessful.

The CDU is campaigning on change with continuity. "Together let's make Germany" is its slogan. Although its platform is called *Programme for Stability and Renewal*, it is more about continuity than change. Armin Laschet's message is reassuring to Germans who are eager for security and usually reluctant to experiment. The fight against climate change and the protection of jobs in industry are the party's main campaign themes.

Armin Laschet recently pointed to the risk of a left turn in the event of an SPD victory. He criticised his rival, Olaf Scholz, for not saying which government coalition he would prefer and warned against *Die Linke* coming to office. He made it clear that he would never make an alliance with the Alternative for Germany (AfD). He also points to the uncertainties of the Greens/Alliance

90, albeit in a lighter way, as they remain possible partners in government.

Armin Laschet has already indicated that the climate should be the focus of the future government and that, consequently, climate issues should be handled directly by the Chancellery. He has announced a climate-neutral Germany by 2045 in a "socially acceptable and economically sustainable" way. However, while the CDU must show its commitment and willingness to fight global warming and protect the environment, it must be careful not to engage in a real battle with environmentalists on these issues where the latter will always win.

On the economic front, the party rejects any tax increases and proposes to reduce the maximum tax on corporate profits from 30% to 25%. It promises to abolish the solidarity tax introduced in 1991 to finance the country's reunification. The CDU is opposed to any further increase in the age of retirement; it is committed to a return to the rules of the *Stability and Growth Pact* and the *debt brake mechanism*, which was suspended during the pandemic. The latter has been part of the German constitution since 2009 and prevents the country from taking on more than 0.35% of GDP per year in debt. It was lifted in 2020 and 2021 by the Bundestag to finance pandemic-related expenditure.

On the diplomatic front, Armin Laschet supports a rapprochement between Germany and Russia and China. Following Angela Merkel's lead, he supports the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, which is to link Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, and he wants to establish a partnership with Moscow, just as he wants to negotiate investment agreements with Beijing. In his view, limits must and can be set for Vladimir Putin's regime. Armin Laschet is still in favour of NATO requiring each member state to spend 2% of its GDP on defence by 2024, which is "essential for NATO to remain capable of acting and defending itself".

"I would be satisfied with a result of 32%, 33% or 35% of the vote", said Armin Laschet, which is higher than the score obtained in the previous federal elections on 24 September 2017 (30.25%).

"The most important thing for the CDU is not so much

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the programme but to have a candidate who wins the elections," said Ursula Münch, director of the political training academy in Tützing in Bavaria. Since 1949, when the FRG was founded, the CDU has spent only 21 years in opposition.

"Almost 16 years after Angela Merkel's election, the CDU gives the impression that it is exhausted and deeply divided, with a weak chancellor candidate who is contested by its electoral base, which would have preferred Markus Söder. Not since the end of the Helmut Kohl era (1982-1998), marked by the so-called Slush Fund affair in 1999, has the CDU been in such a deep crisis," said Albrecht von Lucke, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik*.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY: A NEW START?

Led by its candidate for the chancellery, outgoing Finance Minister, Olaf Scholz, the SPD, which has been a CDU/CSU partner in government since 2013 (it was also a coalition partner during Angela Merkel's first term in office between 2005 and 2009), is on a roll three weeks before the election.

Olaf Scholz, who is not very charismatic, has managed to convince his fellow citizens of his seriousness and competence. *"Annalena Baerbock (the Green candidate) has made serious mistakes, Armin Laschet has made serious mistakes and people are wondering who has the necessary competence to lead the country. This is what we want to convince people of,"* said Lars Klingbeil, one of the SPD leaders. *"While his competitors make mistakes, he does not. He appears to be the most professional of the candidates in the running, even if he is far from being charismatic (...) Olaf Scholz is a male version of the outgoing chancellor, rather modest, moderate, without oratorical talent, but experienced and able to find compromises. People know him and, after more than 15 years of Merkel chancellorship, this is reassuring,"* said Wolfgang Merkel, a political scientist at Berlin's Humboldt University.

