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GERMANY'S NEW CENTRISTS?

The evolution, political prospects, and foreign policy of Germany's Green Party

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countries across the trans-Atlantic alliance are suffering from deep polarization, shifting political landscapes, and doubts about the liberal order. American retrenchment, China's growing influence, the climate crisis, rising economic inequality, and the coronavirus pandemic are fueling the angst. In response, a new generation of moderate politicians has emerged with a different style of politics that includes hopeful, unifying messaging. Germany's Green Party, a strong contender to serve in the country's next government, is part of this trend.

Until the coronavirus outbreak, there was a developing narrative in German politics. The long-serving governing coalition — between Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) — was fading in dynamism. The traditional left/right political divide, embodied in these traditional parties, was being challenged by a liberal/illiberal rift. On one side was the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a far-right populist party that surged in the polls during the 2015 migration crisis. On the other side, the Green Party had evolved from its radical origins in the 1980s to become an appealing moderate force with increasing electoral success. Clear-eyed about the social transformations underway, the Greens have countered the fearmongering of the far right, seized ground from the center left with progressive policies, and developed a constructive approach that emphasizes coalition building and positive rhetoric. Yet the party remains largely untested at the federal level, faces lingering internal divisions, and has limited support in eastern Germany. Its centrist approach also carries political risks.

This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the Green Party, including its historical evolution, future electoral prospects, and foreign policy views. The Greens bear watching ahead of Germany's federal elections in autumn 2021 given their potential role in the next government. They can also serve as a case study for Western democracies that are struggling to stabilize the political center. This paper begins by tracking the party's evolution from the left-wing fringe to the moderate middle. Next, it explores the rising popularity of the Greens in recent years. It considers structural factors in Germany,

including the hollowing of the political center, the growth of the far right, and increasing concern about the environment. It also examines how the party changed itself by electing dynamic leaders, strengthening internal cohesion, and advocating a more inclusive approach. Finally, the paper assesses the Green Party's electoral prospects and its views on foreign policy issues of interest to the trans-Atlantic community.

INTRODUCTION

Countries across the trans-Atlantic alliance are suffering from deep polarization, shifting political landscapes, and uncertainty about the future of the liberal order. American retrenchment, China's growing influence, the climate crisis, rising economic inequality, and the COVID-19 pandemic are fueling the angst. At the same time, a new generation of moderate politicians has emerged in several countries with a different style of politics marked by messages of unity and hope. Consider Emmanuel Macron, with his "people-powered"¹ En Marche movement, who defeated a far-right candidate in French presidential elections in 2017, holding back the populist wave that contributed to Brexit and the election of U.S. President Donald Trump.² Ekrem İmamoğlu, a little-known Turkish politician, rallied a fractured coalition around a campaign of "radical love" to defeat the former prime minister from the ruling party and become mayor of Istanbul.³ And Zuzana Čaputová, a lawyer and environmental activist, defeated a European Commissioner backed by the ruling center left to become president of Slovakia in 2019 with messages of integrity, optimism, and civility.⁴ Although these politicians hailed from different



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backgrounds and faced unique challenges in their respective countries, they all used messages of inclusion, eschewed divisive rhetoric that demonized opponents, and built broad-based coalitions across ideological lines.

A similar trend is occurring in Germany. Until the coronavirus outbreak, there was an emerging narrative in German politics. The governing coalition — between Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) — was fading in dynamism. The traditional left/right political divide, marked by these two old parties, was being challenged by a liberal/illiberal split.⁵ On one side was a far-right populist party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which surged in the polls during the 2015 migration crisis. On the other side, the Green Party emerged as an appealing moderate force, having evolved from its radical, leftist origins to become an oft-cited potential coalition partner for the CDU after federal elections in autumn 2021.⁶ Consistently ranked second in opinion polls behind the CDU,⁷ the Greens looked more likely than not to serve in the next government. Although the pandemic has injected new uncertainties in recent months, including a resurgence in Merkel's popularity and a recession, the Greens remain a strong contender for federal office. With Merkel set to leave the chancellery next year, politicians on both sides of the Atlantic are beginning to grapple with a new phase in German politics. This paper examines a player that remains largely untested at federal level but bears watching in the coming year.

Beyond its electoral prospects, the German Green Party serves as a useful case study for Western democracies that are grappling with divided societies and struggling to stabilize the political center. The party is clear-eyed about the social transformations

underway and has championed a new style of politics in response to deepening conflicts on cultural issues. It has directly countered the fearmongering of the AfD, warning the center right about the risks of adopting populist rhetoric in response to the far right. The Greens have also seized ground from the center left by championing progressive, yet capitalism-friendly, policies. And it has developed a constructive style that relies on the creation of wide-ranging coalitions and hopeful messaging. If the Green Party's approach remains successful, it could provide an important model for countering polarization in other countries.

This paper discusses the history, rise, and future of the German Green Party. In addition to reviewing academic literature and policy documents, it draws from interviews with German politicians, journalists, and analysts; initial consultations occurred in Berlin in November 2019 with additional conversations by phone in June 2020. The paper begins by tracking the party's evolution from the left-wing fringe to the moderate middle. Next, it explores why the Greens have become so popular in recent years. It considers structural factors in Germany, including the hollowing of the political center, the rise of the far right, and increasing concern about the environment. It also examines how the party changed itself by electing dynamic leaders, strengthening internal cohesion, and advocating a more inclusive approach. Finally, the paper assesses the Green Party's electoral prospects and its views on foreign policy issues of interest to the trans-Atlantic community.

EVOLUTION OF THE GREEN PARTY

Origin story

The Green Party (Die Grünen) was founded in West Germany on January 13, 1980 as a pacifist “anti-party party”⁸ by a diverse group of environmentalists, feminists, peace activists, and anti-nuclear campaigners. The party's basic program (*Grundsatzprogramm*) said its policy was “guided by four principles: it is ecological, social, grassroots and non-violent.”⁹ Its original members were driven by environmental concerns, such as deforestation and acid rain, and opposition to nuclear power (a cause bolstered by the Chernobyl disaster in 1986).¹⁰ They were skeptical of partnership with the West, including Cold War efforts to enhance military capabilities.¹¹ They emphasized peace and disarmament, demanding that the United States remove its nuclear weapons from West Germany.¹² Its policy program called for the “dissolution of military blocs, especially NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the Warsaw Pact.”¹³

This broad platform differentiated the German Greens from its sister parties in other Western European countries, which focused primarily on ecological issues rather than wide-ranging grassroots concerns.¹⁴ Its membership drew from across the political spectrum, from dogmatic communists and nondogmatic socialists to middle-class conservationists and former *völkisch*¹⁵ activists.¹⁶ Several prominent Greens — including Reinhard Bütikofer,¹⁷ Jürgen Trittin,¹⁸ and Winfried Kretschmann¹⁹ — had political roots in communist groups founded in the 1960s. Yet despite its leftist leanings, the party largely adopted a “Third Way” approach to economic questions that sought to avoid the traditional dichotomy.²⁰ The party's heterogeneous composition and philosophical approach were reflected in its semi-official slogan: “We are neither left nor right, but in front” (Wir sind nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn).²¹

The party won early support: it was represented in six of West Germany's 11 state parliaments by 1982, won 28 seats in the Bundestag (the federal parliament) with

5.6% of the vote in March 1983, and increased its vote share to 8.3% in January 1987 elections. In December 1985, the Greens first entered state government by forming a coalition with the SPD in Hesse. Joschka Fischer became the country's first Green state minister, with responsibility for the environment. Michael Kellner, the party's current secretary general, said: "the party brought green to the republic, which was very grey."²² In keeping with their unconventional approach to politics, Green politicians wore denim and handmade sweaters to meetings; they also brought plants, babies, and their knitting to plenary sessions.²³ Fischer raised eyebrows by wearing white tennis shoes, jeans, and a sports coat without a tie when he was sworn in as minister.²⁴

Despite its early electoral success, grassroots opposition — not governing — was the party's aim. As the Greens were founded as an "anti-parliamentary party," some members objected to sitting in the Bundestag²⁵ and others worried that governing in Hesse would require too many concessions. These divergent

objectives reflected the internal tensions between the hardline *Fundis* (fundamentalists), who wished to remain in opposition as they were "more movement-oriented, ideologically radical, conceptually purist and strategically uncompromising," and the pragmatic *Realos* (realists), who were "practically oriented" and prepared to work in government coalitions

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with other parties.²⁶ Given the Greens' enthusiasm for participatory democracy, these differences were discussed at great length during party conferences.²⁷ Fischer, a leading *Realo*, recalled that the party's left wing "believed in utopian promises that never materialized. There was a bitter struggle for decades and idiotic radical left discussions: reform or revolution. My answer was always no. If you want revolution, don't go into parliament, as that needs votes and work within the system." The *Realos* won an early battle at the 1988 party conference, when Ralf Fücks (then serving as a Green member of the Bremen state parliament) and others successfully



ALLIANCE 90/THE GREENS (GREENS)

- **Founded:** 1980 (West German Greens); 1989 (East German Greens); 1990 (merger of West German Greens and East German Greens/Alliance 90); 1993 (merger of Alliance 90 and Greens)
- **Political orientation:** Center-left
- **Current leadership:** Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck
- **Years in federal government:** 1998-2005 (junior partner to SPD)
- **Current state government coalitions:** Baden-Württemberg (leader), Berlin (junior partner with Left Party to SPD), Brandenburg (junior partner with CDU to SPD), Bremen (junior partner with Left Party to SPD), Hamburg (junior partner to SPD), Hesse (junior partner to CDU), Rhineland-Palatinate (junior partner with FDP to SPD), Saxony (junior partner with SPD to CDU), Saxony-Anhalt (junior partner with SPD to CDU), Schleswig-Holstein (junior partner with FDP to CDU), Thuringia (junior partner with SPD to Left Party)
- **Current number of Bundestag seats:** 67/709 (9.4%)

advocated the removal of radical ecologists from the Green's executive committee, with the aim of evolving into a reform party that could work with Social Democrats and other like-minded groups to form new political majorities.²⁸

German reunification prompts reforms

The reunification of Germany in 1990 was an inflection point, as the Green Party misjudged the national mood. The party's focus on social movement concerns and its critique of consumer capitalism had lost its electoral appeal, as "the specific social milieu from which the Greens had once emerged was rapidly disintegrating."²⁹ Skeptical of unification, the party opposed the wholesale application of West German law to the eastern part of the country. Its campaign slogan, which paraphrased a popular ad by the German national railway, was "Everyone is talking about Germany. We're talking about the weather."³⁰

In December 1990, separate Bundestag elections were held in the two halves of the newly united country. This was the only election for which the 5% threshold — the minimum vote share required for a party to achieve parliamentary representation — was applied separately rather than nationally. In the west, the Greens narrowly failed to reach the threshold. In the east, environmental groups in Berlin had established the East German Green Party (Grüne Partei der DDR) in November 1989.³¹ It formed an electoral pact with Alliance 90 (Bündnis 90), a group of civil rights activists whose efforts helped bring down the Berlin Wall.³² Their combined effort earned 6.1% of the vote and eight Bundestag seats. The following day, the east and west green parties merged. In April 1993, they formally joined with Alliance 90. The new party was called Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), but it was known colloquially as the Greens.³³

The stinging defeat in the 1990 Bundestag elections led to soul-searching in the party. As Hubert Kleinert, one of the first Green members of the Bundestag, recalled: "The debacle paved the way for a change of attitude, and the Greens increasingly came to accept the fact that they were becoming a parliamentary party of reform, rather than a diffuse group of extra-parliamentary gadflies."³⁴ The party conference in April 1991 ratified Realo proposals, including changing its self-definition from an anti-establishment force into one of "ecological reformism."³⁵ But as Fücks later noted, these changes were by no means unanimous: "There was a zeitgeist on the left [in the Greens' early days] in which quarreling was a value in itself and fighting through world views was the most noble political activity."³⁶ Over 40 Fundi members left the party in disagreement after this party conference, which eased tensions but did not eliminate them.³⁷ The Greens also struggled to merge the western and eastern cultures of their constituent members. The former East German branches dissolved, former members of Alliance 90 left, and by the mid-1990s there were no Greens in several state parliaments in eastern Germany.³⁸ This division still plagues the party today.

The Greens performed well throughout 1991 in the western German states of Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Hamburg, and Bremen. These early successes enabled the party to explore different coalition arrangements. They formed a "red-green" coalition with the SPD in Hesse and an *Ampelkoalition* (a red-yellow-green "traffic light coalition") in Bremen that also included the liberal Free Democratic Union (FDP).

Coalition government hampered by war debates

In the 1994 federal election, the party returned to the Bundestag with 7.3% of the vote nationwide and 49 seats.³⁹ In advance of the 1998 election, the Greens benefited

from a national focus on “ecological modernization.” This led other parties to include environmental concerns in their platforms and helped pave the way for coalition talks.⁴⁰ (The fact that Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the CDU-FDP coalition had run their course after 16 years also helped.) After securing 6.7% of the vote, the Green Party joined the federal government for the first time in a red-green coalition with the SPD headed by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Joschka Fischer became vice-chancellor and foreign minister. Although he never held a senior office in the party, Fischer functioned as its informal leader until he left government in 2005. The party held three other ministerial positions,⁴¹ including Jürgen Trittin as minister of environment, nature conservation, and nuclear safety.⁴²

The Greens faced a serious crisis in 1999 when the coalition government decided to join NATO’s military operation in Kosovo, marking Germany’s first deployment since World War II. The party’s 1998 election program had advanced a “peace policy” that rejected “military peace enforcement and combat operations.”⁴³ Fischer lobbied delegates at a party conference in Bielefeld — held with police protection amid fist fights, nude male



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streakers, and paint bombs — to forgo their pacifist agenda and support the operation, reminding them that they were “no longer a protest party.”⁴⁴ He said he stood for “two principles: never again war and never again Auschwitz. Never again genocide and never again fascism. Both belong together for me, dear friends, and that is why I joined the Green Party.”⁴⁵ The

party ultimately backed Fischer in a 444-318 vote to defeat a motion demanding an end to the NATO bombing campaign. However, this decision affected the party’s composition and outlook: “around a third of the membership left and was replaced by a new intake, more amenable to the leadership’s orientation.”⁴⁶

In November 2001, the coalition was again strained by military debates. Schröder forced the Greens in parliament to support the government in a confidence vote over the deployment of German forces to Afghanistan as part of NATO operations after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Fischer threatened to resign if the Greens opposed the decision, arguing “This coalition has decisively renewed the republic.”⁴⁷ After four Green MPs reluctantly backed him, Schröder won with two more votes than the simple majority required. This was the first time the Bundestag approved the deployment of German troops in a combat role outside Europe since 1945.⁴⁸ The party has continued to debate the use of military force.⁴⁹

Return to the backbenches

Ahead of the 2002 federal elections, the party revised its basic program for the first time since 1980. It was clear on its values: “ecology, self-determination, expanded equitability and a vibrant democracy” as well as “non-violence and human rights.”⁵⁰ And it had a straight-forward campaign slogan: “The future is green.” Although the party failed to produce new proposals, severe flooding of the Elbe River⁵¹ and U.S. President George W. Bush’s Iraq policy gave salience to a platform that seemed outdated.⁵² The Greens increased their vote share to 8.6% and won 55 seats, but their SPD coalition partner suffered significant losses and only barely hung on as the largest faction.⁵³ Policy debates were dominated by Schröder’s introduction of labor market and welfare

reforms (known as Agenda 2010),⁵⁴ which aimed to pull Germany out of an economic slump that led *The Economist* to describe the country as “the sick man of the euro.”⁵⁵ The Green Party’s support for these measures upset its base.

The Greens suffered in the 2005 snap elections, despite winning 8.1% of the vote, on par with previous results. It lost four seats, finished fifth behind every other mainstream party, and entered the opposition. The SPD joined a grand coalition (*Große Koalition*, or *GroKo*) as the junior partner to the CDU/CSU (the Christian Social Union is the Bavarian sister party of the CDU), with Angela Merkel as chancellor. Joschka Fischer retreated from frontline politics and the Green Party launched an internal review, including of its approach to the ecological question. At a party conference in December 2006, the Greens produced a report that sought to combine Fundi and Realo approaches into a single outlook: “radical realism.” This view recognized the limits of previous eco-political assumptions while acknowledging the need for socio-economic changes.⁵⁶ At their conference the following year, the Greens called themselves “the party of lifestyle change” and argued that not only the wealthy but also average earners must invest in climate protection.

Between 2007 and 2011, the Greens experimented with different coalition arrangements at the state level with varying degrees of success.⁵⁷ A bright spot was a breakthrough in Baden-Württemberg, a state dominated by the CDU for six decades.⁵⁸ In March 2011, environmental concerns — related to political fallout from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan as well as local disagreements over the renovation of a train station in the state capital, Stuttgart — created an opportunity.⁵⁹ Although the CDU won the most seats, it fell short of the number needed to form a coalition with its traditional partner, the pro-business FDP. The Greens, who placed second, formed a coalition with the SPD and Winfried Kretschmann became Germany’s first-ever Green minister president (equivalent to a U.S. governor). Stuttgart also elected a Green mayor, Fritz Kuhn.

In the weeks after these elections, the party polled at 24% nationally. Its dramatic collapse before the 2013 federal elections — 10 points by fall 2011 and a further drop in late summer 2013 that resulted in 8.4% of the September electoral vote — was blamed on bad policies.⁶⁰ The party was ridiculed for “Veggie Day,” a proposal for school cafeterias to serve only vegetarian food one day a week.⁶¹ It was hurt by a divisive proposal to raise the top rate of tax to 49% for those earning over 80,000 euros annually.⁶² And it suffered from a controversy over some party members’ permissive views on pedophilia in the 1980s.⁶³ In addition, environmentalism had become mainstream, with Merkel known internationally as the “Climate Chancellor.”⁶⁴ The Greens failed to capitalize on the Fukushima disaster at national level, due in part to Merkel’s decision to phase out nuclear power.

