

Germany: Everyone's a winner

Three weeks after the federal election, six million German were allowed to go the ballots again



Source: istock

Snap elections in the German state Lower Saxony were called in July when a member of parliament from the Green party changed to the CDU, thereby shattering the one-seat majority of the government coalition between SPD and Greens.

According to still-unofficial results, the SPD won the election with 37%, followed by the CDU with some 34%. The Greens came in with around 8.5%, followed by the liberal FDP with some 7% and the AfD slightly above the 5% threshold. The far-left Die Linke stood at 4.7%, which would mean the party did not make it into government.

Four years ago, the results still dramatically changed over the course of the night. Therefore, some shifts should not yet be excluded.

A natural reflex, only three weeks after the federal elections, would be to see the state elections in Lower Saxony as initial feedback on political developments at the federal level. In our view, such a reflex is too short-sighted.

The elections in Lower Saxony were not dominated by federal issues but by issues like education, security, agriculture, energy and automobiles.

Don't forget that the state is the agricultural heart of Germany and hosts the biggest German car manufacturer.

Still, the outcome of the election in Lower Saxony in our view provides some interesting lessons for national politics.

The SPD can still win elections, which should comfort the party in its decision not to join a fourth Merkel government. It should therefore further reduce the theoretical alternative for Merkel in case the coalition talks with the FDP, and the Greens fail.

The AfD, though entering the 14th state parliament, stayed clearly below its results at the federal elections, probably as a result of stronger differences between SPD and CDU than at the national level but also ongoing tensions and disputes within the own party. Finally, the fact that the CDU lost a lead of several percentage points over the last couple of weeks in Lower Saxony will definitely not hush unrest in the party and some pressure on Chancellor Merkel.

Now that the Lower Saxony election can finally be filed away, the first coalition talks for a new federal government can eventually begin. The good news is the next official state election will not be held before autumn 2018 (in Bavaria).

Next week, more than three weeks after the federal election first steps on the road to Jamaica will finally begin. The talks will not be easy, and it looks increasingly unlikely that a new German government will enter office before January 2018.

Even though all official statements by politicians last night brought back good old memories of a famous Hot Chocolate song, ongoing inner-party tensions and complicated coalition building in Berlin should prove that the election in Lower Saxony has not made everyone a winner.

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