Olaf Scholz was nominated for the chancellorship on 10 August 2020. He was officially elected at a party congress on 8 and 9 May, winning the votes of 96% of the delegates present. Mayor of Hamburg between 2011 and 2018, Olaf Scholz, who was then considered

too far to the right, and who ran together with Klara Geywitz, failed to take over the leadership of the SPD in 2019, defeated by the tandem, Norbert Walter-Borjans and Saskia Esken. In the first round of voting on 26 October, he received 22% of the vote, but a few days later, on 30 November, Walter-Borjans and Esken obtained 53% of the vote.

However, it is difficult for the SPD to embody change or to position itself as an opponent since it has been in office almost since 1998. It is emerging from 12 years of the "grand coalition" as a fatigued party. *"As a junior partner, the SPD has suffered greatly, and the government's major social reforms - such as the introduction of a minimum wage - have not been credited to it,"* said Stefan Marschall, a political scientist at the University of Düsseldorf.

The SPD is more left-wing than its candidate, whose positioning as a moderate and centrist man, heir to Angela Merkel, does not correspond to that of its electoral base. *"In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult for the SPD to match a programme with a candidate, and this is even more the case with Olaf Scholz,"* stressed Thorsten Holzhauser of the Theodor Heuss Foundation. *"Olaf Scholz embodies the pragmatic SPD of the Schröder era. However, this centrist position, which was at the origin of the strategy led in the early 2000s to rebuild Germany and strengthen its competitiveness, was experienced as a betrayal by the traditional electoral base,"* said Etienne Dubslaff, researcher at the University Paul-Valéry in Montpellier. Olaf Scholz nevertheless knows how to showcase the thousands of euros he has released as Finance Minister, whether for the victims of the July floods or to combat the pandemic.

The party's promises of social justice are not necessarily audible. Long before the current candidate, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Peer Steinbrück and Martin Schulz made the same commitments in 2010, 2013 and 2017.

Olaf Scholz is promising to introduce a new wealth tax for households earning more than €500,000 a year, to regulate rents, to increase child benefit from €250 to €528 a month, to raise the minimum wage to €12 gross per hour (currently €9.5) and to end the hunt for the bogus unemployed, i.e. people who receive unemployment benefit but are suspected of not actively seeking work.

Ecological transformation and social policy are the priorities of his programme. *"We have already lost too much time (...) we want to achieve climate neutrality by 2045 at the latest"*, said Olaf Scholz, who said he wanted electricity to be produced solely from renewable energy sources by 2040.

THE RISE OF THE GREENS: A FLASH IN THE PAN?

After soaring to the top of the opinion polls, even overtaking the CDU in voting intentions last spring, the ecologists have been in a slump since the beginning of the summer. On 19 April, Annalena Baerbock was designated by her party as the Green/Alliance 90 candidate for the chancellorship, winning 678 of the 688 voters, or 98.5% of the vote. Accustomed to infighting and endless divisions, the Greens have taught a lesson to the entire political class and have shown a maturity rarely seen until now.

Annalena Baerbock, who claims to be neither right nor left but a citizen, wants to be the candidate of change and the incarnation of renewal on the German political scene. Pro-European, centrist and pragmatic, the ecologists are attracting more and more urban middle-class voters. *"What is interesting about Annalena Baerbock's approach is that she combines loyalty to the traditional ideas of the Greens/Alliance 90 - defence of multilateralism and international law, attachment to values - with a real reflection on what a power policy is. She thinks in geopolitical terms and she is convinced that Germany needs to assert itself more in global competition, which has not always been obvious for the Greens/Alliance 90,"* said Ulrich Speck, researcher at the German Marshall Fund's Berlin office.