After failing to join federal coalitions in 2005, 2009, and 2013, the Greens began stressing their policy independence.⁶⁵ They also benefited from developments in other parties: the CDU and the SPD were exhausted by years in government, the SPD was squeezed by Merkel’s liberalization of her party, and the FDP had tacked right. The Greens began occupying the center-left space, as the SPD’s leftist image was tarnished in coalition and the democratic socialist Left Party (*Die Linke*) was too radical for many voters.⁶⁶

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At the party's October 2013 conference, members agreed to consider a range of coalition configurations at federal level.⁶⁷ This approach was buoyed by the Greens' success in 2014 state elections, where they formed a "black-green" coalition with the CDU in Hesse as well as a "red-red-green" coalition with the SPD and the Left Party in Thuringia. When both functioned well, Michael Kellner said this marked a "turning point,"⁶⁸ as the Green Party's left wing accepted the feasibility of governing with the center right while the party's right wing accepted coalitions with the Left Party.

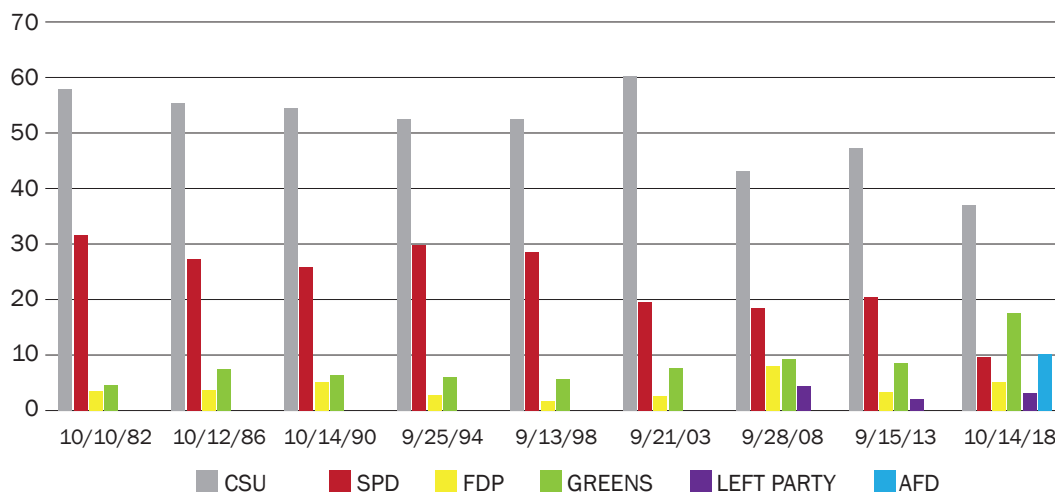
This newfound flexibility helped the Greens after the September 2017 Bundestag elections, where they won 8.9% of the vote and 67 seats. The SPD suffered a historically poor result (dropping to 20.5% from 38% in 2002) and announced plans to enter the opposition. The only alternative for the CDU/CSU was a "Jamaica coalition," with that country's flag representing the three blocs: black (CDU/CSU), yellow (FDP), and green.⁶⁹ Although this worked in state governments, it had never been tried at the federal level.⁷⁰ The month-long negotiations led to agreement on a range of issues, though the parties struggled to reach consensus on immigration and energy.⁷¹ When the FDP walked away, talks collapsed. Four months later, the Social Democrats backtracked on their decision to enter the opposition and negotiated another grand coalition with the CDU, to the dismay of their left wing.⁷²

Despite their failure, these negotiations gave the Greens a political boost: the ability of 14 politicians to effectively represent the membership demonstrated the party's pragmatism and ideological coherence.⁷³ According to Kellner, voters saw the party "was willing to talk, fight for its ideas, and govern the country."⁷⁴ Polls reflected this public confidence. Immediately before the election, support for the Greens had been at 7.5%; two weeks later, it climbed to 10%. It steadily increased over the next 18 months, reaching 23% in November 2018 and peaking at 26% in July 2019.⁷⁵

Bavarian success

The 2018 elections in Bavaria were another significant moment for the Green Party. The CSU had dominated state politics since the 1960s, generally garnering sufficient majorities to rule without a coalition partner. Yet in the October 2018 elections, the Green Party placed second with 17.6% of the vote (nearly doubling their 2013 vote share) and won 38 seats.⁷⁶ The CSU won 36.8% and the SPD 10.1%, with both parties losing more than 10 points since the previous election. The far-right AfD placed fourth with 10.3%. Robert Habeck, who had recently been elected co-leader of the Green Party, called it a "historic evening, of course for Bavaria, but also for the political dynamic in Germany, and if I may use the big word, even for Europe."⁷⁷

The Bavarian election occurred against the backdrop of an unprecedented migration crisis. In 2015, nearly one million migrants and refugees fled to Germany — mostly in response to the Syrian conflict and other wars, but also due to climate change and economic hardships. Although Merkel promoted a "culture of welcoming" (*Willkommenskultur*), she soon faced a backlash as numbers swelled and some Germans felt overwhelmed by foreigners.⁷⁹ By promising to "save Germany for the Germans," the recently-founded AfD attracted some CSU voters, including those who grew disaffected by Merkel's open-door policy.⁸⁰ In response, the CSU moved to the right on immigration and cultural issues. It used similar jargon, speaking of the "anti-deportation industry," "asylum tourism," and the need for a "conservative revolution."⁸¹ Yet both the AfD and CSU misread the electorate. Polls suggested voters were more worried about education,

FIGURE 1: VOTING IN BAVARIAN STATE ELECTIONS, 1982-2018

Source: Der Bundeswahlleiter [The Federal Election Commissioner]⁷⁸

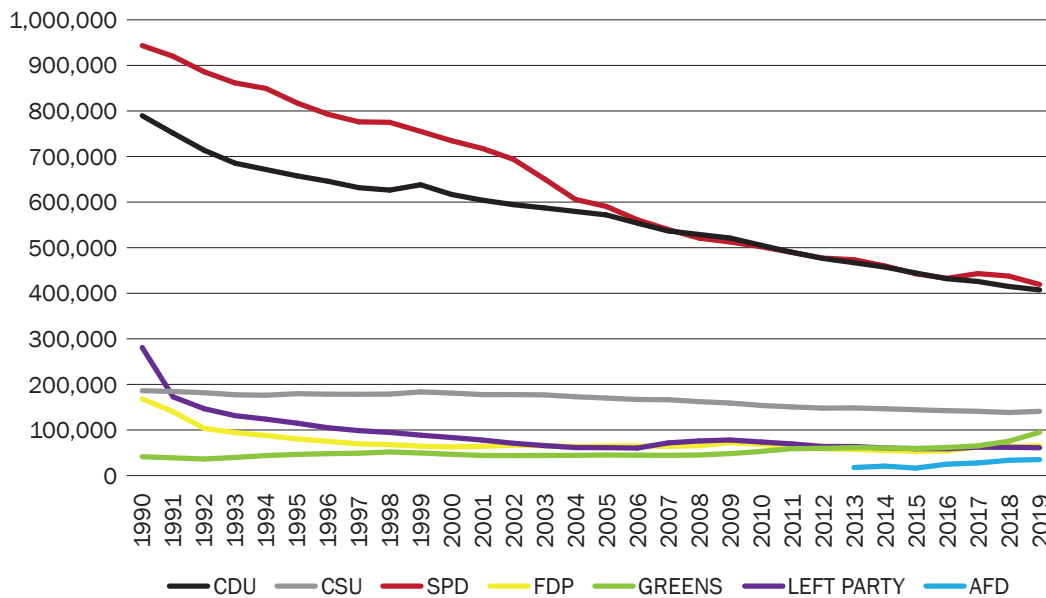
housing, and climate change — issues the Greens had prioritized in their campaign.⁸² The Greens, moreover, held firm with centrist messaging and a refusal to engage in polarizing politics.⁸³

In the May 2019 European Parliament elections, the Green Party again exceeded expectations. With just over 20% of the German vote (nearly double its 10.7% share in 2014), it won 21 seats — 10 more than in the last parliament — and outperformed other parties in the biggest cities. It trailed only the CDU, which lost five seats. The SPD suffered a historic defeat, losing 12 seats.⁸⁴ This success for the environmentalists, which was replicated in several other European countries including France and the United Kingdom, prompted journalists to herald a “green wave.”⁸⁵

In addition to support at the ballot box, Green Party membership increased significantly.⁸⁶ After a small dip in the early 1990s, numbers held steady at around 45,000 from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s. They began to increase in 2008, with significant growth in recent years: support started rising in 2017 (a 5.6% annual increase) and surged in autumn 2018 (a 15.8% annual increase).⁸⁷ Between December 2018 and December 2019, membership grew from 75,000 to 95,000 — nearly a 27% increase.⁸⁸ In early 2020, it reached 100,000.⁸⁹ This influx of new members has contributed to a generational shift and an evolution in the party's views.

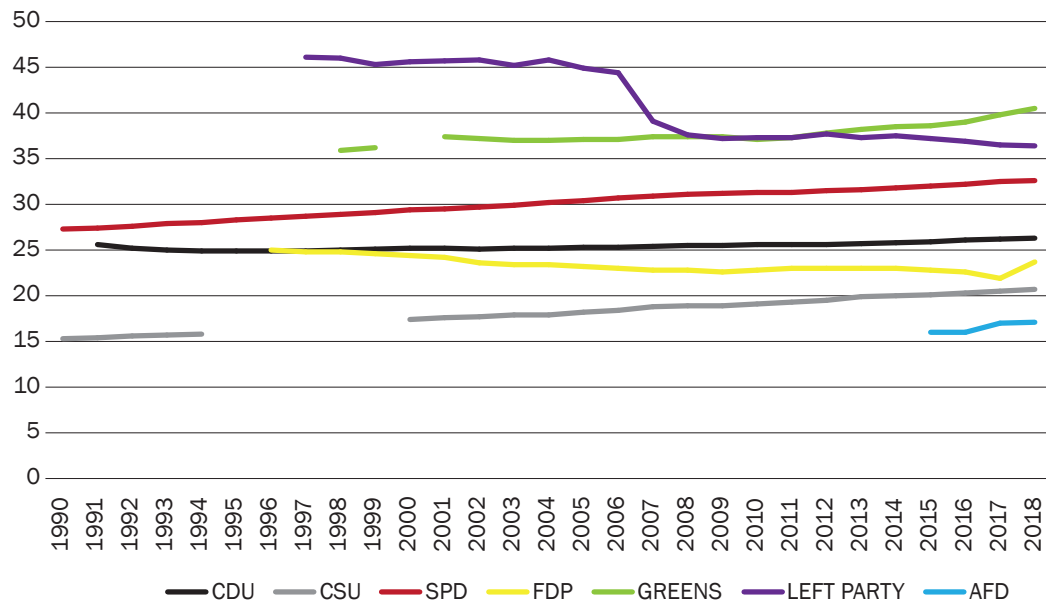
Notably, the Green Party has the highest proportion of female membership of any German party. The Greens, which were co-founded by the feminist movement and long supported equal rights, were the first parliamentary party to introduce a “women's statute” (*Frauenstatut*) in 1986. The percentage of women in the Bundestag had fallen below 10% in 1957 and remained there until 1983, when the Greens first entered parliament.⁹¹ They required that “half the power in the party go to women,” which it achieved and even exceeded by reserving the odd numbered positions on electoral lists for female candidates.⁹² This spurred other parties at the time (except the FDP) to take similar steps. The party has continued to support equal opportunities for women.⁹³

FIGURE 2: GERMAN POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP, 1990-2019



Left Party data reflects Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) membership from 1990 to 2006; Left Party membership from 2007. Source: Oskar Niedermayer, Freie Universität Berlin.⁹⁰

FIGURE 3: PROPORTION OF FEMALE MEMBERS BY PARTY, 1990-2018



Left Party data reflects Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) membership from 1990 to 2006; Left Party membership from 2007. Source: Oskar Niedermayer, Freie Universität Berlin⁹⁴

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN GERMANY

Forty years after its founding, the Green Party has seats in 14 of Germany's 16 state parliaments and plays a coalition role in 11 of them. It is currently the smallest party group in the Bundestag, but it comprises the second largest delegation of German members in the European Parliament. It consistently polls as the country's second most popular party, despite a dip since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and

is a serious contender for federal government in 2021. The party's recent success can be partly explained by structural factors in Germany, including the weakening of the political center, the rise of the far right, and growing public concern about climate change.

Hollowing political center

Modern German politics is marked by the weakening of the *Volksparteien*, the two centrist “people’s parties” that have dominated domestic governance since World War II. In the 1970s, the center-right CDU/CSU and center-left SPD won 90% of the vote with only three parties represented in the Bundestag.⁹⁵ In the 2017 federal elections, they won 55% with six parties in parliament. As of 2020, the CDU/CSU and SPD have been in a grand coalition for 11 of the last 15 years (2005-2009, 2013-2017, and 2018 onwards), which makes it difficult for them to define themselves in opposition to one another.

These traditional parties are accustomed to operating on left/right axes of power, but they have struggled to adapt to new political fronts. “As socioeconomic issues have lost their salience,” wrote the journalist Zia Weise of Politico, “transnational issues and questions of culture — from migration and multiculturalism to climate change, European integration and international trade — have become subjects of fierce political and societal debate.”⁹⁶ As a result, these parties have struggled to find a defining issue. Although politics have become similarly polarized across Western democracies, there is a unique national element in Germany, described by New York Times journalist Katrin Bennhold as the loss of a meta narrative after 1989: “The end of history left a vacuum, especially for the center right after being on the right side of history. Politics in the center became boring, as there’s no story to tell.”⁹⁷

Modern German politics is marked by the weakening of the *Volksparteien*, the two centrist “people’s parties” that have dominated domestic governance since World War II.



The Christian Democratic Union was founded in 1945 by a diverse group of politicians and activists as a center-right party that supported a free-market economy and social welfare programs while remaining conservative on social issues. With its Bavarian sister party (established the same year), it led the country for the first two decades after its founding and for most of the last two decades of the 20th century. After losses in 1998 and 2002, the CDU returned to government in 2005; it has governed — mostly in a grand coalition with the SPD — without interruption ever since. In October 2018, Merkel announced that she would neither run again for the party’s leadership that December nor for chancellor in the 2021 elections. Her hand-picked heir apparent and successor as party leader, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (widely known by her initials as AKK, and the country’s current defense minister), struggled to energize the party.⁹⁸

During interviews in fall 2019, politicians and analysts acknowledged a general willingness in recent years to let “Mother Merkel”⁹⁹ — the derogatory nickname initially given to the chancellor by men inside her own party — manage the country’s troubles, including the migration and debt crises.¹⁰⁰ Yet this sentiment was beginning to fade, as the public grew bored with the Merkel-led grand coalition, a lame duck ahead of 2021 elections. “Stability was good in the past,” said Left Party MP Stefan Liebich, “but now we need a functioning

democracy with more fight and competition.”¹⁰¹ The CDU's perceived steadiness was upended in February 2020, when Kramp-Karrenbauer announced her resignation as party leader after a shocking decision by the CDU in the eastern state of Thuringia to vote with the AfD to unseat the sitting Left Party minister president.¹⁰² The selection of her replacement was scheduled for the CDU party conference in April 2020, but it was subsequently postponed until December amid the coronavirus outbreak.¹⁰³

The leadership decision could significantly affect the CDU's electoral prospects, as the last two contests have largely been referenda on Merkel's management. The party's standing in the polls slid to 26% by July 2019, a stark decline from 40% in 2015 before the refugee crisis. But Merkel's handling of the coronavirus rallied public support, with numbers peaking at 39% in early May 2020.¹⁰⁴ (Wavering voter support during the refugee crisis suggests this uptick may be similarly short-lived, especially given the pandemic-induced recession.¹⁰⁵ By early October, it had fallen slightly to 35%.) Merkel's pandemic response, including the negotiation of the European Union recovery program, and her visibility during Germany's EU presidency (July to December 2020) could make it even harder for the party to define itself without her.

There are three official leadership contenders, none of whom seem sufficiently unifying to preserve the center ground.¹⁰⁶ Norbert Röttgen, chairman of the Bundestag Foreign Affairs Committee, surprised observers by formally throwing his hat in the ring first.¹⁰⁷ A centrist favorite of the party establishment, he lacks a senior backer and is seen as a long-shot. Armin Laschet, minister president of Germany's largest state (North Rhine-Westphalia), was an early front-runner as a “Merkel favorite” with moderate views.¹⁰⁸ He is a strong Europeanist, governing a state bordering the Netherlands and Belgium and speaking French. To bolster his candidacy, Laschet is running on an American-style ticket with Jens Spahn,¹⁰⁹ the current health minister who played a leading role alongside Merkel during the pandemic and provides an attractive counterbalance for the CDU's conservative wing. This has helped Laschet, whose credibility suffered as he was averse to implementing restrictive COVID-19 measures in his hard-hit region and quick to call for their removal. The third contender is Friedrich Merz. He boasts a lengthy political



CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (CDU) AND CHRISTIAN SOCIAL UNION IN BAVARIA (CSU)

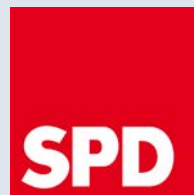
- **Founded:** 1945
- **Political orientation:** Center-right
- **Current leadership:** Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU), Markus Söder (CSU)
- **Years in federal government:** 1949-1969 (leader), 1982-1998 (leader), 2005-present (leader)
- **Current state government coalitions:** Baden-Württemberg (junior partner to Greens), Bavaria (CSU — leader), Brandenburg (junior partner with Greens to SPD), Hesse (leader), Lower Saxony (junior partner to SPD), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (junior partner to SPD), North Rhine-Westphalia (leader), Saarland (leader), Saxony (leader), Saxony-Anhalt (leader), Schleswig-Holstein (leader)
- **Current Bundestag seats:** 246/709 (34.7% — 200/709 CDU; 46/709 CSU)

track record, but lost previous leadership contests to Merkel in the early 2000s and to Kramp-Karrenbauer in 2018. He is popular with the free-market and law-and-order base, especially those who believe Merkel has moved too far left, but he lacks a deep network.

