

Germany: Landslide relief

Regional elections in Saxony and Brandenburg brought another big gain for Germany's Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party. Both partners of the federal government lost electoral support but are likely to remain in charge in the state government



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Sunday's state elections in Saxony and Brandenburg were in fact only a continuation of a wider trend seen in recent years. Both partners of the federal government, CDU and SPD, lost many votes in the two states, as they have in other regions as well as in the last federal election. The AfD gained relatively more votes than in other elections, garnering some 23% of the vote in Brandenburg and some 28% in Saxony. Despite the historic result, the AfD came in as the second largest party in both states, only a small margin behind the SPD in Brandenburg and the CDU in Saxony.

Forming governments in both states will not be easy, as it will probably require at least three coalition partners. The AfD will not be part of any of the two governments.

Impact on national politics

While the SPD and the CDU saw landslide losses, both parties have remained the biggest parties in their respective political strongholds, meaning that any inner party unrest will likely be limited.

Nevertheless, even if these two state elections have no imminent consequences for national politics, they were the last piece of evidence of a complete overhaul of the German political

landscape. In fact, some lessons can be drawn from the regional elections.

- The 'grand' coalition is far from grand.
- The downward trend of both SPD and CDU continues.
- The AfD has become the big anti-establishment party, gathering one quarter of all votes in Eastern Germany. The AfD has also attracted many votes from the former anti-establishment party in the east: the Left Party. As in many other countries, the AfD has won votes from both the extreme left and right wing.
- Finally, the recent surge of the Green Party at the national level did not reach Saxony and Brandenburg. The Greens gained some votes but with 8% and 10% respectively, they remained far below the 25%-levels they have reached in national opinion polls.

The two coalition partners in Berlin have gone away with a very black eye. At least in the short run, we shouldn't expect any new escalation of inner party tensions, either within the CDU or the SPD. However, structural changes in the political landscape, the slowing economy and weakening electoral support could easily bring back political tensions in Berlin.

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