Since her appointment, Annalena Baerbock has faced numerous attacks. First of all, she has been criticised for never having actually governed at either regional or national level, and for only having a mandate as a member of parliament since 2013. Secondly, the candidate was suspected of having embellished her CV (which was false, but which nevertheless damaged her reputation: she did indeed obtain a Master's degree in International Law at the London School of Economics

(LSE)). She was also accused of failing to declare that she received several bonuses worth €25,220 between 2018 and 2020. Members of Parliament are required to declare any additional income to the Bundestag administration within three months. This was a real blunder for a party that has been advocating for years for more transparency in the publication of elected officials' income. The Green candidate said she had simply forgotten to declare these sums.

Finally, Annalena Baerbock was accused of having used the cut-and-paste technique five times in her programme book entitled *Jetzt* (Now) without citing her sources. The media lawyer who defended Baerbock said that he did not see any copyright infringement and pointed out that the passages in question were simply a repetition of information that was known and accessible to everyone. Furthermore, a political book is not a university thesis and its author is therefore not subject to the same rules as the writer of a thesis.

The Green programme defends a strong state and an increase in public spending. For example, the Greens are planning a €50 billion infrastructure investment plan (transport, health, education) financed by debt (which would require the lifting of the constitutional obligation that forbids the federal state to borrow more than 0.35% of its GDP). The Greens/Alliance 90 want to increase taxes for the highest income earners by raising the marginal rate of the top bracket from 45% to 48% and to reintroduce a tax on large fortunes for people with assets of more than €2 million. The party is calling for an increase in family allowances and a minimum wage of €12 per hour *"so that people on low incomes are not burdened by rising prices for individual goods in the field of climate protection"*.

Indeed, the fight against global warming is the Greens/Alliance 90's priority. They promise a 70% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels), which they want to achieve through scientific progress and innovation. Similarly, the Greens' programme wants to increase the competitiveness of industry through the establishment of an industrial strategy at European level.

On an institutional level, Annalena Baerbock wants to create a super ministry for the environment that

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would have the right to veto decisions taken by other ministries. The candidate is promising to make Germany "the first industrial nation to become climate neutral" and "to make Europe the first continent to achieve climate neutrality". This includes increasing the carbon tax recently introduced in Germany, phasing out coal by 2030 (instead of 2038), expanding wind and solar energy and investing in energy renovation of buildings. Finally, the environmentalists want 2030 to be the year when petrol car production and short-haul flights are phased out.

On foreign policy, Annalena Baerbock aims to break with Angela Merkel on the diplomatic front. The Greens/Alliance 90 are against any rapprochement between Germany and China or Russia. They call for the abandonment of mercantilist diplomacy in favour of the defence of human rights, particularly in these two countries. They want the construction of the German-Russian gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 to be abandoned, as they believe that it will make the sanctions against Moscow meaningless and, moreover, pose a threat to the environment. "*Annalena Baerbock takes a clearly critical stance towards autocrats, whether in the Kremlin or in Beijing,*" said Thortsen Benner, Global Director of the Public Policy Institute. "*Annalena Baerbock no longer wants a foreign policy that is driven solely by the country's economic interests,*" said Jens Althoff of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

The ecologists are in favour of setting up a European Defence Union. They want a strict framework for Bundeswehr interventions, strict control of arms exports, a ban on nuclear weapons and, finally, the abandonment of the obligation imposed by NATO to devote at least 2% of national GDP to defence by 2024, a requirement deemed "*absurd*" by Annalena Baerbock in a context of economic crisis.

'SMALL' PARTIES AS POTENTIAL KINGMAKERS

As a coalition partner of the CDU/CSU in the 1980s and 1990s, but also of the SPD in the 1970s, the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) has long been a kingmaker in German federal elections. Its leader, Christian Lindner, positions himself as the representative of the wealthy

middle class and the defender of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), of which there are many in Germany. He defends a reduction in state intervention and lower taxes, a position that is not necessarily in tune with the times in the context of a pandemic that has led the state to become more involved in the economy, even to the point of lifting the debt brake mechanism stipulated in the German constitution.