The current frontrunner is someone who is not even running: the conservative Bavarian minister president, Markus Söder.¹¹⁰ Söder came to office in March 2018, replacing Horst Seehofer, who became interior minister in Merkel's new cabinet; a year later, he replaced Seehofer as CSU leader. Söder has a 94% approval rating in Bavaria for his effective handling of the pandemic, with a hardline approach that made him the first German leader to issue stay-at-home orders and close schools. After losing votes to the Greens and AfD in the 2018 state elections, he made overtures on environmental issues¹¹¹ and has taken a tougher line on the far right.¹¹² Söder has repeatedly denied that he will run, though most observers believe he wants the job.¹¹³ However, several interviewees predicted that the CDU will not allow the party to be led by a CSU politician, especially after losing twice to the SPD when it ran CSU candidates for chancellor.¹¹⁴

Fatigue with the center right is compounded by the weakness of the center left, with general agreement that the SPD's near-term electoral prospects seem bleak.¹¹⁵ Germany's oldest party (established in 1863) has long been a leading left-wing force, with coalition governments headed by Willy Brandt (1969-1974) and Helmut Schmidt (1974-1982) delivering "on the promise of the social democratic welfare state: pensions, education and training for all, the liberalization of abortion regulations and divorce."¹¹⁶ Soon after, the party faced an identity crisis as it sought to reconcile the divergent interests of its supporters. Splits in the 1970s contributed to the rise of the Greens, while Schröder's embrace of "Third Way" labor market liberalizations paved the way for the creation of the Left Party in 2007.¹¹⁷ The party's historic objectives have largely been accepted and implemented by others. Jan Techau, an analyst at the German Marshall Fund when interviewed, described the SPD as a "spent political force." He added that "Several generations of party leadership have been unable

The leadership decision could significantly affect the CDU's electoral prospects, as the last two contests have largely been referenda on Merkel's management.



SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SPD)

- **Founded:** 1863
- **Political orientation:** Center-left
- **Current leadership:** Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans
- **Years in federal government:** 1969-1982 (leader), 1998-2005 (leader), 2005-2009 (junior partner to CDU/CSU), 2013-present (junior partner to CDU/CSU)
- **Current state government coalitions:** Berlin (leader), Brandenburg (leader), Bremen (leader), Hamburg (leader), Lower Saxony (leader), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (leader), Rhineland-Palatinate (leader), Saarland (junior partner to CDU), Saxony (junior partner with Greens to CDU), Saxony-Anhalt (junior partner with Greens to CDU), Thuringia (junior partner with Greens to Left Party)
- **Current Bundestag seats:** 152/709 (21.4%)

to define what social democracy might mean in a 21st century society. Today it's the Greens who are Germany's mainstream left-wing party."¹¹⁸

After the 2017 elections, the SPD intended to enter the opposition. But after coalition talks between the CDU/CSU, FDP, and Greens collapsed, the party ended months of political uncertainty and agreed to another grand coalition. One third of party members opposed this decision and voted against the coalition treaty.¹¹⁹ The following year, the SPD suffered significant losses in the May 2019 European Parliament election. Its leader, Andrea Nahles, resigned after 14 months in the job; this briefly raised questions about the coalition's future and the prospect of early elections.¹²⁰ In December 2019, the party picked a new leftist leadership — Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans — over a rival team led by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz. Despite the new leaders' initial threats, the party stayed in the governing coalition.¹²¹

In August 2020, the party nominated Scholz as its candidate for chancellor in next year's federal elections. This move was widely rumored but occurred sooner than expected. Given praise for Scholz's response to the pandemic and uncertainty about the CDU's personnel, the party is promoting an experienced alternative to Merkel — who is notably more centrist than the candidates who defeated him in the leadership race.¹²² The SPD has consistently polled in the low- to mid-teens since June 2019, with numbers on the higher end of that spectrum since the beginning of the pandemic (15% as of October 2020).¹²³ Metin Hakverdi — an SPD member of the Bundestag — predicted that “without Merkel on the ballot for the conservatives and with Scholz now confirmed as the SPD's candidate, the SPD will have a chance to emerge as the strongest party in next year's elections.”¹²⁴

Germany's two other parliamentary parties merit a mention to understand the political landscape before examining the far right. The Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei) was founded in 1948 by members of pre-war liberal political parties, the German Democratic Party and the German People's Party. It supports free-market economic policies, but it has historically leaned left on civil liberties, defense, and foreign policy. For much of the postwar period, it held the balance of power in parliament, serving as a junior coalition partner to the CDU/CSU (1949-1956, 1961-1966, 1982-1998, 2009-2013) and the SPD (1969-1982). In 2013, the FDP failed to win any seats or meet the threshold for list representation, leaving the party without Bundestag

Freie Demokraten

FDP

FREE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (FDP)

- **Founded:** 1948
- **Political orientation:** Center to center-right
- **Current leadership:** Christian Lindner
- **Years in federal government:** 1949-1956 (junior partner to CDU/CSU), 1961-1966 (junior partner to CDU/CSU), 1969-1982 (junior partner to SPD), 1982-1998 (junior partner to CDU/CSU), 2009-2013 (junior partner to CDU/CSU)
- **Current state government coalitions:** North Rhine-Westphalia (junior partner to CDU), Rhineland-Palatinate (junior partner with Greens to SPD), Schleswig-Holstein (junior partner with Greens to CDU)
- **Current number of Bundestag seats:** 80/709 (11.3%)

representation for the first time in its history. It regained its standing in 2017, winning 10.6% of the vote and 80 seats, and became a potential kingmaker in a Jamaica coalition with the CDU and the Greens.

Since abandoning those talks, leader Christian Lindner has shifted the party toward the right, making him popular among AfD voters and leading critics to compare him to right-wing Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.¹²⁵ The party's standing suffered when the FDP's leader in Thuringia, Thomas Kemmerich, was briefly elected minister president with AfD (and CDU) support in Thuringia in February 2020 over Left Party incumbent Bodo Ramelow.¹²⁶ The FDP is currently part of coalition governments in North Rhine-Westphalia (with the CDU), Rhineland-Palatinate (with the SPD and the Greens), and Schleswig-Holstein (with the CDU and the Greens). As of October 2020, its support hovered around 6%; the party may struggle to meet the 5% parliamentary threshold in the next election.¹²⁷

Rounding out Germany's parliamentary parties is the Left Party (Die Linke), a democratic socialist party founded in 2007 by the merger of Labour and Social Justice—the Electoral Alternative (WASG) with the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which descended from the former East German communist ruling party.¹²⁸ It currently holds 69 of 709 seats in the Bundestag after winning 9.2% in 2017 elections, making it the fifth-largest group. It also has seats in 10 of 16 state legislatures, including all five former East German states and Berlin. It is part of coalition governments in the states of Berlin, Bremen, and Thuringia — serving in a

coalition with the SPD and Greens in the latter two. During the coronavirus pandemic, its national support has hovered around 7%.¹²⁹ Its consistent poll numbers have led Der Spiegel to jokingly describe it “Germany’s most stable party.”¹³⁰

Rise of the far right

In addition to the weakening of the political middle, German politics has been marked by the rise of the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, or AfD), which emerged in 2013 during the European financial crisis. Its founders, primarily drawn from the CDU, were center-right conservatives and soft euroskeptics. They disliked Merkel's shift toward the center and her use of German taxpayer money to bail out other eurozone members. The party narrowly failed to reach the 5% threshold to enter parliament in 2013.

The party found a new cause in 2015, capitalizing on backlash against Merkel's immigration policy that triggered the arrival of a million refugees and migrants.

DIE LINKE.

THE LEFT PARTY (DIE LINKE)

- **Founded:** 2007
- **Political orientation:** Left to far-left
- **Current leadership:** Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger
- **Years in federal government:** None
- **Current state government coalitions:** Berlin (junior partner with Greens to SPD), Bremen (junior partner with Greens to SPD), Thuringia (leader)
- **Current number of Bundestag seats:** 69/709 (9.7%)

There was a power struggle that summer between the party's founders who focused on economic policy and a faction who advocated a hardline, nationalist approach; the latter won. Under new leadership, the AfD adopted a more populist and xenophobic tone that prioritized immigration, domestic security, and challenges to national sovereignty from European integration and refugees. The party blamed state failure and scorned political correctness, with then-party spokesman Alexander Gauland vowing in 2017 that the AfD would "take back our country and our people."¹³¹ Yet according to my Brookings colleague Constanze Stelzenmüller, the movement's enemy was not dark-skinned immigrants. Although such rhetoric mobilized voters, "The real thrust of their hostility was against Enlightenment liberalism, universalism, and global modernity. Its key concern and focus was 'metapolitics' – in other words, winning the culture wars – not the race wars."¹³² Stelzenmüller suggested Merkel's decision to move the CDU to the middle of the political spectrum had left the party's right flank uncovered.



ALTERNATIVE FOR GERMANY (AFD)

- **Founded:** 2012
- **Political orientation:** Far-right
- **Current leadership:** Tino Chrupalla and Jörg Meuthen
- **Years in federal government:** None
- **Current state government coalitions:** None
- **Current number of Bundestag seats:** 89/709 (12.6%)

In the September 2017 federal elections, the AfD attracted nearly six million votes (12.6%) and entered the Bundestag for the first time as the third largest party – and, given the grand coalition, the official leader of the opposition. The AfD received support across party lines: almost a million votes from the CDU; 500,000 from the SPD; 400,000 from the Left Party; and even 40,000 from former Green voters. In addition, 1.2 million votes came from those who previously stayed home.¹³³ The strongest support came from the former East German states (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Lower Saxony and Thuringia), where the party also won backing in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

Germany's political establishment knows well how a dangerous force can take power legally and destroy the system from within, as the Nazis created a dictatorship through the use of emergency powers in the Weimar-era constitution.¹³⁴ Germany's domestic intelligence agency (Bundesverfassungsschutz, or BfV) carefully monitored the aggressive rise and subsequent dissolution of the party's hard-right faction *der Flügel* ("the Wing").¹³⁵ During the AfD's first six months in parliament, a study by the liberal daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* found the party used "orchestrated laughter" by members, repeated interruptions, and provocative commentary to disrupt debate and discredit mainstream parties.¹³⁶ The paper reported that the AfD focused almost exclusively on immigration or law-and-order issues, even when other matters were being discussed. The party also abused the parliamentary process of "small inquiries" (*Kleine Anfragen*) to question the government.¹³⁷ Although other parties initially took the bait and unwittingly amplified the AfD's message, they have learned to focus on addressing voters' concerns. Yet, according to Stelzenmüller, "there can be no doubt

that the AfD has successfully moved the needle of public discourse to the right. As a result, the overall mood in German politics has become notably more febrile and defensive.”¹³⁸

As of October 2020, the AfD was polling nationally at 10%.¹³⁹ Although 39% of its supporters approved of Merkel’s handling of the coronavirus crisis,¹⁴⁰ the AfD maintained its backing in the eastern states during the pandemic (reaching 20% in both Brandenburg and Thuringia and 26% in Saxony).¹⁴¹ It found itself on the margins of lockdown debates, though some felt vindicated by the government’s decision to shut borders. It has regained its voice in discussions about reopening, and may become more vocal as the economy continues to suffer.¹⁴² In eastern Germany, the party has faced challenges from a newly established right-wing movement, *Widerstand 2020* (Resistance 2020), which has attracted conspiracy theorists, vaccination opponents, and civil liberties activists. The movement has led protests against the government’s coronavirus-related restrictions, claiming they unjustifiably infringe on citizens’ rights.¹⁴³

Growing environmental concern

Beyond capitalizing on domestic political trends, the Green Party has benefited from the increasing salience of its principal message. There is a long tradition of environmental concern across the political spectrum in Germany, but opinion polls show the matter has risen to the forefront in recent years.

During the 2019 European elections, 48% of Germans cited climate change as the most important issue and 88% of Green voters said the environment was important to their voting decision.¹⁴⁴ A 2019 poll by the Körber-Stiftung found 31% of Germans considered climate change to be the country’s greatest foreign policy challenge.¹⁴⁵ This focus has withstood the pandemic, with Germans citing climate protection (50%) and the coronavirus (39%) as their top priorities for the country’s presidency of the Council of the European Union, which began in July 2020.¹⁴⁶

There is a long tradition of environmental concern across the political spectrum in Germany, but opinion polls show the matter has risen to the forefront in recent years.



The challenge has become more visible than ever before, with the last three summers being particularly hot in Europe.¹⁴⁷ A severe drought¹⁴⁸ in 2018 caught the attention of voters in rural parts of eastern Germany, some of whom previously saw the environment as the concern of bourgeois city dwellers. As Joschka Fischer explained, “Climate change was an abstract scientific issue that’s hard to understand, but people now see the challenge. You don’t need to talk to scientists but can talk to witnesses — winemakers, farmers, foresters.”¹⁴⁹ Increased civic activism, including the student-led Fridays for Future protests,¹⁵⁰ rallied young voters. And, at least until the coronavirus outbreak, the handling of other pressing problems enabled a greater focus on climate issues. Refugees worried voters during the 2015 migration crisis, but asylum applications have dropped significantly.¹⁵¹ The German economy was also doing well: between December 2014 and December 2019, unemployment decreased from 2.8 million to 1.4 million (3.2%).¹⁵² This changed during the pandemic, with unemployment reaching 6.4% by late August 2020¹⁵³ and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicting a 5.4% drop in GDP this year as of mid-September 2020.¹⁵⁴

Although mainstream parties have incorporated environmental issues into their platforms, voters are frustrated by the failure of Merkel's government to articulate bold new plans. Fridays for Future made clear demands: a coal phase-out by 2030, 100% renewable energies, and net carbon neutrality by 2035. Yet the government has abandoned its 2020 emissions target and faced significant expenses in restructuring the energy market.¹⁵⁵ As a result, the CDU and SPD find themselves torn between their traditional constituencies: industry on the one hand and industrial voters on the other. This has created an opening for the Greens, which has become the home for those worried about the environment and frustrated with the current coalition.¹⁵⁶

THE GREENS' RISING POPULARITY

The Green Party has undoubtedly benefited from evolving political trends in Germany, including fatigue with the old style of politics and growing concern about the environment. As Ralf Fücks — who has become one of the Green Party's pre-eminent public intellectuals alongside Fischer — observed, it “is the perfect reincarnation of the zeitgeist.”¹⁵⁷ Yet the Greens have also done considerable work, including electing new leaders in 2018, forging greater internal cohesion, and developing a more inclusive style of politics.

Dynamic leadership & internal cohesion

The Greens are currently led by two young, dynamic, and centrist politicians: Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck. The party, which has always chosen male and female co-leaders, traditionally split the two posts between a centrist and a more radical member. But at the January 2018 party conference, delegates chose to elect two members of the Realo wing, which could make the party more attractive to non-Green voters and to other parties as a coalition partner.¹⁵⁸ Baerbock received nearly 65% of the vote, with Habeck garnering 83%. They replaced outgoing co-chairs Cem Özdemir and Simone Peter, both of whom declined to stand for re-election.¹⁵⁹ At the November 2019 party conference, after success in regional and European elections earlier that year, Baerbock and Habeck were re-elected with 97.1% and 90.4% of the vote respectively.¹⁶⁰ Despite media speculation about which of them would serve as chancellor if the party won federal elections, they have dodged the question.

Several interviewees attributed the Greens' recent success in part to the leaders, with Jan Techau describing the duo as “likeable: they are not seen as firebrand revolutionaries but as progressive. They

ANNALENA BAERBOCK, a 39-year-old mother of two who grew up in the western state of Lower Saxony, followed a traditional political path. After graduate studies in international law in London, she worked for a member of the European Parliament and served as an adviser on foreign and security policies for the Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag. She was elected to the Bundestag, representing a district in the eastern region of Brandenburg on the German-Polish border, in 2013 and 2017.

ROBERT HABECK was born to pharmacists in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, near the Danish border. A 51-year-old father of four boys, he began his career by writing plays, children's books, and novels. He was elected to his home state legislature in 2009 and served as party group leader for three years. He was deputy minister president and state minister for energy, agriculture, environment and rural areas from 2012-18 in governments led by the SPD (2012-17) and CDU (2017-18). He published political books in 2016 and 2018, which respectively make the case for a new style of politics beyond the left/right axis and address the importance of political language.

are green enough for the left and pragmatic enough for the less ideological.”¹⁶¹ In particular, they have been credited for addressing long-standing internal divisions. As journalist Stefan Braun of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote, “Seldom has a party leadership succeeded in creating so much unity so quickly. This is especially remarkable because Baerbock and Habeck took the considerable risk of bringing the once quarreling Greens together on a path of growing realism, of all things. Only a few years ago they would probably have considered this impossible themselves.”¹⁶²

Unlike the highly public ideological battles of the 1980s, there is widespread agreement that the Greens are now more unified than ever. Commentators such as Braun have observed clarity in the Greens’ topline messages: “Climate protection, refugee policy, the fight against intolerance and racism — what divides other parties is regulated by the Greens. The Greens have a clear profile on the very issues that many in society currently consider the most important. In times of great uncertainty, this is a political asset that the other parties are trying to gain in vain.”¹⁶³ The party appears even more cohesive when compared with others. A 2019 political attitudes survey by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach asked respondents which parties had internal divisions: 64% said the SPD, 53% the CDU/CSU, and 26% the AfD; only 4% named the Greens.¹⁶⁴

As the party has grown in recent years, the Greens have incorporated new members with different views from the founders. The Fundi wing, whose membership shrank in the 1990s, has largely lost the internal debates. The generational transition helped bring peace, with Joschka Fischer noting “the combatants are getting old and tired.”¹⁶⁵ As Britta Jacob, the party’s senior policy advisor on international and EU affairs, explained: “some members need to face the reality that the current electoral success is closely linked to the change of policy by the new leadership.”¹⁶⁶

Despite agreement on values, divisions on some policies persist. In particular, the leaders’ centrism is not shared uniformly across the party — with several interviewees noting that the party’s base continues to lean left. Jürgen Falter, a political scientist, wrote that the Greens benefit from a “decisive and unified appearance” in contrast to the weakness of traditional parties. However, he described their biggest weakness as “the split into eco-socialists, eco-liberals and eco-conservatives. You never know who will dominate and prevail — the system changers or the environmental rescuers.”¹⁶⁷

In contrast to the early Greens’ propensity for intense and public disagreement, the party has learned to solve conflict behind closed doors. The clear desire for political power has dictated greater message discipline. According to analyst Gaëlle Winter, Baerbock and Habeck “bracketed or reinterpreted” internal divisions on foreign and security policy given their focus on electoral success.¹⁶⁸ They also relied on “a tightened team of permanent party employees” when writing the party’s new policy program to avoid conflict. The party’s lack of experience at the federal level since the Schröder coalition years has allowed them to remain fuzzy on thorny policy questions, as discussed later in this paper. When pressed about lingering divisions, Green Party officials acknowledge robust internal debate but argue that the Fundi/Realo divide is less salient these days amid emerging issues.

