

Germany: Last test before the September election

The results of Sunday's election in Saxony-Anhalt once again illustrate that, even if there was any, the wind of change in German politics is currently very mild



Armin Laschet, leader of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, left, and Annalena Baerbock, co-leader of Alliance 90/The Greens.

Source: Shutterstock

Saxony-Anhalt is one of Germany's smallest states, with a population of just 2.2 million. Still, as this was the last regional state election before the national election in September, all parties, spin doctors and political observers had a close eye on the election and its potential implications for national politics.

Angela Merkel's CDU scored a convincing win with some 36% of the vote, more than expected and more than in the last election in 2016. The AfD, which was seen by some pollsters as potentially winning the election, scored some 23%, slightly less than in 2016. The Left Party (11%) and SPD (8%) lost votes, while both the FDP and the Greens recorded small gains, coming in at around 6%.

Main take-aways

Saxony-Anhalt is a small state and, as in all regional state elections, the results reflect national and regional themes and the influence of key politicians. Therefore, any extrapolation of the results on the national level should be done with caution. Still, here are in our view the most important take-aways from the election and the political trends observed in recent weeks:

- The CDU has recovered from the dip after the nomination of Armin Laschet to lead the party into the elections. Whether it is the accelerating vaccination roll-out or the strong popularity of the CDU minister-president in Saxony-Anhalt, Reiner Haseloff, the fact is that the CDU has gained momentum in recent weeks. Remember that in the state elections in March, the CDU suffered strong defeats.
- The rise of the Greens has come to a (temporary) halt. The Greens have never been a very popular party in Eastern Germany. This has definitely not changed with last night's elections, bringing a rather disappointing result for the Greens. After the surge in the polls after the nomination of Annalena Baerbock as official candidate for the chancellery, expenses slip-ups, some vagueness in Baerbock's resume and an affair involving the mayor of the city of Tübingen have hit the electorate's support for the Greens.
- As regards the other parties, the SPD continued its downward trend of recent months and years, while the results of the FDP did not entirely reflect its recent upswing at the national level. At the national level, the FDP could still become a surprise beneficiary of the duel between the Greens and CDU.

In short, the fact that at the third state election this year, the third incumbent minister-president won the election suggests that there is very little wind of change in German politics. The re-emergence of the CDU and some weakening of the Greens could give credence to this theory. There is still a long way to go until the elections in September. With the ongoing vaccination roll-out and continued government support schemes, the pandemic and its economic impact could become less important as the one and only topic deciding the election in September. In our view, a coalition of the CDU and the Greens is currently still the most likely outcome of the September election. However, as seen in recent weeks, the mood in German politics can shift easier and faster than in the past.

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