



Sources: Der Bundeswahlleiter, wahl.tagesschau.de

## The federal election of September 24, 2017

Karsten Grabow

### Key Points

- Despite significant losses the German Christian democrats remained as the strongest political forces in Germany. It is impossible to form a winning coalition against them. Angela Merkel will continue as Germany's next chancellor.
- The Social democrats achieved their worst result ever. They declared to go into opposition.
- While the former governing parties suffer from losses, smaller parties increased their results. The Liberals are back in parliament.
- With the Alternative for Germany there is a relevant right-wing nationalist populist party in parliament.
- Seven parties are represented in the new Bundestag. This is the highest number of parties since 1953.
- The formation of a new government coalition requires time and will end with high probability in a new coalition model.

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Despite severe losses the two Christian democratic parties attained important strategic goals. They remained as the strongest political forces in Germany. There is no winning coalition without them possible and Angela Merkel will be Germany's next chancellor.

The Social democrats lost more than five percentage points and gained 20.5 percent of the votes. This is the worst result the Social democrats got in an election since the foundation of the Federal Republic. Immediately after election, SPD chairman Martin Schulz declared that the Social democrats will go into opposition in the new electoral term.

Largest gains got the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The party received 12.6 percent and will form the third-largest group in the 19th German Bundestag, given that the retreat of the party chairwoman Frauke Petry from the formally not even founded group only a few hours after election does not cause further dissolution. The Liberals returned to parliament with a result of 10.7 percent. Basically, the Left and the Greens confirmed their results from 2013 with 9.2 and 8.9 percent, respectively.

Compared to 2013 turnout increased by roughly five percentage points to 76.2 percent.

## Large parties lose, small parties win

The parties which governed in the Grand coalition from 2013 to 2017 lost significantly. Similar to the prior Grand coalition from 2005 to 2009 it seems that this model harms the Christian democrats and the Social democrats – although both Grand coalitions were able to solve problems and although a majority of Germans feel satisfied with the overall political and economic situation.

With the AfD Germany has a relevant right-wing national populist party in parliament – like other European countries. The AfD mobilized especially former non-voters (roughly 1.5 million), followed by former CDU/CSU-voters (approximately one million), former SPD-voters (roughly 500.000) and former voters from the Left party (some 400.000). About two thirds of AfD-voters say that they voted for this party because of dissatisfaction with the others. Only one third declared a personal match with the party's ideology and its image. The AfD has its strongholds in the south-eastern part of Saxony. Here, candidates of the AfD won three electoral districts.

As in 2009, also the Liberals benefited from the Grand coalition. The party attracted roughly 1.6 million voters who supported the Christian democrats in 2013.

## Distribution of seats

Seven parties will be represented in the newly elected Bundestag. Because the Christian democrats form one parliamentary group the seven parties will organize in six parliamentary groups. Due to the introduction of balanced mandates as part of the reform of the electoral law the number of seats increases to 709. This number confirms worst expectations of experts related to the size of the Bundestag. Since

the reform was introduced in 2013 the experts warned of all side effects of an heavily increased parliament.

The strongest group is formed by the Christian democrats with 246 seats (minus 65). The Social democrats lose 40 seats and are going to send 153 MPs to parliament. The AfD gets 94 seats, the Liberals 80, the Left 69 and the Greens 67.

Even though the number of parties and parliamentary groups was not that high since 1953 there is a remarkable stability in German politics. Basically the newly elected parties are in parliament for decades. Only the AfD is really a newcomer. In 2013 the party failed to attain the five per cent electoral threshold. The entry of the AfD into the Bundestag is not a complete surprise, yet. Almost all neighbouring countries have right-wing and national populist parties which mobilize detached and dissatisfied voters at least in parliament for years.

After the Social democrats declared not to join a Grand coalition again, a new coalition model must be formed. Most likely is the so-called 'Jamaica-model' under leadership of the Christian democrats. Because of programmatic (and personal) intolerances, especially between the smaller parties of this model, complicated coalition negotiations will be expected. However, the Christian democrats will take action to form a coalition of responsible democratic parties rapidly in order continue Germany's successful way of development over the last years and to send out a positive signal to both the worried parts of the German voters and to Germany's international partners.

## Outlook

Prior to election polls were remarkable stable for weeks. After the hype of SPD chairman Martin Schulz was over, after the state election in North-Rhine Westphalia at latest, the Christian democrats led polls by large margins compared to the SPD and came close to their result of 2013. This margin was confirmed by and large, yet at a significant lower level. The return of the Liberals was quite sure for weeks, and no one doubted the entry of the Left and Alliance 90/The Greens. Almost everybody expected a victory of the Christian democrats and Angela Merkel. The only questions were at what percentage and with which coalition model.

The AfD that was torn by internal struggles for inner-party power over months before election has increased its result significantly compared to the polls. The party benefitted obviously from high intense coverage and strategic shortcomings in dealing with them. As a matter of fact, it mobilized more voters than the polls reflected before.

Probably the tone will be rougher between the parties and their MPs in the 19th German Bundestag due to the entry of the AfD and due to frustration of others. The AfD feels up-draft and announced to 'hunt' the next federal government, completely in line with their vigorous kind of language. The entry of the right-wing populist into the German parliament does not mark a crisis of German democracy, nor a crisis of the parliament or a threat for future government action. In order to prevent this it is necessary to form a capable government and to offer the voters convincing answers for the challenges ahead as soon as possible.

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