New approach to politics

As the *Volksparteien* lost their way, voters began seeking a new guiding narrative.¹⁶⁹ This has been complicated by an emerging third dimension of German politics beyond the traditional left/right divide, which addresses cultural issues.¹⁷⁰ Authoritarianism,

xenophobia, and nationalism are on one plane, while cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, Europeanism, and participatory governance are on the other.¹⁷¹ As Robert Heinrich, chief of staff to the Green Party's leaders, observed: "On the cleavage between social welfare and liberal markets, the more traditional parties used to dominate the debate. On the new cleavage between liberal versus authoritarian values, the Greens and the AfD are natural opponents."¹⁷² Indeed, as The New Yorker's Isaac Chotiner has argued, the Greens have replaced the SPD as the main left party because they have developed a better brand: "why would you vote for a party as tired as the old social democrats look when labor unions aren't really a factor for most of the voters involved, and the key issues are more to do with the environment, Europe, and migrants?"¹⁷³

In response to this emerging cultural divide, the AfD deployed populist rhetoric while the CDU/CSU experimented with exclusionary politics to maintain voter support. In contrast, the Greens have advocated a different style of discourse. Britta Jacob explained it as the "courage to communicate differently" by framing issues in a positive manner with



A key theme for the Greens is countering fear, a clear response to tactics used by the AfD.

a style that is "clear and less complex." This approach, Jacob continued, "affects how we engage political opponents. We don't attack or act like we know it all. We don't get personal. We support their fair points and seek cooperation on certain issues."¹⁷⁴ The Greens used

this tactic during the coronavirus pandemic, with party leaders making an early and deliberate decision to refrain from unnecessary criticism, support what the coalition did well, and make recommendations when they identified gaps (e.g., they critiqued the government's economic stimulus package for failing to include sufficient climate protections or address the needs of women and children).¹⁷⁵

Habeck, perhaps because of his background as a writer, has stressed the importance of narrative: "People hear about the challenges, are confronted by facts and figures, but don't necessarily feel a connection to politics anymore... That's the vacuum that populists tap into." In order to fight populism, he argued, "politicians need to tell a compelling story that arouses emotion and inspires."¹⁷⁶ In his 2018 book, *Wer wir sein könnten* ("Who we could be"), he argued that "[p]olitics is language, and language is politics... It is not difficult to be cynical, populist and bitter, not difficult to say what is not possible, not difficult to bad-mouth others. Let us dare to be open... to be vulnerable and optimistic."¹⁷⁷

A key theme for the Greens is countering fear, a clear response to tactics used by the AfD. When a journalist asked Habeck if politicians needed a thicker skin, he replied: "when you pursue a politics driven by fear, you've already lost... I concentrate on positive interactions that greatly outweigh that which comes from threats."¹⁷⁸ Cem Özdemir, Habeck's predecessor as the party's co-leader, made a similar argument in his November 2019 Schiller lecture.¹⁷⁹ He called on Germans to protect democracy and free society from hateful reactionaries who use the discourse of culture and identity to exclude others, arguing for engagement with all rather than only those with whom one agrees.

The Green Party effectively employed this strategy during the 2018 elections in Bavaria, led by local leader Katharina Schulze. When the AfD focused on migration and the CSU shifted right in response, the Greens addressed issues of concern to voters and

provided a sense of optimism. As Schulze explained, “Our slogan is ‘giving hope instead of fear.’ We give options and opportunities, focusing on a brighter future for all of us... The world doesn’t get better through complaints but by action.”¹⁸⁰ In her recent book, *Mut geben, statt Angst machen: Politik für eine neue Zeit* (“Giving courage instead of causing fear: Politics for a new era”), she argued that overcoming crises “requires one thing: the courage to go ahead and leave behind the fear of change. An active and proactive optimism.”¹⁸¹

The Greens repeated this positive messaging during elections in eastern German states, where the AfD has performed well. Green campaign signs proclaimed: “Courage has many faces” and “Open the heart, let out the hate.”¹⁸² In response, the AfD started targeting its Green opponents directly. Rather than channeling voter frustration with migrants, the party began championing rural voters who felt unfairly targeted by environmental policies. Its posters clamored: “Save the Diesel.” This led the Greens to double down on liberal democratic values, with posters countering: “Hatred is no alternative for Germany.”¹⁸³

KATHARINA SCHULZE, an energetic and relentlessly optimistic regional leader in the Green Party, could represent the future of German politics. The 35-year-old has served in the Bavarian parliament since 2013 and led the Green Party’s parliamentary group since 2017. She outlined her political views in a recently published book, addressing the challenges of sustainability and digital change, the need for equal rights and female empowerment, debates over freedom and security, and resistance to the political right.

In addition to rhetorical shifts, the Greens are seeking to reclaim traditional conservative symbols. For example, Schulze’s campaign embraced Bavarian customs — such as wearing the dirndl (a traditional female outfit) and talking politics in beer tents — which the dominant CSU had viewed as its exclusive cultural property. As Özdemir noted in his Schiller lecture, “[t]he struggle for symbols is representative of the question of direction in our country.”¹⁸⁴

Skeptics of the party’s approach question its depth and effect, suggesting there is more style than substance. As one German weekly noted, “A lot of people like what [Habeck] says and how he says it, but they don’t recall afterward what he was talking about.”¹⁸⁵ Armin Laschet, the North Rhine-Westphalia minister president and candidate to lead the CDU, argued:

“The Greens are not responsible for the government, do not have to act in concrete terms and can therefore express themselves emphatically on any topic that they want to address.... The philosophical reflections of a poet from the North [Habeck] are particularly popular.... That sounds quite good, but it quickly loses substance if you listen carefully or ask questions.”¹⁸⁶

Lessons learned

The Green Party has learned lessons from the past. For starters, it moved away from its previous approach of “forbidding things” — such as the disastrous Veggie Day. The party also began advocating environmental action in cooperation with market capitalism. According to leftist writer and Left Party member Loren Balhorn, “Although never explicitly anti-capitalist, the Greens long harboured a degree of scepticism towards the free market and, as recently as 2013, were still projecting a left-wing image under

the former leader Jürgen Trittin.”¹⁸⁷ Now, party leaders approach business as a partner rather than an enemy in the climate fight. Habeck attended the World Economic Forum at Davos this year, while business executives have joined the party’s conferences.¹⁸⁸ This shift has increased the appeal of the Greens to more conservative voters, an important step toward a possible federal coalition with the CDU/CSU.

In addition, the party has recognized the need to address the socio-economic effects of environmental policy by observing the French case. Emmanuel Macron took office as president in May 2017 on a reformist agenda, with his new party La République En Marche! sweeping to a parliamentary majority the following month. The Greens paid close attention to Macron’s environmental plans, particularly after his proposed fuel tax increase sparked widespread protests led by the Yellow Vest (*gilets jaunes*)



The Green Party has learned lessons from the past. For starters, it moved away from its previous approach of “forbidding things” — such as the disastrous Veggie Day. The party also began advocating environmental action in cooperation with market capitalism.

movement.¹⁸⁹ Although the diesel tax was portrayed as a climate-saving measure, it was perceived as imposing an unfair burden on the working class in rural areas, especially as a means of offsetting damage caused primarily by big businesses and urban elites. Franziska Brantner, a Green MP who studied in France, met with Yellow Vest leaders in February 2019 and praised her party leaders’ early readiness to address

these issues.¹⁹⁰ They have started publicly acknowledging the importance of balancing ecological and social transformation with protecting the markets. “The lesson from France,” said Baerbock, “is that we cannot save the climate at the expense of social justice. The two things need to go hand in hand.”¹⁹¹ Similarly, Habeck recognized that “efforts to promote Green economic policies have burdened the poorest members of our society.” Taxing consumption places a heavier load on lower-income households, which he said “was the economic driver behind the yellow vest protests in France.”¹⁹²

More broadly, the Greens have changed the country’s political debate. An academic study of the party’s first 30 years in parliament found that it “successfully institutionalized in Germany’s mainstream a brand of progressive politics that [in the 1980s] was at best a fringe occurrence consumed and followed by politically marginal sects. The Greens have become established without being the establishment. Some of their political leaders now wear suits without having become such.”¹⁹³ The party’s current approach appeals to the German public, according to psychologist Jo Groebel. The Greens “combine the ideas of ethically responsible politics on the one hand, with the promotion of material well-being of the citizens on the other.” The party now represents “the German desire for harmonious and economically sound everyday life with a morally ‘superior’ approach to politics.”¹⁹⁴ The question is whether this view will remain as popular during a coronavirus-induced recession as it has been amid a historic budget surplus.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Although the Green Party achieved impressive electoral results in 2019, its standing suffered during the coronavirus pandemic. From mid-March to early May 2020, the party’s popularity fell steadily to the mid- to high-teens, as voters rallied around the chancellor. By July, the Greens regained some ground, with polls placing them at 20%;

after a dip in August, they returned to 21% by early October.¹⁹⁵ Yet if a week is a long time in politics, then Germany's fall 2021 elections remain a lifetime away. This section looks at the Green Party's electability, especially its challenge attracting support in eastern Germany, and options for a governing coalition.

Electability

The upcoming federal elections will be a watershed moment in German politics. Germans, who are traditionally conservative about changing government, will vote in the first election since 1949 without an incumbent chancellor. Although the CDU remains the strongest party, will that continue without Merkel at the helm? With Scholz as the SPD's candidate for chancellor, will the party emerge as a serious contender? Will the FDP recover? Will the Left Party remain stable? Will the AfD rise again? And will Greens run for first place rather than as a junior partner? The answer to these questions will shape the outcome.

When asked about the typical Green voter, several interviewees described a middle-class mother who is university-educated, lives in a city, and has multicultural and secular views — similar to what American pundits call the “soccer mom.” An in-depth study of Green Party supporters in 2016 confirmed these perceptions.¹⁹⁶ It found that 60% are women. The average age is 48 years old; nearly half are between 30 and 54, a fifth are under 29, and a third are over 55.¹⁹⁷ Almost half reside in communities with over 50,000 inhabitants. They are educated, with 37% holding university degrees and 51% having completed high school or vocational training. Of the 62% of Green supporters who are employed (with 9% students and 18% retirees), 72% are white-collar workers; blue-collar workers, civil servants, and self-employed each comprise around 9% of supporters. Notably, 89% of Green supporters are west German (who comprise more than 80% of the country's total population).¹⁹⁸

The Green Party faces its biggest electoral challenge in eastern Germany. Weakening support for the center has contributed to the AfD winning a quarter or more of the vote in recent state elections there.



Indeed, the Green Party faces its biggest electoral challenge in eastern Germany. Weakening support for the center has contributed to the AfD winning a quarter or more of the vote in recent state elections there.¹⁹⁹ The Greens are often viewed in this region as a bourgeois party, with some voters believing that climate concerns are a luxury of the rich, environmental policies (such as ending coal mining) hurt the economy, and the party cares more about refugees than local jobs. There are also systemic factors at play.

Since reunification, Germany has suffered from an enduring divide. A poll by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach in January 2019 showed that 52% of east Germans (as opposed to 26% of west Germans) felt their regional origin still set them apart.²⁰⁰ Exit surveys for the September 2019 state elections in Brandenburg²⁰¹ and Saxony²⁰² found 59% and 66% of those polled, respectively, agreed that “East Germans are second-class citizens.” A study of Berlin and the five eastern states found that 58% of respondents said they were no better protected against arbitrary actions by the state than under the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR).²⁰³

Part of the challenge is political, with democracy having had fewer years to take root in the east. Another component is financial, as the region's economy suffered after

the Berlin Wall fell. Yet significant investment in reconstruction has contributed to strong economic growth, record-low unemployment, and steadily rising salaries and pensions.²⁰⁴ Eastern Germany's GDP rose from 43% of West Germany's GDP in 1990 to 75% in 2018, while household income in the east reached 85% of the west's in 2018; the gap is further reduced when taking into account the disparity between average costs of living.²⁰⁵

As a result, analysts frequently cite emigration as an important explanatory factor for the AfD's success in the east. According to the journalist Tobias Buck of the Financial Times,

“The exodus of more than 1.9m eastern Germans since 1989 is seen by many as a key reason for the malaise. Those who left were overwhelmingly young, ambitious and well-educated — precisely the kind of citizens the east needs today to strengthen the economic and democratic fibres of society. Among those who stayed put, a certain nostalgia has taken root, along with a deep anxiety about yet more upheaval and change.”²⁰⁶

A study by the weekly Die Zeit found that the AfD performed well in eastern German districts during the 2017 federal elections where populations had shrunk most since 1991.²⁰⁷ DIW, a Berlin-based economic

policy think tank, reached similar conclusions after examining structural differences at the district level: “the Green Party is particularly popular in economically strong, demographically young, and dynamic districts with solid economic structures.... the AfD receives more support in economically weaker,

vulnerable districts where demographics skew toward the older population because younger people have moved away.”²⁰⁸

There is also a significant representation gap. The East German elite lost their positions to westerners in the early 1990s, with recent studies showing easterners only hold one in five leadership roles in the region.²⁰⁹ No major German companies have their headquarters in the east, and virtually all universities and cultural centers are headed by west Germans. Nationally, a 2017 study found that east Germans account for 17% of the population but hold only 1.7% of the top jobs in politics, law, military, and business. Merkel, who grew up in Brandenburg, is a rare exception. Even the AfD's leadership is drawn almost exclusively from western Germany, where it has struggled to earn more than 10% of the vote. Nonetheless, “it has managed to present itself as an authentic voice of the east, vowing to complete the East German revolution of 1989 by toppling the old liberal order of the federal republic.”²¹⁰ The far-right party has compared the political correctness of modern Germany to the totalitarian rule of the GDR and tapped into nostalgia for a past that was supposedly more egalitarian and homogenous.²¹¹

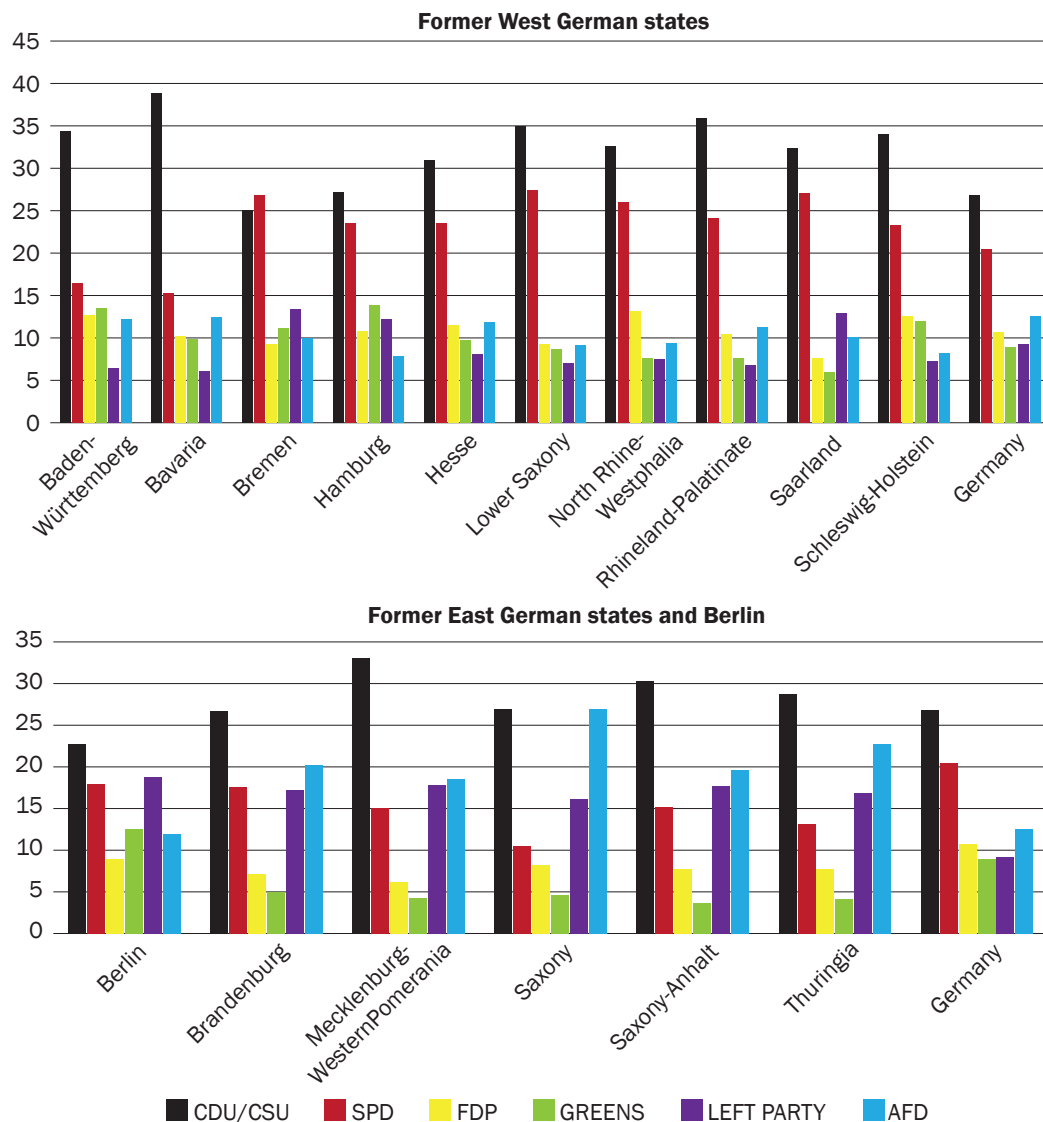
Despite the AfD's success, the Greens are enlarging their political footprint eastwards. In recent years, young people have begun returning to the east's few big cities (Dresden, Halle, Leipzig, Potsdam) and contributed to the development of a “green milieu” there. During the 2019 European Parliament elections, the Greens received the highest vote share of any party in Jena, Leipzig, Potsdam, and Rostock and placed a close second to the Left Party in Halle and Weimar.²¹² In state elections, they neither



The Greens are part of coalitions in four of five state parliaments in the east (Brandenburg, Saxony, Lower Saxony, and Thuringia), where they have demonstrated their governing strengths.

face a 5% percent electoral threshold nor compete for first place. The Greens are part of coalitions in four of five state parliaments in the east (Brandenburg, Saxony, Lower Saxony, and Thuringia), where they have demonstrated their governing strengths.²¹³

FIGURE 4: 2017 NATIONAL ELECTION RESULTS BY STATES



Source: Der Bundeswahlleiter [The Federal Election Commissioner]²¹⁴

Coalition options

As the 2021 federal elections approach, Green Party leaders will need to determine whether they are running to form a government or to serve as the junior partner in a coalition. They are reportedly discussing their strategy, with a final decision to be taken closer to the election. The party started 2020 three to four percentage points behind the CDU and its lame duck leader, which put the chancellery in sight; yet as Merkel’s ratings soared during the pandemic, the party was forced to reassess. The Greens, which have a history of doing well in polls and less well on election day, must weigh the pros and cons. If they are within striking distance of first place, they may decide to pursue that option lest the SPD seize the momentum and media interest –

which has arguably already started with the Scholz announcement. Yet by doing so, the Greens will become subject to intense media and public scrutiny that could raise difficult questions. The party is clear at a minimum about its determination to serve in government, which marks a change from past debates about remaining in principled opposition.