Can the FDP regain the position it held until recently after the elections on 26 September? Nothing is less certain.

Further to the right, the *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) chose Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla to lead its lists. The duo won 71% of the 14,815 votes cast by party members (or 48% of the total) in May. They were pitted against Joachim Wundrak and Joana Cotar, who won 24% of the vote.

The last AfD congress in April 2021 showed a party divided between moderates and radicals. The nomination of Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla confirmed the victory of the radical wing. Alice Weidel entered the Bundestag in the last vote on 24 September 2017 as did Tino Chrupalla, who had then defeated Saxony's Minister President Michael Kretschmer (CDU). "*This vote was an opportunity for the AfD to choose in which direction it wants to go; Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla are close to the radical trend without being part of it. However, other factors also played a role in this vote, starting with the popularity and media visibility of the two candidates. This is important for an election. Finally, this duo represents both the east and the west of Germany,*" said Kai Arzheimer, professor of political science at the University of Mainz.

The Alternative für Deutschland defends a very firm stance on immigration, wants to ban family reunification completely and calls for measures in favour of national preference. The party declares itself "anti-Islam". It is opposed to the sanitary measures that have been taken to protect the population from the pandemic (wearing masks, confinement, various restrictions). Finally, the AfD advocates a German exit from the European Union, the *Dexit*, and a return to the *Deutschemark*. "*The shift to the right has been underway since 2015 and voters know it. Those who*

were opposed to it have already left the ranks, others have joined the party. This explains the stability of the AfD in the polls over the past year and a half," said Kai Arzheimer.

Finally, the left-wing, Die Linke, a party of those who regard themselves as belonging to the most disadvantaged social categories and who suffered from the democratic transition of the eastern part of the country after the fall of the *Berlin Wall*, is struggling. It has lost its position as the leading protest party to the AfD.

It proposes an increase in unemployment benefit to 90% of the previous salary and an increase in social benefits. It is a strong supporter of Russia. Its defence of the legitimacy of the socialist experiment is undoubtedly a limit to its development.

On 2 May, Die Linke appointed Janine Wissler and Dietmar Bartsch to head the lists for the federal elections. Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, the party's designated spokesperson, chose not to run for this position. The two candidates were officially elected on 8 and 9 May by the party's executive officers and received 87% of the votes.

THE GERMAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The German Parliament is bicameral, comprising a lower and an upper house, the Bundestag, and the Bundesrat. Elections to the Bundestag are held every four years in a mixed system that combines first-past-the-post and proportional representation voting.

Each person has two votes.

The first vote (*Erststimme*) is used to elect the Member of Parliament for the constituency (*Wahlkreis*) in which he or she lives. There are 299 constituencies in the country, and the number of people elected in this way, who thus obtain a direct mandate, ranges from 2 in Bremen and 4 in Saarland to 64 in North Rhine-Westphalia.

The second (*Zweitstimme*) allows electors to vote in preferential order for a list presented by a political party at Land level (Germany has sixteen *Länder*).

Seats are allocated according to the *Sainte-Laguë/Schepers* method. The percentage of "second votes" determines the number of seats proportionally allocated to each party and ultimately the balance of power between the parties in the Bundestag. Only parties with more than 5% of the national vote or 3 direct mandates in the single-member constituency can be represented in the Bundestag. If a party wins more direct mandates in a Land than the number of seats it is allocated according to the number of "second votes", it nevertheless retains these surplus mandates (*Überhangmandate*). This explains why the number of members of the Bundestag varies from one election to the next.

Parties representing recognised national minorities (Danes, Frisians, Swabians and Roma) are exempt from the 5% vote threshold.