The Greens have become increasingly competitive on the left and right, with supporters drawn from both disappointed SPD members and those raised in CDU-supporting families. Between the 2017 federal elections and the 2019 European Parliament elections, the Greens gained 1,250,000 votes from the SPD; 1,110,000 from the CDU; and 70,000 from the AfD.²¹⁵ This gives the party a range of coalition prospects, with Fücks describing them as the “real center because they are able to build coalitions with the most parties and have the most partner options.”²¹⁶ A 2019 survey by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach showed voters were open to a range of configurations: 21% wanted another grand coalition, 27% said SPD-Greens-FDP, and 19% wanted Greens-CDU. An equal proportion of Greens (32%) cited the SPD and FDP as their second-choice parties, while 43% of SPD and 45% of FDP supporters ranked the Greens second.²¹⁷



As the 2021 federal elections approach, Green Party leaders will need to determine whether they are running to form a government or to serve as the junior partner in a coalition.

“Greens are focused more on saving democracy by broadening the base and engaging other parties. We are open to working with whoever is willing to work with us, because it is better to have some Greens than none.”²¹⁸ During a February 2020 speech in London, Habeck noted the Greens have forged alliances with a range of different social groups, including businesses, churches, and Fridays for Future. “We see ourselves as an alliance party and an alternative to the people’s party.”²¹⁹ Similarly, Baerbock told the party conference in November 2019: “We have to create broader alliances, not with those who think in the same way we do, but with those who challenge us... who dare to contradict each other... who bring others together, because only in this way can we change instead of making promises.”²²⁰

In many ways, the SPD is the Greens’ obvious coalition partner given the party’s leftist roots and their previous cooperation at the federal level. In January 2020, Habeck told the party’s executive committee that “In terms of content, we are still closest to the SPD.”²²¹ At the time, declining support for the SPD — which hovered around 15% before the coronavirus pandemic — raised questions about the feasibility of a coalition. Yet the party’s announcement of the well-liked Scholz as its chancellor candidate could boost both its electoral prospects and the odds of a left-wing coalition, which would create challenges and opportunities for the Greens. As Constanze Stelzenmüller observed: “The Greens display a studied indifference to all this that betrays an awkward dilemma. They owe their surge to a progressive centrism designed for cross-over appeal to conservatives. But much of their base remains very left-wing.”²²² In addition, there are doubts about the SPD’s willingness to serve as a junior partner in a Green-led coalition on the federal level — notwithstanding positive noises from the party’s co-leader.²²³

The current parliamentary arithmetic suggests a leftist coalition — either red-red-green or green-red-red, with the latter configuration giving the chancellery to the Greens²²⁴ — would require the inclusion of the Left Party, which shares similar views with some Greens on social issues. Although the Greens and the SPD opposed a federal coalition with the Left Party in 2013, their attitudes have since softened.²²⁵ Green Party officials are not ruling out this possibility, but they acknowledge the difficulties of reaching an acceptable agreement with them. Although the parties diverge on economic and monetary policy, the biggest obstacle would be foreign and security issues given the Left Party's anti-European stance (having rejected all EU treaties), desire to leave NATO, opposition to military deployments (having opposed them all), and contrary views on Russia. The Left Party has recently made overtures, including the appointment of a more moderate foreign policy spokesperson, Gregor Gysi.²²⁶

The FDP is another possible kingmaker, though current polls suggest it may struggle to reach the 5% threshold needed to enter parliament.²²⁷ Peter Unfried, a journalist at the left-wing Berlin daily *Die Tageszeitung*, was skeptical of coalition prospects, citing the parties' contrasting policy approaches: the FDP regulates culture and opposes immigration, while being more neoliberal and less supportive of workers' rights. "The FDP are bad people for the Greens, and the Greens are illusionists for them," he said.²²⁸

This leaves the CDU, where the coalition math is most favorable. Although this is not necessarily the Green Party's preferred arrangement, conservatism and conservative sensibilities are by no means incompatible. Winfried Kretschmann — the Green minister president in Baden-Württemberg since 2011, who has governed in coalitions with both the SPD (2011-2016) and the CDU (since 2016) — wrote a book in 2018 on what it means to be conservative.²²⁹ He argued against the binary "us or them" positions of populists, which exacerbate rather than solve problems. He instead advocated a "politics of and" (*Politik des Und*), which can include economy and ecology, progressives and conservatives.²³⁰

Kretschmann caused a minor stir in late August 2020 by expressing his support for a black-green coalition at the federal level, suggesting the Greens should not dream of overtaking the CDU.²³¹ Baerbock promptly responded on Twitter, stressing the party was still vying for the chancellery despite the recent dip in support. "For me, politics means: doing instead of just dreaming. And I certainly don't dream of black-green. We have clear goals and a claim to leadership. No one has a subscription to the Chancellor's Office. Democracy lives on alternatives!"²³²

Her remarks underscore the party's effort to pick up votes from the center

WINFRIED KRETSCHMANN, a 72-year old Green politician born in Baden-Württemberg, has served as minister president of his home state since 2011. Popular across party lines, he identifies as a "green conservative" and has led coalition governments with both the SPD and the CDU. After youthful engagement in West Germany's Communist League, he was one of the founding members of Baden-Württemberg's Greens and elected to the state parliament in 1980. After a two-year stint in Hesse as Joschka Fischer's policy advisor, he returned to the state parliament in 1988, where he has remained with only one period out of office. Kretschmann served as chairman of the party's parliamentary group there (2002-11). He was the first ever Green president of the Bundesrat (the federal council representing the states) from 2012-13. He published a book in 2018 that outlined a new politics of conservatism, countering populist arguments and advocating an inclusive approach.

right. According to the journalist Helene Bubrowski of the national daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, swing voters include those “who have voted for the CDU in recent years because they approved of Merkel’s course — her refugee policy, the sharp demarcation from the AfD, the reorientation of family policy, the nuclear phase-out. If the CDU moves to the right, so the calculator says, many of these voters will probably vote green next time.”²³³ The Greens are positioning themselves accordingly, as the subtitle of their June 2020 draft basic program proclaims “change creates stability” (*Veränderung schafft Halt*).²³⁴ Although some CDU voters who backed the Greens in 2019 returned to Merkel during the coronavirus pandemic, this could change again — particularly with a new party leader.

GREEN FOREIGN POLICY

If the Green Party enters the federal government in 2021, it will be required to make numerous policy decisions. Although the party has a high degree of internal coherence on economic and environmental topics, there are lingering disagreements over questions of national security. Thus far, the party has managed to paper over divisive issues and will likely remain vague until pressed to address them in office. Notably, the Greens are reportedly not prioritizing control of the foreign ministry as they did during talks leading to the Schröder government. It was also not a prime concern during 2017 coalition negotiations.²³⁵ Several interviewees suggested the foreign ministry, which is seen as less influential than in the past, would deliver few benefits for the Greens while highlighting its internal fractures. The party is more interested in the finance ministry, which controls the purse strings needed to achieve its objectives on climate change. A super ministry — bringing together finance, environment, agriculture, and related functions — would be seen by many as ideal. That said, as the SPD currently holds both the foreign and finance ministries as the junior partner in Merkel’s grand coalition, it is not inconceivable that the Greens could reach a similar arrangement. Given the party’s potential influence on foreign policy, including trans-Atlantic relations, this final section of the paper assesses how the Greens view the world.

National security debates

The Greens have largely remained true to their founding principles, with their foreign policy grounded in human rights and the pursuit of peace through multilateralism, diplomacy, and international law.²³⁶ The party last defined its basic program in 2002, with piecemeal updates and country specifics in election platforms and publications by its Peace and International Affairs Working Group. The Greens are currently producing a new basic program that outlines broad, enduring principles. An interim text was published in March 2019, the first draft was shared in late June 2020, and the final text is expected to be ratified at the party’s November 2020 conference. Separately, the party will prepare a more detailed foreign policy vision as part of its 2021 federal election platform.

There is considerable continuity between the 2002 basic program and the June draft of the 2020 version. Both emphasize the primacy of Europe, underscoring the EU as a central foreign policy actor, the need for deeper integration, and its capacity as a power for peace. They call for further development of the EU’s common foreign and security policy, as well as greater cooperation between national EU armed forces. They stress international cooperation and multilateralism, highlighting the importance of the United Nations. They advocate fairer trade, including the creation of an asymmetrical

customs policy to promote the interests of less developed countries. The party focuses on human rights, peace policy, and a preventative foreign policy that promotes a more holistic notion of security. They also maintain their desire for denuclearization — within Germany, NATO, and ideally the world.²³⁷ (This is not a solely Green preoccupation; the chairman of the SPD's Bundestag faction caused an uproar in May 2020 by calling for the U.S. to withdraw all nuclear weapons from Germany.²³⁸) However, the Greens remain divided over several security questions, including NATO, arms exports, and military deployments.

NATO and defense spending

Party pragmatists recognize the need for NATO, although they are not enthusiasts. Members continue to debate its purpose, as they broadly support territorial defense, are increasingly willing to accept peacemaking operations, but are uncomfortable with deterrence. While the draft program described the alliance as “an indispensable component of the European security architecture and trans-Atlantic relations” and “a counter to re-nationalization,” it noted that NATO “suffers from divergent security policy interests within the alliance and an unclear strategic perspective.”²³⁹ It also called for “stronger military cooperation and coordination within the EU and with Great Britain” as a means of representing European strategic interests, “especially in NATO.”²⁴⁰

This does not translate into support for increased defense spending. The Greens share the fatigue across

Germany with Trump's aggressive reminders of the pledge by NATO members at the 2014 Wales Summit to work toward spending 2% of their GDP annually on defense within a decade. In an April 2019 statement to the Bundestag, the party said this goal “does not make sense — it's even dangerous.” It noted ample defense assets within NATO and suggested more important questions concern “the concrete orientation and design of the alliance.” It added the declaration did not determine specifics but wanted countries to “take steps in this direction” and “fulfill pledged capability goals.”²⁴¹ Green MP Tobias Lindner noted the “absurdity of this target” in an August 2020 press release, as German defense spending could reach 1.6% of GDP this year due to the coronavirus-induced recession without any changes to the Bundeswehr (the German armed forces).²⁴²

These themes were repeated in interviews with three Green politicians across the party's spectrum. They described continued European insecurity despite spending three times more on defense than Russia, and they were suspicious of Washington's desire for allies to purchase American military equipment. That said, they recognized the need to increase burden sharing and improve Europe's defense capabilities, with a preference for smart spending as well as pooling and sharing.

Arms exports

A controversial issue within the Green Party — and Germany more broadly — concerns arms exports. In September 2014, Merkel and her cabinet agreed that Germany would send weapons to irregular forces in a warzone — the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga

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fighting the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) — for the first time since the end of World War II.²⁴³ A poll at the time found 58% of Germans opposed this decision.²⁴⁴ When the Greens discussed the issue at their November 2014 party conference, differing opinions emerged. Party co-leader Cem Özdemir supported the deliveries, arguing the Kurds should be able to defend themselves. Although many members worried the weapons could fall into the wrong hands, the party failed to pass a motion declaring arms deliveries to crisis areas were fundamentally wrong.²⁴⁵ The Bundestag does not need to authorize such decisions, as it does with foreign military operations. However, it voted in late January 2015 on a symbolic motion: coalition parties supported the delivery for humanitarian reasons; the Left Party was opposed; and the vast majority of Greens abstained while calling for parliament to have a say on exports.²⁴⁶

Debate over arms exports flared again in 2018, when the German government halted exports to Saudi Arabia after the October 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. This decision required France to stop selling equipment to Saudi Arabia that was jointly produced or included German-made parts,²⁴⁷ raising questions about the future of Franco-German defense cooperation.²⁴⁸ In October 2019, the two countries agreed that Berlin would only have a say in the French export of joint military systems if its contributions surpassed a 20% threshold.²⁴⁹ This outcome upset Merkel's SPD coalition partners, who wanted stricter guidelines; critics noted they had ignored the issue during most of their government tenure.²⁵⁰

The Greens also criticized this deal, but they have continued to debate the larger question. The party's pacifist roots made many members averse to adding fuel to a conflict zone. In 2018, Green MPs demanded a law to prevent exports to non-EU or non-NATO countries.²⁵¹ In 2019, the party's Peace and International Affairs Working Group called for legal prohibitions on arms exports to crisis regions and states that systematically violate human rights.²⁵² However, other members argued that preventing atrocities sometimes requires arming those who are seeking to protect human rights. Baerbock's June 2019 visit to northern Iraq, where she met Yazidi women who suffered from IS violence, reportedly reaffirmed her desire to take a case-by-case approach under the principle of "responsibility to protect."²⁵³ The debate has highlighted tensions within the party over the desire to severely restrict arms exports, integrate the European defense industry, and spend less money on defense, which some members will privately acknowledge is an impossible trifecta of goals. The party's draft 2020 basic program sought a compromise:

“Exports of weapons and armaments to dictators, regimes that despise human rights and to war zones should be proscribed. What is needed is a common restrictive European arms export controls mechanism with strong institutions and in accordance with the EU guidelines for arms exports. EU member states that violate binding European arms export criteria must expect sanctions in the future.”²⁵⁴

Military intervention

Authorization for the use of military force has been the most contentious issue in the Green Party's history. “In the 1990s,” explained Jan Techau, “it was a reality shock that their foreign policy didn't work, so they parted from their founding myth of pacifism. The new cadre is still skeptical of military intervention, but not automatically allergic to it, so there is negotiating space.”²⁵⁵ While the founding members were true pacifists, MP Franziska Brantner agreed that thinking has evolved: “Now the debate is about when to intervene. The ‘if’ question is gone.”²⁵⁶ Yet there remains significant disagreement

over the when, how, and under what circumstances. Ralf Fücks described a “profound regression” from the coalition that backed German military intervention, with support for a more active international role largely gone.²⁵⁷ These questions plagued the 2017 coalition negotiations,²⁵⁸ were contested during the drafting of the party’s 2019 European election program,²⁵⁹ and created clashes at the party’s 40th anniversary celebration in January 2020. It has continued to cause heated debate among the base.²⁶⁰

On this issue, the fault line between the party’s Fundi and Realo wings persists. For years, the party’s official line reflected the Fundi position: the Bundeswehr should only be deployed under a U.N. mandate, as an invitation from the affected country or a NATO mandate does not provide sufficient legal justification. The September 2019 conference of the Peace and International Affairs Working Group reiterated the party’s traditional approach: “The use of the military is only for self-protection and alliance protection, on the territory of a state requesting military assistance, as well as for missions in accordance with international law with a mandate from the United Nations.... We will only approve Bundeswehr operations with a mandate from the United Nations.”²⁶¹ Fundis argued that Green peace policy only allows military force as a last resort, requires adherence to constitutional and international law, and needs a broad political consensus. A group of analysts recently convened by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (a political foundation affiliated with the Green Party) wrote: “The prohibition of violence must not be circumvented by ‘coalitions of the willing,’ which are not authorized by a UN mandate to use force and thus to act against fundamental norms of international law.”²⁶²

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However, this approach has been challenged by Realos. While they agree that a U.N. mandate is the highest form of legitimation, they argue that its absence or denial should not end the debate.²⁶³ According to Reinhard Bütikofer, a Green MEP, “the U.N. Security Council mandate for every single Bundeswehr deployment has become a shibboleth, an article of faith, and not a policy.”²⁶⁴ Given frequent gridlock on the council due to Russian and Chinese vetoes, U.N. authorization has become increasingly difficult to obtain and limits potential international action. The current uncertainty in the geopolitical environment, including Trump’s leadership of the United States and Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s stewardship of post-Brexit Britain, has raised further concerns about the potential weakening of the U.N. Another group of analysts writing for the Böll Foundation argued that adhering to the U.N. mandate requirement results in the abdication of responsibility for peace and security; renouncing it would demonstrate the Greens’ desire to strengthen multilateralism and protect human rights.²⁶⁵ Some party members have advocated other bases of legitimacy for military operations, including EU collective security²⁶⁶ or NATO.

These divisions are apparent in Bundestag votes on military deployments, with 31 measures considered between the election of the current leadership in January 2018 and July 2020.²⁶⁷

- In 15 of these cases, most Green MPs voted in favor of the Bundeswehr’s deployment or continued operations abroad. This includes voting 10 times for U.N. missions in Lebanon (UNFIL), Mali (MINUSMA), Darfur (UNAMID), and South

Sudan (UNMISS); three times for the NATO mission in Kosovo (KFOR); and twice for the EU mission training Malian forces (EUTM Mali). All of these votes aligned with the CDU/SPD and were opposed by the Left Party.

- A quarter of the time (26%), most Green MPs voted against the grand coalition and with the Left Party in opposing new or continued deployments lacking a U.N. mandate. These included NATO maritime operations in the Mediterranean (SEA GUARDIAN), the Counter-Islamic State Coalition, and an EU mission to stop migrant flows from Libya into Europe (SOPHIA).
- The party was split on 19% of votes: three times on a NATO-led operation to train and assist Afghan national security forces (RSM) and three times on the EU mission to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia (ATALANTA).
- A majority of Green MPs abstained on two votes in May 2020, addressing the EU mission to Mali (EUTM Mali) and the EU mission to enforce the U.N. arms embargo on Libya (IRINI).

The Green Party's draft program sought to find a compromise, making clear the tension between the responsibility to protect and international law without taking a definitive stance that would rile the leftist base. It began by affirming that "Direct operations under a U.N. mandate have priority over EU or NATO operations."²⁶⁸ The reference to these missions marks a notable departure from the party's previous doctrine of relying exclusively on the U.N. for authorization to deploy the Bundeswehr. It added that military force should always be a "last resort" and Bundeswehr operations must be "embedded in a system of mutual collective security based on... international law." It then stated the challenge, while avoiding a clear prescription:

"Military interventions in the sovereignty of a state, or in a space where sovereignty is lacking, require a mandate from the United Nations. If the right to veto in the Security Council is abused to cover the most serious crimes against humanity, the international community faces a dilemma, because inaction damages human rights and international law just as much as action does."

Notably, debates about military deployment are not unique to the Green Party. (As critics tend to over-estimate the Greens' aversion to defense, it is worth noting the CDU has not been particularly forward-leaning either.) They track discussions among the German public, which is war-weary after two decades of conflict. Bastian Hermisson, executive director of the Böll Foundation's Washington office, noted, "Greens have been a barometer of where German public opinion is, back to the 1980s."²⁶⁹ During its first two decades, the Greens were a pacifist party. As Robert Heinrich explained, "the genocide in the Balkans and the powerless U.N. forced the party to cope with new challenges in international politics. The Green Party changed because reality changed. The concept of responsibility to protect was introduced by realpolitik and after vigorous internal debates."²⁷⁰ It is now a different party with new members, while the international situation has grown more complex. Jürgen Trittin noted that "all publics are increasingly skeptical about intervention, from Iraq to Libya. In the mid-90s, the focus was on humanitarian intervention. Today it has shifted toward hard security policy issues, like access to resources."²⁷¹

Relations with the European Union

The European Union is at the heart of the Green Party's worldview. "German foreign policy must therefore always be conceived as part of a European foreign policy," wrote Omid Nouripour, the party's spokesman on foreign affairs.²⁷² The Greens would like to centralize power in the EU, with an entire section of their 2020 draft basic program focused on the federalization of Europe. This is driven by a desire to see the EU as a "global player" that can "help shape the rules of the international environment" as well as "assert itself in a globalized world and develop democratic shaping power."²⁷³ In order to improve the EU's effectiveness, the party wants the principle of unanimity to be replaced by majority decisionmaking in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy: "European unification and the blockade attitude of individual states must not become an excuse for collective inaction."

The Greens do not want the EU to become an assertive or aggressive military power, preferring it to be a "peace power." A statement by the party's Peace and International Affairs Working Group in 2019 ruled out nuclear armament, prioritized prevention efforts, and rejected the EU as a "military union."²⁷⁴ Yet there is debate about the merits of an EU army.²⁷⁵ On one hand, Greens recognize it would reduce states' military expenditures, encourage disarmament, and address both their federalist vision for Europe and pragmatic tendencies. This aspiration has been reflected in public statements. For example, Baerbock said in a 2019 speech: "I believe that a European army could be useful in the future to replace 27 national defense armies and their military expenditure."²⁷⁶ On the other hand, there is internal resistance to militarizing the European peace project. Trittin, a leading Fundi, dismissed the idea as "not realistic in the near future." Within Europe, he said it "makes no sense to talk about a common military if there is no political unity."²⁷⁷

The European Union is at the heart of the Green Party's worldview.



This divide has resulted in a cautious official posture. The working group proposed conditions in September 2019: "An EU army is only debatable for us if its deployment (comparable to the Bundeswehr) is tied to an EU parliamentary resolution and it saves arms costs significantly through cooperation."²⁷⁸ The June 2020 draft basic program did not explicitly address the issue, suggesting that "Instead of channeling more and more money into parallel national military structures, increased cooperation between the armed forces in the EU should be developed and military capabilities should be pooled."²⁷⁹

On the economic side, the Greens have called for an end to negotiations on the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the U.S. and a new start to European trade policy.²⁸⁰ They opposed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada²⁸¹ and legal privileges for international corporations.²⁸² They want the euro to become a global reserve currency, reflecting frustration with the global dominance of the U.S. dollar; these challenges were magnified when the U.S. withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal.²⁸³ The party's draft program advocated a democratic world trade order under the umbrella of a reformed World Trade Organization (WTO). In the long term, they call for strengthening and democratizing the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to ensure global financial stability.²⁸⁴ In the medium term, they want the European Central Bank (ECB) to consider how its policies affect developing

countries. They also want an asymmetrical customs policy to increase agency for less developed countries, as well as climate and social tariffs.

Such views highlight the potential for cooperation and conflict with France. When Macron hosted Habeck in October 2019, some analysts saw a match made in political heaven. As journalist Paul Hockenos enthused, “The duo might be the best bet to reconstitute the French-German tandem in a way that could reform the EU, set a global gold standard for climate protection, and transform Europe into a more assertive global force. France could lead on security and foreign affairs, Germany on climate and energy.”²⁸⁵ Greens have supported Macron’s ambitions for the eurozone²⁸⁶ and criticized Merkel’s failure to respond to his defense cooperation proposals.²⁸⁷ But the party will not be as forward-leaning as Paris would like on nuclear weapons, arms exports, and drones.

If the Greens are truly committed to working via the EU, they will be required to compromise. As Bastian Hermisson noted, “The Greens want to play a leading role, but it has a price. When you Europeanize, you need to change your approach, as it cannot be all the EU’s way or Germany’s way. You need to work with France. It can be hard to achieve consensus.”²⁸⁸ Notably, several Green politicians expressed an aversion to the Franco-German axis continuing to try to run Europe; they suggested during interviews that the EU has grown too big for this approach and should instead focus on developing more widely accepted policies.

Relations with Russia and China

Of all the parties in the Bundestag, the Greens have taken the hardest line on both Russia and China. While official documents have provided limited information on the party line, MPs have clearly expressed their views; more details are expected in the forthcoming election platform.



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On Russia, the Greens have largely endorsed Merkel’s approach. They have advocated a strong stance on human rights, backed the retention of arms control agreements, and supported retaliation for adversarial actions by Moscow (such as the Salisbury poisoning²⁸⁹ and Russian hacking of the German government²⁹⁰). The party has also endorsed sanctions, including for Moscow’s invasion and occupation of Crimea. Manuel Sarrazin, a Green MP serving as the party spokesperson on Eastern Europe, told the Bundestag: “if you really want lasting good economic relations between Europe and Russia, then set your sights on a course of democratization and the rule of law in Russia and not on cuddling up with a regime of [President Vladimir] Putin that tramples on both.” He acknowledged that EU sanctions have economic repercussions on business, but argued they remained the right approach as “the war was stopped by the European Union at the time by non-military means and can still be limited today.”²⁹¹

However, the Greens have strongly opposed Merkel’s backing for the NordStream 2 pipeline, which will transport gas from Russia to Germany and the EU. Their opposition stems in part from the creation of divisions within the EU as well as concerns about the vulnerability of Ukrainian democracy. They are also troubled by its climate implications, arguing that “the pipeline would keep the EU committed to fossil fuels for decades instead of promoting the European energy transition.”²⁹²

Splits between German parties on Russia policy came to the fore in early September 2020 after the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, a vocal critic of Putin.²⁹³ The AfD and Left Party maintained their support for the Russian government and NordStream 2. The Greens renewed their demand that pipeline construction halt immediately, with Baerbock laying out the legal arguments for doing so and Bütikofer outlining necessary steps for the European Commission and the German Federal Network Agency.²⁹⁴ Merkel fleetingly expressed openness to the idea,²⁹⁵ but quickly reverted back to supporting the completion of the pipeline.²⁹⁶ Among the contenders to succeed Merkel, attitudes toward Russia remained unchanged by the Navalny poisoning: Armin Laschet and Markus Söder²⁹⁷ are more lenient, while Norbert Röttgen and Friedrich Merz are among Putin's staunchest German critics.

On China, the Greens have been far more critical of Merkel. Bilateral trade has grown steadily since she took office, with exports more than quadrupling between 2005 and 2018, from \$26 to \$110 billion. China's share of Germany's total exports more than doubled (from under 3% to just over 7%) during the same period.²⁹⁸ When the U.S. was hit by the 2008 financial crisis, the German economy was sustained by continued Chinese investment; at that same time, critics argue that Berlin's austerity policies during Europe's debt crisis enabled Beijing to purchase strategic assets in cash-strapped southern European countries. Detractors also accuse Merkel of undermining EU policy, including downplaying human rights concerns, by pandering to German industry. A September 2020 report by Politico journalist Jakob Hanke Vela, who interviewed numerous EU trade officials and diplomats, concluded that Beijing's leverage on Europe comes from "Germany's desire not to upset its lucrative economic relationship with one of the world's largest export markets."²⁹⁹

The chancellor's balancing act became more tenuous after Trump took office and launched a trade war against China.³⁰⁰ Even German companies began voicing their frustrations, with the Federation of German Industries (BDI) — an association that long advocated greater engagement with Beijing — publishing a position paper in January 2019 that called on the government to help address problematic Chinese business practices. According to Janka Oertel, a German expert on China, "To German companies, China was no longer just a cooperation partner or economic competitor, but also a 'systemic rival' — a phrase which was later taken up in an EU strategy paper in March 2019³⁰¹ and a triad which has since become standard vocabulary to describe the relationship."³⁰² The coronavirus pandemic further complicated matters, as the Chinese economy recovered more quickly than others while the Trump administration continued to threaten Europe with tariffs.

Human rights are at the center of the Greens' critique. The Greens were "always values-driven," said journalist Noah Barkin, "so it is the perfect issue for them."³⁰³ According to Politico's Matthew Karnitschnig, Merkel's approach — "expressions of concern over human rights and pledges to continue 'dialogue', coupled with a deepening of the commercial relationship" — has remained consistent over the last 15 years.³⁰⁴ In contrast, Green MPs have called on their government to condemn human rights violations in Xinjiang,³⁰⁵ oppose suppression of free speech,³⁰⁶ and speak out against Chinese disinformation.³⁰⁷ Such calls have reverberated in Beijing, which refused to issue a visa to MP Margarete Bause³⁰⁸ — a Green spokesperson for human rights in the Bundestag and vocal critic of China's treatment of its Uyghur minority — as part of a parliamentary committee visit, which the multi-party group cancelled in solidarity.³⁰⁹

Greens have warned against China's growing influence in Europe, including its economic power projection — from Belt and Road investments³¹⁰ to the coronavirus.³¹¹ The party's 2019 European Parliament election platform called on Europe "to ensure that the enormous investments that China is planning in other countries pay off in terms of sustainable development in order to preserve global and local environmental assets, social peace and international security."³¹² The party also opposed Merkel's willingness to let the Chinese tech firm Huawei help build part of Germany's 5G network. According to Habeck, this approach "threatens to make us technologically dependent on the goodwill of a country that is at least in part a systemic rival... Since the U.S. is banking on financial-market-driven capitalism and China is relying on authoritarian state monopolism, our European response must be a social-ecological market economy."³¹³

In addition, the party was skeptical about Merkel's plans for an EU summit with China in Leipzig in September 2020. They submitted 18 pages of parliamentary questions to the government in January about German and EU relations with Beijing, underscoring the need for a "common European policy on China — values-based and realistic."³¹⁴ Merkel cancelled the summit in early June; although coronavirus was the official reason, limited progress on negotiations for an investment treaty and China's crackdown on Hong Kong created an uncomfortable atmosphere. It was replaced by a video-conference "quadrilogue" in mid-September between Merkel, Chinese President Xi Jinping, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and European Council President Charles Michel.³¹⁵ The gathering, at which European leaders reported raising human rights concerns and pending requirements for an investment agreement, was inconclusive and far from the "jewel in the crown" that Merkel had envisioned for her EU presidency.

Wariness of China's growing influence is becoming widespread in Germany. Within the Bundestag, Röttgen, the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee and CDU leadership contender, led opposition to the government's position on Huawei.³¹⁶ MP Metin Hakverdi, whose SPD bloc also advocated a tougher stance, said the "main problem [in the 5G debate] is the chancellery."³¹⁷ In addition, the German electorate is increasingly opposed to close relations with China, especially since the onset of the coronavirus. In opinion polls published by *Der Spiegel* in July 2020, over 46% of Germans advocated "greater distance from China" — up almost 30 points from September 2017 (17.6%) and seven points since April 2020 alone (from 39.3%).³¹⁸

The Greens have warned against EU dependence on foreign powers, which increasingly includes both China and the United States. The 2019 European Parliament election platform noted pressure on global trade: "The 'America-first policy' of Donald Trump or China's aggressive industrial policy strengthen the pull of more and more bilateral agreements."³¹⁹ It said Europe is falling behind both countries in innovation and research, as well as investments in renewables to address environmental change.³²⁰ At the 2020 Munich Security Conference, Baerbock called for the EU to increase its budget, warning against reliance on Chinese and American foreign direct investment in EU infrastructure.³²¹ Yet some members recognize Europe's limits. Bütikofer, who serves as the party's unofficial spokesman on China, said: "Germany has a particular role to play [in developing a European China policy], given the intensity with which the country's China relations have long been shaped by a high complementarity of economic interests. But its unique role with China is waning. China is becoming more German and Germany is becoming more European."³²² In addition, economic conditions in Germany have led observers to question whether a new coalition government that

includes the Greens would really adopt a more principled stance or continue Merkel's carrot and stick approach.³²³

Relations with the United States

The Green Party's views have evolved considerably since the party was founded by pacifists, communists, and anti-militarists with deep skepticism of U.S. foreign policy. The party generally supported President Barack Obama, although there was disappointment in his perceived reluctance to fully embrace multilateralism (e.g., failure to join the International Criminal Court). There is deep frustration with Trump, a sentiment that cuts across Germany, and doubts about American leadership and values. The Greens' website laments the lack of cooperation on pressing challenges: "Plans for nationalistic isolation and trade wars, denial of the climate crisis, the rejection of the Geneva Convention with regard to the ban on aid for refugees and the cancellation of multilateral agreements such as the Paris Climate Convention or the nuclear agreement with Iran undermine the urgent need for joint action."³²⁴ Yet the party also recognizes that some issues — including defense spending, Russia, China, tech, and trade — predate and could outlive the current U.S. president.

Greens have established good relations with American politicians at the state level on environmental issues. In 2015, California's then-Governor Jerry Brown and Baden-Württemberg Minister President Winfried Kretschmann agreed to work toward keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, an initiative that now includes a total of 222 subnational entities.³²⁵ During his January 2020 visit to Washington, Habeck called for a trans-Atlantic alliance of progressive politics: "The Democrats here are talking about a Green New Deal, and the European Commission has now adopted such a plan. Sooner or later, hopefully, it will be possible to implement it in lockstep."³²⁶

The party's co-leaders have positioned themselves as committed trans-Atlanticists. Baerbock is seen as more mainstream, having studied in the U.S. and earned a degree in London. Habeck raised questions about his suitability for the chancellorship when he made provocative remarks to German radio about Trump's performance in Davos hours before arriving in Washington.³²⁷ Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the minister of defense and outgoing CDU leader, asked "What has Mr. Habeck improved in the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany, in the interests of Europe, also in the interests of climate protection, with this statement? Nothing."³²⁸ Although this critique was widespread among German politicians and journalists, some commentators on the left saw his comments as refreshing.³²⁹ The reaction from then-U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell was "sharp"³³⁰ and led to a downgrade in Habeck's State Department meetings, a disastrous result for a trip intended to introduce him to American interlocutors.³³¹

Several American observers in Berlin thought Habeck's comments about Trump were symptomatic of a certain immaturity in the party's foreign policy. If elected, they noted, the Greens would need to work hard to translate their convictions into workable policies on a range of issues. Specifically, they cited a naiveté about the challenges of and compromises required by multilateralism, including the need for Germany to do more in some areas — especially on defense. While the traditional parties do not always agree with the United States, they understand the nature of international diplomacy and are willing to compromise in some cases for the sake of comity.

Like most Europeans, the Greens are anxiously awaiting the outcome of the November elections in the United States. Party officials and politicians struggled to articulate what



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a second Trump administration would mean. If former vice president and Democratic nominee Joe Biden wins, they suggested a restart would be possible but cautioned that the clock could not be turned back. Several legislators recommended increasing American public diplomacy to repair the country's tarnished image. They also cited the need to reaffirm the importance of NATO, renew international agreements, work together on China, and cooperate in global organizations. As Bütikofer told the press in July 2020, "I don't expect that, if we have a new president, everything will just fall into place." But he said there was a chance for "revisiting and reforming multilateralism" after years of American hostility to international institutions.³³² Similarly, a press release by Trittin during the Democratic National Convention said "regardless of the outcome of the election, a simple return to the old world of natural trans-Atlantic relations is not to be expected. The conflicts that have arisen between the former partners on both sides of the Atlantic are too profound."³³³ In particular, he expected continued disagreements on NATO defense spending and sanctions against European companies.