The German electoral system aims to ensure that the party has a stable parliamentary majority and to avoid the fragmentation of the political scene that the country experienced during the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), when the large number of parties represented in parliament made it almost impossible to form a government. In 1949, 11 political parties were represented in the Bundestag, in 1957 there were only four, and between 1961 and 1983 only three (SPD, CDU/CSU and FDP). In 1983, the Greens managed to pass the 5% threshold and enter the Bundestag, followed in 1990 by the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which emerged from the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the former German Democratic Republic (the former communist MPs entered the Bundestag one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall), the forerunner of the Left Party (Die Linke), and in 2013 by the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The latter is divided between a conservative current, focused on issues such as immigration, policing and the place of Islam in society, and a more realistic current, which is nevertheless in the minority.

7 political parties are represented in the current Bundestag:

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- the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of the outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel, in office since 2005. Founded in 1945 and led by Chancellor candidate Armin Laschet, the CDU has 200 MPs;

- The Christian Social Union (CSU), founded in 1946 and led since the end of 2008 by Bavarian Minister-President Horst Seehofer, has been cooperating electorally with the CDU since 1953. According to their agreement, the CDU does not present a candidate in Bavaria and the CSU competes only in this Land. The CSU has 45 elected members;

- The Social Democratic Party (SPD), founded in 1863, led by Norbert Walter-Borjans and Saskia Esken and headed in the federal elections by outgoing Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, is Germany's oldest political party, with 152 MPs;

- The Alternative for Germany (Afd), founded in spring 2013, is a right-wing populist party. Alexander Gauland is its honorary president and Jörg Meuthen and Tino Chrupalla its spokespersons. It has 87 seats;

- the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), founded in 1948 and led by Christian Lindner, has long been the kingmaker of German elections. It has 80 seats;

- the Left Party (Die Linke), a left-wing populist party, was formed in June 2007 by the merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which had emerged from the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the former GDR, with the Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), a movement created on 22 January 2005 and which united the former communist elite and those disillusioned with social democracy. Led by Janine Wissler and Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, it has 69 seats;

- the Greens/Alliance 90 (Grünen), formed in 1993 from the merger of Alliance 90, the civil rights movement of the former GDR, with the Green Party. Led by Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck, they have 67 seats.

There are nine non-attached Members.

The German parliament also has an upper house, the Bundesrat, comprising members of the governments of the country's 16 Länder. Each region has at least 3 votes; those with more than 2 million inhabitants have 4 votes; those with more than 6 million, 5 votes; and those with more than 7 million, 6 votes. In total, the Bundesrat has 69 members.

Finally, Germany elects its President of the Republic indirectly every 5 years. Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) was elected on 12 February 2017 by the Federal Assembly (*Bundesversammlung*), which comprised the 630 members of the Bundestag and an equal number of elected representatives from the 16 Länder and personalities from civil society. His term of office will therefore expire in 5 months.

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Reminder of the results of the federal elections of 24 September 2017 in Germany

Turnout: 76,15%

Political parties	Number of votes won	Percentage of votes cast	Number of seats	Number of votes won	Percentage of votes cast	Number of seats	Total number of seats won
Christian Democratic Union (CDU)	14 030 751	30,25	185	12 447 656	26,76	15	200
Christian Social Union (CSU)	3 255 487	7,02	46	2 869 688	6,17	0	46
Total Christian Unions (CDU/CSU)	17 286 238	37,27	231	15 317 344	32,93	15	246
Social Democratic Party (SPD)	11 429 231	24,64	59	9 539 381	20,51	94	153
Alternative for Germany (AfD)	5 317 499	11,46	3	5 878 115	12,64	91	94
Liberal Democratic Party (FDP)	3 249 238	7,00	0	4 999 449	10,75	80	80
Left Party (Die Linke)	3 966 637	8,55	5	4 297 270	9,24	64	69
Greens/Alliance 90 (Grünen)	3 717 922	8,01	1	4 158 400	8,94	66	67
Free Voters (FW)	589 056	1,27	0	463 292	1,00	0	0
Die PARTEI	245 659	0,53	0	454 349	0,98	0	0
Others	487 246	1,05	0	1 407 892	3,03	0	0
Independents	100 889	0,22	0			0	0

Source : <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html>

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