CONCLUSION

Across Western democracies, mainstream political parties are struggling to respond to new forms of polarization. In Germany, the formerly stable old center is eroding and requires tenuous coalitions for support. The key question now is who will represent the moderate middle. The Green Party believes they are the answer. Habeck, reflecting on the party's 2018 Bavarian election success, said: "other parties saw it was possible to gain the political center... The role of the Greens can't be drawing voters back from the AfD. We won't get votes from them and vice versa. But we can stabilize the political center."³³⁴ The party's approach is grounded in pragmatism, with Katharina Schulze describing her motto as "Saving the world pragmatically—one step at a time."³³⁵ The party's policies are based on "radical realism": on migration, they advocate solutions that "bring together humanity and order";³³⁶ on fiscal policy, they seek to bridge the divide between social, economic, and environmental interests;³³⁷ and on defense policy, they want to bolster the normative basis of alliances in an evolving international landscape.³³⁸

In the 40 years since the party's founding, the Greens have firmly established themselves as a key player in German politics — at regional level, at European level, and potentially again at federal level. As traditional left/right divisions are overtaken by liberal/illiberal fissures, the Greens are well-placed to defend democratic values and build coalitions of interests. They have challenged the AfD, while reminding the CDU/CSU about the dangers of shifting right in response. They have staked out clear progressive positions, seizing ground previously held by the SPD. And they have championed a constructive style of political discourse, civic engagement, and coalition building. Moreover, many policies long supported by the Greens — such as sustainable energy, equal pay, and peacebuilding — have become mainstream. As one academic study concluded: "just like there is nothing particularly Green any more about loving nature and fighting to preserve it, so, too, there seems little Green in today's Germany about extolling peace at virtually any and all costs."³³⁹ The formerly anti-party radicals are now perceived as "a party for everybody: leftists as well as conservatives, Friday for Future activists

and CEOs, patriots and tech-liberals.”³⁴⁰ Or, almost everybody: the Greens’ struggle to appeal to voters in eastern Germany remains a significant weakness.

The party’s desire to serve in government is forcing them to grapple with the trade-offs between their founding values and *realpolitik*. This tension will only grow as the 2021 federal elections approach and the party confronts more hard choices. The debate over military deployments is one example.³⁴¹ Another is the discomfort created by the need to collaborate in multilateral settings with challenging countries, including those that violate human rights. As *Tageszeitung* journalist Peter Unfried bluntly stated, “Greens don’t want to work with racists or Saudis or Russians or Chinese on climate, as they want to promote their values. But the new Greens know they need to cooperate.”³⁴²

When pressed on lingering divisions within the party, several interviewees with insights into the leadership’s thinking acknowledged the Greens were seeking to preserve their flexibility now to limit internal discord but would establish clearer positions once in government. Although politically expedient, this approach bolsters the perception that the Greens remain naive. But compared to when they were last in power at federal level two decades ago, there are some real differences: the party’s clarity about its desire to govern, cohesion around core principles, and message discipline.

True to their roots, the Greens have remained adamant about the urgency of addressing the climate crisis. However, there is a danger that their newfound centrism may lead them to concede on their most far-reaching environmental proposals, thereby alienating the most radical portion of their base.³⁴³ Running the state government of Baden-Württemberg, for example, has demonstrated the challenge of maintaining support from more leftist supporters while making necessary compromises to attract a broader base and govern. “Rather than sweeping, radical changes,” observed the journalist Andrew Green, “the Greens have championed efforts that represent incremental gains within their broader ideological framework.”³⁴⁴

Centrism also creates political risks. During the coronavirus pandemic, for example, the Greens’ decision to support the coalition’s approach came at the expense of differentiating themselves from other parties. According to the journalist Robert Pausch of *Die Zeit*, “the aesthetic model of success of the Greens (constructiveness before criticism, cooperation instead of escalation) led the party straight into the bravery trap.” The party’s style, he noted, thrives on difference: “if the coalition was once again particularly grumpy with itself, the Greens in the opposition seemed more supportive of the state than the government.”³⁴⁵

The final risk concerns the *zeitgeist*, a German word used by several interviewees to describe the Green Party’s current appeal: it is seen as being in tune with the current mood. This popularity is a double-edged sword. Germany needs the Greens to act as a moderating force during this era of polarization; but in its attempt to appeal to as many voters as possible, the party may be defined by what others want, fail to achieve its core socio-ecological objectives, and eventually fall out of favor.³⁴⁶ Roderick Kefferpütz, deputy director of policy and strategy in the Baden-Württemberg government and former

Germany needs the Greens to act as a moderating force during this era of polarization; but in its attempt to appeal to as many voters as possible, the party may be defined by what others want, fail to achieve its core socio-ecological objectives, and eventually fall out of favor.



Bütikofer staffer, aptly summarized the key questions facing the party:

“The German Greens are taking a unique position by pursuing a complementary political logic that tries to bridge divides and solve contradictions. The question is — can they keep up that approach and will it succeed, or will the Greens end up being caught up in and crushed by the multiple contradictions? Is society ready for such a balancing approach or will the Greens make everybody unhappy? Which policies suit this complementary political logic? It is easier to advance a general political approach than it is to make policy recommendations affecting people’s interests.”³⁴⁷

As this paper goes to print in October 2020, there are many unknowns, including the outcome of the U.S. presidential election, Germany’s elections a year later, and the state of the world’s physical and economic health. From a trans-Atlantic perspective, a German government that includes the Green Party seems well-placed to help strengthen Europe, counter Chinese influence, and address the climate crisis. And if the party is truly able to herald a new, hopeful style of politics domestically — in which it manages the demands of national leadership, builds effective coalitions that heal polarizing divides, and continues evolving with the times — then it could provide an important model of governing the moderate middle for other fractured Western democracies.

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[formierung-der-grundungsgrunen-in-der-bundesrepublik-der-siebziger-und-fruhen-achtziger-jahre](#). Mende quotes Lukas Beckmann, the former federal executive director from the Green Party's early days: "The Greens have a leftist tradition. Nevertheless, we are not a left-wing party. An ecological society, in which ecology is more than just environmental protection and a socio-ecological orientation, will be the result of a new way of thinking that cannot be assigned to the traditional right-left cliché." Mende says the Green's desire to overcome this dichotomy stems from the crisis of the left (including the erosion of communist groups, severe economic crises in the 1970s, and ineffectiveness of socialist solutions in capitalist societies) and the changing nature of conservatism (which preferred market-liberal values to classic conservative ones). The Greens used the slogan "Third Way" to describe this approach.

- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Author telephone interview with Michael Kellner, June 30, 2020.
- 23 Katrin Bennhold, "Greens Thrive in Germany as the 'Alternative' to Far-Right Populism," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/27/world/europe/germany-greens-merkel-election.html>. Bennhold noted that voters' attitudes have since evolved: "Three decades later, [Fischer's] shoes are in a museum, and almost one in two German voters say they can imagine casting a ballot for the Greens." Andrei Markovits and Joseph Klaver reported that Fischer's fashion choices evolved too: "By the time he became foreign minister 13 years later, he had come to wear his hair much shorter and more stylish, while he had forsaken the jeans-with-sport-coat look for a more traditional but spiffily tailored dark suit accessorized with a stylish neck tie." See Andrei S. Markovits and Joseph Klaver, "Thirty Years of Bundestag Presence: A Tally of the Greens' Impact on the Federal Republic of Germany's Political Life and Public Culture," (Washington, DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2012), 34, https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/markovits-klaver_thirty_years_bundestag_greens.pdf.
- 24 Andrei S. Markovits and Joseph Klaver, "Thirty Years of Bundestag Presence," 34.
- 25 Silke Mende, "Enemies at the Gate," *passim*.
- 26 Andrei S. Markovits and Joseph Klaver, "Thirty Years of Bundestag Presence," 11-12.
- 27 Author interview with Joschka Fischer, Berlin, November 20, 2019.
- 28 At the party's 1988 Karlsruhe conference, Realos sought to remove the radical ecologists — including Jutta Ditfurth, a leader of the Fundi wing — from the federal committee. The party cast a vote of no confidence in the Ditfurth-led executive branch, forcing the group's resignation from leadership. See Joachim Jachnow, "What's Become of the German Greens?," *New Left Review* no. 81 (May-June 2013), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II81/articles/joachim-jachnow-what-s-become-of-the-german-greens>. "Reluctant to accept themselves as a party," wrote Hubert Kleinert, "the Greens had hesitated to install a center capable of true control. It was peripheral elements of the party which had, until then, provided internal structures and an outward profile." See Hubert Kleinert, "Politics and Progress: The German Green Party 1983-2003" in *Green Parties: Reflections on*

- the First Three Decades*, eds. Frank Zelko and Carolin Brinkmann (Washington, DC: Heinrich Böll Foundation North America, 2006): 77-88, <https://www.ghi-dc.org/publications/publication/publication/green-parties-reflections-on-the-first-three-decades>, 81.
- 29 Ingolfur Blühdorn, “Reinventing Green Politics: On the Strategic Repositioning of the German Green Party,” *German Politics* 18, no. 1 (2009): 36-54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644000802649189>, 38.
- 30 “Zeiten ändern sich. Wir ändern sie mit.” [Times are changing. We are changing with them], Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens], December 20, 2019, 40, https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/GRUENE_Chronik_1979-2019.pdf,
- 31 “The History of Alliance 90/The Greens,” Heinrich Böll Foundation, February 18, 2016, <https://www.boell.de/en/2016/02/18/history-of-alliance-90-the-greens>.
- 32 Parts of the East German opposition groups Neues Forum (New Forum), Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights), and Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now) formed Bündnis 90 [Alliance 90], which was formally established as a party in September 1991. See “The History of Alliance 90/The Greens,” Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- 33 See Helene Bubrowski, “Die Grünen genießen ihren Albtraum” [The Greens are enjoying their nightmare], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/steinmeier-beim-geburtstag-die-gruenen-und-ihr-albtraum-16575950.html>: “Many representatives of the citizens’ movements from the GDR... are bothered by the fact that in normal language usage the full unwieldy name ‘Alliance 90/The Greens’ is often shortened to ‘The Greens’ and the proportion of East Germans is lost. Both party leaders showed clear sympathy for this cause... [at the January 2020 anniversary of the party’s founding]. Baerbock greeted the party friends with the words: ‘Dear Alliance Greens.’ Habeck said that Alliance 90 and the Greens were not two entities ‘tacked together,’ which could be separated with a slash, but had become one, namely ‘Alliance Greens.’ It is quite possible that the party leadership will soon approach the party with a request for a name change.”
- 34 Hubert Kleinert, “Politics and Progress,” 81.
- 35 These proposals were ratified through the party’s adoption of the “Declaration of Neumünster” (*Erklärung von Neumünster*.) See “13. Ordentliche Bundesversammlung Die Grünen (1. Teil): 26.–28. April 1991 Neumünster” [13th Ordinary Federal Assembly The Greens (Part 1): 26 - 28 April 1991 Neumünster], Heinrich Böll Foundation: Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis [Henrich Böll Foundation: Archive Green Memory], 15-16, https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/assets/boell.de/images/galerie/publikationen/BDK_1979_bis_1993_Die_Gruenen.pdf. In addition, the party ended the process of “rotation” — the requirement that elected members (such as Kleinert) leave office after two years and be replaced by a substitute. The rotation policy was intended to protect members from the perils of professional politics, but it prevented members from developing relationships with colleagues and understanding the bureaucracy. See also Andrei S. Markovits and Joseph Klaver, “Thirty Years of Bundestag Presence,” 30: the rotation system created “a clash between democratic impulses and participatory inclinations on

the one hand, and the exigencies of efficiency demanded by complex institutional frameworks on the other.”

- 36 Quoted in Justus Bender, “Wie sich die Grünen selbst zähmten” [How the Greens tamed themselves], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 29, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/disziplin-statt-chaos-wie-sich-die-gruenen-selbst-zaehmten-16926909.html>.
- 37 “Auszüge aus der Grünen Chronik” [Excerpts from the Green Chronicle], Heinrich Böll Foundation, September 11, 2015, <https://www.boell.de/de/2015/09/22/auszuege-aus-der-gruenen-chronik>.
- 38 Sebastian Bukow, “The Green Party in Germany,” in *Green Parties in Europe*, ed. Emilie van Haute (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 118.
- 39 “Wahl zum 13. Deutschen Bundestag am 16. Oktober 1994” [Election to the 13th German Bundestag on 16 October 1994], Der Bundeswahlleiter [The Federal Election Commissioner], <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/bundestagswahlen/1994.html>.
- 40 Ingolfur Blühdorn, “Reinventing Green Politics,” 39.
- 41 Fischer and Trittin were joined for shorter tenures by Andrea Fischer as Health Minister and Renate Künast as Minister of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture.
- 42 One of the party’s biggest environmental successes during this period was the decision in 2000 to phase out nuclear energy within 20 years. See “Germany renounces nuclear power,” BBC News, June 15, 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/791597.stm>.
- 43 The platform also called for the “strengthening of preventive measures and non-military solutions, which prevent crises from turning into armed conflicts.” “Grün ist der Wechsel. Programm zur Bundestagswahl 1998” [Green is the change. Program for the 1998 federal election], Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens], March 1998, 135, https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/assets/boell.de/images/download_de/publikationen/1998_Wahlprogramm_Bundestagswahl.pdf.
- 44 Ian Traynor, “Greens back Nato amid uproar,” *The Guardian*, May 13, 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/may/14/greenpolitics>.
- 45 Joschka Fischer, “The Kosovo War and the Greens,” (speech, Bielefeld, Germany, May 13, 1999), http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/Ch8_Doc07FIN.pdf. See also Brian C. Rathbun, “The Myth of German Pacifism,” *German Politics and Society* 24, no. 2 (2006): 68-81, <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/gps/24/2/gps240204.xml>, 73.
- 46 Joachim Jachnow, “What’s Become of the German Greens?”
- 47 Steven Erlanger, “Pressing Greens, German Leader Wins Historic Vote on Sending Troops to Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/17/world/pressing-greens-german-leader-wins-historic-vote-sending-troops-afghanistan.html>.

- 48 Walter L. Perry and David Kassing, "Toppling the Taliban: Air-Ground Operations in Afghanistan, October 2001-June 2002," (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), xiii, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR381.html,
- 49 The Greens opposed German involvement in the Iraq war in 2003 and party delegates voted against the leadership's motion in 2007 to extend the army's deployment in Afghanistan. See "Germany's Green Party Split Over Afghanistan Mandate," DW, September 17, 2007, <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-green-party-split-over-afghanistan-mandate/a-2785998>. As one study of the party concluded: "Despite their continued and probably permanent reluctance to tolerate, let alone accommodate, armed interventions for humanitarian purposes, the Greens remain unconditionally opposed to any armed conflicts that they deem wars of opportunity and choice." See Andrei S. Markovits and Joseph Klaver, "Thirty Years of Bundestag Presence," 26.
- 50 Sebastian Bukow, "The Green Party in Germany," 125.
- 51 "Thousands flee Dresden floods," *The Guardian*, August 16, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/aug/16/naturaldisasters.weather>.
- 52 Ingolfur Blühdorn, "Reinventing Green Politics," 39.
- 53 Some analysts have argued that the Greens' recent rise can be partly attributed to the decline of other parties. Although voters punished the SPD for the Afghanistan war and cuts to the welfare state, their Green coalition partners did not suffer similar blowback. See e.g. Paul Hockenos, "Green Is the New Black," *Foreign Policy*, March 1, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/03/01/green-is-the-new-black/>.
- 54 Agenda 2010, the largest social reform package in post-war Germany, included a series of labor market and welfare reforms intended to reduce unemployment and jumpstart the economy. The reforms included cuts to the welfare budget, tax breaks for workers and corporations, and provisions making it easier to hire and fire workers. These measures were supported by conservative politicians and businesses but disliked by the left and labor unions. See Rebecca Staudenmaier, "German issues in a nutshell: 'Agenda 2010,'" DW, June 6, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-issues-in-a-nutshell-agenda-2010/a-38789461>.
- 55 "The sick man of the euro," *The Economist*, June 3, 1999, <https://www.economist.com/special/1999/06/03/the-sick-man-of-the-euro>.
- 56 The report, titled "For a Radical Realism in Eco-Politics," was agreed upon at the December 2006 conference in Cologne. Ingolfur Blühdorn, an environmental sociologist, described this approach as "realistic in that it recognises that all eco-political 'assumptions which have been made so far were not realistic,' and radical in the sense that it revives the demand for structural changes to established social practices and the existing socio-economic order." Notably, she argued that the departure of Joschka Fischer from frontline politics enabled this discussion. See Ingolfur Blühdorn, "Reinventing Green Politics," 41-42.
- 57 Frank Decker, "Etappen der Parteigeschichte der GRÜNEN" [Stages in the party history of the Greens], Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education], July 16, 2018, <https://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/gruene/42151/geschichte>.

- 58 Philip Oltermann, “How one German region is bucking the rightwing trend by going green,” *The Guardian*, March 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/12/german-greens-bucking-rightwing-trend-baden-wuerttemberg>.
- 59 At the time, representatives of other parties — including foreign minister and FDP leader Guido Westerwelle, SPD faction leader Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and CDU Secretary-General Hermann Gröhe — blamed the nuclear debate for their poor performances. Polls confirmed these assessments, with 41% of voters agreeing nuclear policy was a key concern. See Martin Muno and Marion Linnenbrink, “Grüne feiern historischen Erfolg” [Greens celebrate historic success], DW, March 28, 2011, <https://www.dw.com/de/grüne-feiern-historischen-erfolg/a-14946766>.
- 60 The Greens peaked at 24% in April-May 2011, then plummeted to 14% by late October 2011, where they hovered through summer 2013. In the two months preceding the September 22, 2013 federal election, they dropped from 14% to 8.4%. See “Vote Intention,” Infratest Dimap.
- 61 Kate Connolly, “Wurst policy ever? German ‘Veggie Day’ plan leaves Greens trailing,” *The Guardian*, September 13, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/german-elections-blog-2013/2013/sep/13/german-election-wurst-policy-veggie-day-greens>.
- 62 The proposed tax rate was a stark increase from the current rate of 42% for salaries over 57,052 euros and 45% for those over 270,501 euros. “Spitzensteuersatz— das steckt dahinter” [Top tax rate - what is behind it], Vereinigte Lohnsteuerhilfe e.V. [United Wage Tax Aid e.V.], June 9, 2020, <https://www.vlh.de/wissen-service/steuer-nachrichten/spitzensteuersatz-das-steckt-dahinter.html>.
- 63 “Top Greens step aside after German election decline,” DW, September 9, 2013, <https://www.dw.com/en/top-greens-step-aside-after-german-election-decline/a-17109573>.
- 64 Ellen Thalman and Julian Wettengel, “The story of ‘Climate Chancellor’ Angela Merkel,” *Clean Energy Wire*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/making-climate-chancellor-angela-merkel>.
- 65 At this point, according to political scientist Sebastian Bukow, the Greens “are no longer antimilitaristic or harsh critics of representative democracy; they are clearly pro-European and argue for a moderate renewal of the European Union, including aspects of direct democracy; they combine the idea of a powerful state (to enforce ‘Green’ ideas) with arguments for a lean state in other dimensions.” Sebastian Bukow, “The Green Party in Germany,” 126.
- 66 In 2010, press reports said Jürgen Trittin — then the party’s parliamentary leader — described the Greens as the “middle left ground, with members who define themselves clearly on the left, but are anchored firmly in the middle of society.” See Dagmar Breitenbach, “The ‘anti-party party’ celebrates its 30th anniversary,” DW, January 12, 2010, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-anti-party-party-celebrates-its-30th-anniversary/a-5119601-0>. Similarly, the Comparative Manifestos Project found that although the Greens remain the second most progressive party (slightly behind the Left Party) today, they have become significantly more conservative

- since the early 1990s. See Andrea Volkens, Werner Krause, Pola Lehmann, Theres Matthieß, Nicolas Merz, Sven Regel, and Bernhard Weißels, “The Manifesto Data Collection: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR) Version 2020a,” (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2020), <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/datasets/MPDS2020a>.
- 67 Arne Jungjohann, “German Greens in Coalition Governments: A Political Analysis,” (Brussels: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, 2017), 17, https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/greens_in_government.pdf.
- 68 Author telephone interview with Michael Kellner, June 30, 2020.
- 69 J.C., “Germany’s preliminary coalition talks collapse,” *The Economist*, November 20, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/kaffeeklatsch/2017/11/20/germanys-preliminary-coalition-talks-collapse>.
- 70 The first Jamaica coalition was formed in Saarland in October 2009; it collapsed in January 2012. This configuration has governed Schleswig-Holstein since April 2017.
- 71 The CDU/CSU insisted on a cap of 200,000 refugees and asylum seekers per year (including family reunification). The FDP wanted to set quotas according to economic and humanitarian criteria. The Greens reluctantly agreed to the CDU/CSU number, as long as migrants with “subsidiary protection” status could be reunited with their families. With respect to energy policy, the Greens demanded a reduction of coal-generated power. See Philip Oltermann, “German coalition talks collapse after deadlock on migration and energy,” *The Guardian*, November 19, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/19/german-coalition-talks-close-to-collapse-angela-merkel>; Niklas Helwig and Heidi Tworek, “Nicht bei der Verteidigung sparen!” [Don’t save on defense!], *Die Zeit*, October 30, 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-10/sondierungsgespraech-jamaika-koalition-europa-frankreich-deutschland>.
- 72 J.C., “SPD members vote for a grand coalition,” *The Economist*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/kaffeeklatsch/2018/03/04/spd-members-vote-for-a-grand-coalition>.
- 73 Roderick Kefferpütz, “Green is the New Normal in German Politics,” *Green European Journal*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/green-is-the-new-normal-in-german-politics/>.
- 74 Author telephone interview with Michael Kellner, June 30, 2020.
- 75 “Vote Intention,” Infratest Dimap.
- 76 “Ergebnisse Früherer Landtagswahlen” [Results of previous state elections], Der Bundeswahlleiter [The Federal Election Commissioner], April 6, 2020, 29, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/dam/jcr/a333e523-0717-42ad-a772-d5ad7e7e97cc/tw_erg_gesamt.pdf.
- 77 phoenix, “Pressekonferenz mit Robert Habeck zum Ergebnis der Grünen bei der Landtagswahl in Bayern am 15.10.18” [Press conference with Robert Habeck on the results of the regional elections in Bavaria, October 15, 2018], YouTube, October 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGPHW3I-NrM>.

- 78 Data from “Ergebnisse Früherer Landtagswahlen” [Results of previous state elections], Der Bundeswahlleiter [The Federal Election Commissioner], April 6, 2020, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/dam/jcr/a333e523-0717-42ad-a772-d5ad7e7e97cc/ltw_erg_gesamt.pdf.
- 79 The success of the far right in Germany after 2015 can be partially explained by what social scientists call the “halo effect,” whereby voters are most likely to support far-right politicians if they live close to — but not actually within — diverse areas. See Amanda Taub, “How a Sleepy German Suburb Explains Europe’s Rising Far-Right Movements,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/20/world/europe/how-a-sleepy-german-suburb-explains-europes-rising-far-right-movements.html>.
- 80 Sudha David-Wilp, “In Bavaria, Green Could Be King,” *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/11/forget-the-AfD-in-bavaria-green-could-be-king/>.
- 81 Oliver Das Gupta, “Leise Töne von den einstigen Scharfmachern” [Soft tones from the former agitators], *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/csu-seeon-seehofer-soeder-1.4274491>.
- 82 Sudha David-Wilp, “In Bavaria, Green Could Be King.”
- 83 The Greens also did well in Hesse in October 2018, doubling their numbers from the 2013 elections and tied for second with the SPD (who dropped over 10 points). The CDU placed first with 27% (a drop from 38%) and the AfD tripled its standing, reaching 13% of the vote. Matthew Karnitschnig, “Merkel’s coalition lives to fight another day—just,” *Politico*, October 28, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/merkels-cdu-suffers-heavy-losses-in-hesse-projection/>.
- 84 Noah Barkin, “Germany’s Future Is Being Decided on the Left, Not the Far Right,” *The Atlantic*, August 28, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/greens-surge-stronghold-germanys-far-right/596911/>.
- 85 Some analysts disagree, suggesting the European Parliament election results were due to the electorate’s anti-establishment mood. See Daniel Kochis and Nile Gardiner, “European Parliamentary Elections Reflect Electorate’s Mandate for Change,” The Heritage Foundation, May 30, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/commentary/european-parliamentary-elections-reflect-electorates-mandate-change>.
- 86 It is easy to join the Green Party via an online registration form. Recommended dues are 1% of net income. See “Mitglied werden” [Become a member], Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens], <https://www.gruene.de/mitglied-werden>.
- 87 Party membership went from 61,596 at the end of 2016 to 65,065 by the end of 2017 (a 5.63% increase). By the end of 2018, membership had reached 75,311 (a 15.75% increase). See Oskar Niedermayer, “Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2019” [Party membership in Germany: 2019 Edition], *Arbeitshefte a. d. Otto-Stammer-Zentrum* 30 (2019), 6, https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/systeme/empsocz/team/ehemalige/Publikationen/schriften/Arbeitshefte/Arbeitsheft-Nr-30_2019.pdf.

- 88 “Grüne Geschichte” [Green History], Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens], <https://www.gruene.de/unsere-gruene-geschichte>.
- 89 “Grüne verzeichnen erstmals mehr als 100.000 Mitglieder” [Greens register more than 100,000 members for the first time], *Der Spiegel*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gruene-verzeichnen-erstmals-mehr-als-100-000-parteimitglieder-a-332bda27-1599-4c53-a4da-cec9a36b92fe>.
- 90 Oscar Niedermayer, “Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2019” [Party membership in Germany: 2019 Edition], (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2019), 6, https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/systeme/emproz/team/ehemalige/Publicationen/schriften/Arbeitshefte/Arbeitsheft-Nr-30_2019.pdf.
- 91 The SPD was the first party to follow the Greens’ lead by introducing a women’s quota (*Frauenquote*), later followed by the Left Party and the CDU. The FDP opposes quotas that factor any collective over the individual, though the party has significantly increased the inclusion of women. See Andrei S. Markovits and Joseph Klaver, “Thirty Years of Bundestag Presence,” 20-23.
- 92 “Zeiten ändern sich. Wir ändern sie mit.,” Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 26.
- 93 According to the party’s website, this approach “influences our politics and policies: equal opportunities for women and men constitute one of our central policy demands, and there is much left to be done. We want to create a framework to ensure that women have equal opportunities in employment and also that in everyday life, work in a woman’s career as well as her family can (and will) be equally divided between women and men.” Ibid, 21.
- 94 Oskar Niedermayer, “Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2019” [Party membership in Germany: 2019 Edition], (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2019), 23, https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/systeme/emproz/team/ehemalige/Publicationen/schriften/Arbeitshefte/Arbeitsheft-Nr-30_2019.pdf.
- 95 Roderick Kefferpütz, “Green is the New Normal in German Politics.”
- 96 Zia Weise, “Germany’s new Green divide,” *Politico*, November 23, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-green-party-haidhausen-munich-elections-social-democrats-spd-is-the-new-red/>.
- 97 Author interview with Katrin Bennhold, Berlin, November 19, 2019.
- 98 A June 2019 survey found twice as many Germans could see Habeck as Kramp-Karrenbauer as chancellor. See “Habeck läge bei Kanzler-Direktwahl vor AKK” [Habeck would be ahead of AKK in direct chancellorship election], *Der Spiegel*, June 16, 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/umfrage-robert-habeck-bei-kanzler-direktwahl-vor-annegret-kramp-karrenbauer-a-1272647.html>.
- 99 “Many men, both inside and outside of the CDU, have a neurotic relationship with Merkel. Even the nickname ‘Mutti,’ or ‘Mommy,’ which began making the rounds in the CDU shortly after her tenure in the Chancellery began, contains a strange mixture of derision and subservience.” René Pfister, “Why German Politics Can’t Move Beyond Merkel,” *Der Spiegel*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/how-merkel-has-fundamentally-changed-german-politics-a-1191422.html>.

- 100 “European Debt Crisis Fast Facts,” CNN, January 22, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2013/07/27/world/europe/european-debt-crisis-fast-facts/index.html>.
- 101 Author interview with Stefan Liebich, Berlin, November 25, 2019.
- 102 Sam Denney and Constanze Stelzenmüller, “The Thuringia debacle resets the Merkel succession – and proves the AfD is a force to be reckoned with,” The Brookings Institution, February 28, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/28/the-thuringia-debacle-resets-the-merkel-succession-and-proves-the-afd-is-a-force-to-be-reckoned-with/>.
- 103 Robert Roßmann, “Die CDU lässt sich Zeit” [The CDU takes its time], *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/sonderparteitag-cdu-vorsitz-wahl-corona-1.4875956>.
- 104 “Vote Intention,” Infratest Dimap.
- 105 Ibid. The CDU’s initial handling of the refugee crisis provided a temporary jump in the polls: it hovered around 40% during summer 2015, then numbers fell steadily from September until June 2019 when they hit 31%.
- 106 Matthew Karnitschnig, “The wannabe Merckels,” *Politico*, February 2, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-wannabe-angela-merkel-successors-germany-armin-laschet-friedrich-merz-norbert-roettgen>.
- 107 “Surprise candidate throws hat in ring to lead Germany’s ruling CDU,” dpa International, February 18, 2020, <https://www.dpa-international.com/topic/surprise-candidate-throws-hat-ring-lead-germany-ruling-cdu-urn%3Anewsml%3Adpa.com%3A20090101%3A200218-99-959661>.
- 108 Matthew Karnitschnig, “Everybody loves Merkel. Her likely successors? Not so much,” *Politico*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-angela-merkel-complex-approval/>.
- 109 Matthew Karnitschnig, “Germany’s would-be chancellors struggle in Merkel’s shadow,” *Politico*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-armin-laschet-norbert-roettgen-friedrich-merz-jens-spahn-markus-soder-germany-would-be-chancellors-struggle-in-shadow/>.
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- 214 Data from “Ergebnisse Früherer Landtagswahlen” [Results of previous state elections], Der Bundeswahlleiter [The Federal Election Commissioner], April 6, 2020, https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/dam/jcr/a333e523-0717-42ad-a772-d5ad7e7e97cc/ltw_erg_gesamt.pdf.
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- 216 Author interview with Ralf Fücks, Berlin, November 22, 2019.
- 217 Renate Köcher, “Erosion des Vertrauens.”
- 218 Author interview with Britta Jacob, Berlin, November 22, 2019.
- 219 Habeck further explained: “The political fight is no longer about left-wing or right-wing policies but about open vs. closed politics, about politics that unite and politics that divide, about politics of borders and politics of bridges that brings together different interest groups and demographics – bridges between the young and the old, between urban and rural, between immigrants and natives, between economy and ecology.” Robert Habeck, “Bridges over borders.”
- 220 Annalena Baerbock, “Bewerbungsrede.”
- 221 Helene Bubrowski, “Die Grünen hoffen auf Merkel-Stimmen” [The Greens hope for Merkel votes], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 25, 2020, www.faz.net.

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- 222 Constanze Stelzenmüller, “Hard road back to power for Germany’s Social Democrats,” *Financial Times*, August 16, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/92904ea8-f289-4e1a-b44f-c7cdbf2590a2>.
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- 224 Christoph Seils, “Das Wagnis” [The Dare], *Die Zeit*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2020-03/gruen-rot-rote-koalition-bundestagswahl-waehlerumfrage/komplettansicht>.
- 225 Philip Oltermann, “Germany’s grand coalition could undermine democracy, says leftwinger,” *The Guardian*, September 27, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/27/angela-merkel-grand-coalition-germany>. The CDU’s 2018 party conference passed a cordon sanitaire policy at the federal level toward both the Left Party and the AfD. The February 2020 decision of the CDU in Thuringia to join the AfD in ousting the Left minister president did not technically violate this policy, but it broke a national political taboo. See “31. Parteitag der CDU Deutschlands, 7. Bis 8. Dezember, Hamburg, Messe: Sonstige Beschlüsse” [31st Party Conference of the CDU Germany, 7 to 8 December, Hamburg, Messe: Other resolutions], CDU, 19, https://www.cdu.de/system/tdf/media/dokumente/sonstige_beschluesse_31_parteitag.pdf?file=. For more analysis, see Sam Denney and Constanze Stelzenmüller, “The Thuringia debacle resets the Merkel succession.”
- 226 Kai Küstner, “Wie geht das zusammen?” [How does that go together?], *Tagesschau*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/rot-rot-gruen-117.html>.
- 227 “The laissez-faire FDP has failed to rebound from the Thuringia scandal, and its support has steadily dropped since February. The party recently sought to distinguish itself in the opposition by reversing its support of lockdown restrictions. The move has failed to pay off among voters. Currently, if a general election were held, it is unclear whether the FDP would reach the five-percent threshold needed to remain in the Bundestag.” Brandon Bohrn, “COVID-19 and Germany’s Political Transformation,” Bertelsmann Foundation, June 11, 2020, <https://www.bfna.org/politics-society/covid-19-and-germanys-political-transformation-2pfj0hy1os/>.
- 228 Author interview with Peter Unfried, Berlin, November 25, 2019.
- 229 Winfried Kretschmann, *Worauf wir uns verlassen: Für eine neue Idee des Konservativen* [What we count on: For a new idea of conservatism] (Berlin: S. Fischer, 2018).
- 230 See Winfried Kretschmann, *Worauf wir uns verlassen*, 140-141: “We can only master these challenges if we resolutely place the idea of sustainability at the

center of business and politics. We must decouple growth from the consumption of nature and combine economic success with the preservation of the natural foundations of life. And that means: we must press ahead with the ecological modernization of the economy. This is where the 'conserve' becomes the 'transform.'”

- 231 George Löwisch and Maritn Machowecz, “Man muss die Wut ertragen” [One must bear the anger], *Die Zeit*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/2020/36/michael-kretschmer-winfried-kretschmann-sachsen-cdu-gruene-corona-demos>.
- 232 Annalena Baerbock (@ABaerbock), Twitter, August 26, 2020, <https://twitter.com/ABaerbock/status/1298588910482751488>.
- 233 Helene Bubrowski, “Die Grünen hoffen auf Merkel Stimmen.”
- 234 “‘...zu achten und zu schützen...’ Veränderung schafft Halt: Grundsatzprogrammwurf” [“...to respect and protect...” Change creates stability: Draft Basic Platform], Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens], June 26, 2020, https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/202006_B90Gruene_Grundsatzprogramm_Entwurf.pdf. The title of the basic program, “zu achten und zu schützen” (to respect and protect) is a reference to Article 1 of the German Basic Law or constitution (*Grundgesetz*), which states: “Human dignity is inviolable. All state authorities are obliged to respect and protect it.” See “Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Art 1” [Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany: Article 1], Bundesministerium der Justiz für Verbraucherschutz: Bundesamt für Justiz [Federal Ministry of Justice for Consumer Protection: Federal Office of Justice], https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_1.html.
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ability to form alliances in NATO” and said continued nuclear participation was “non-negotiable.” The SPD’s Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and the FDP also objected. See Timothy Jones, “Germany: SPD call to withdraw U.S. nuclear arms stokes debate,” DW, May 2, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-spd-call-to-withdraw-us-nuclear-arms-stokes-debate/a-53314883>; Hans Monath, “Unsere Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik darf nie ein deutscher Sonderweg sein” [“Our foreign and security policy must never be a German special path”], *Der Tagesspiegel*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/maas-reagiert-auf-muetzenichs-atomwaffen-forderung-unsere-aussen-und-sicherheitspolitik-darf-nie-ein-deutscher-sonderweg-sein/25794166.html>.

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advocating for training, equipment and support. The Greens' election program rejected the 2% target; its 10-point plan was less dogmatic, suggesting it would be more sensible to invest in the ecological modernization and digital future of the continent. See Niklas Helwig and Heidi Tworek, "Nicht bei der Verteidigung sparen!"

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